Worksheet

Pluricultural team building, a case study developed by Javier Montiel, Karlshochschule, Karlsruhe Germany (used by permission)

The company and its project

- German company specialised in software development for cash registers
- Subsidiaries in Austria, Switzerland, France, Russia, China, Japan, USA and Mexico
- 500 employees
- 1 year project: new "universal" software architecture
- Until now: two different software structures for Asian and European/American cash registers

The team

- 2 employees from the Head Office (one of them as team leader)
- 2 from the American subsidiary
- 1 from the Japanese subsidiary
- 1 from the Chinese subsidiary
- 1 from the Austrian office

- 1 personal meeting: kick-off at the beginning of the project
- 1 conference call weekly
- E-mail contact
- Updated documentation available via the company intranet

The case

- After 5 months: The project is far behind schedule
- Conflict in team due to different (perhaps irreconcilable) opinions regarding quality controls and the system stability tests

As an intercultural team-building consultant, your first task is to understand the kinds of dynamics present in the team.

- After several personal calls you managed to establish the following:

The German engineers…

- think it is fundamental to test the quality and stability of the system at an early stage of the project in order to ensure that no further programming is developed on an unreliable base, since this would be a waste of valuable time.
- The team leader is not willing to impose this procedure even though he believes it is the most appropriate course of action.

The American engineers

- support the idea of paying attention to quality and stability, but from a different point of view: a first running version of the program is needed if conclusive tests are to be performed. They now believe the Germans are inflexible and "one-way-thinkers".

The Japanese colleague

- appears to feel bad because of the situation and he would prefer that the team leader finally makes a decision (no matter which one) in order to enable the project to progress once more and so that he can finally make some technical suggestions, which he believes will really improve the performance of the system.

The Chinese employee…

- didn't give you any genuinely relevant information. He tried to downplay the conflict and expressed that he was confident everything would return to normal.

The Austrian engineer…

- supports the point of view of the Americans. He says he has tried several times to talk to the Germans in order to convince them to give the other perspective a chance. He thought they would be more receptive, especially when given the opportunity to discuss in their own language. However, he says the Germans "are like a wall".

Your task as an intercultural team-building consultant

- Identify typical intercultural dynamics of this team as they can be deduced from the information you have.
- Make suggestions for (of) actions/measures in order to change the dynamic and encourage synergetic cooperation within the team.
- As a preparation develop value squares.