

Human Resource and Diversity Management

Managing conflict & cooperation

Case study



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CASE STUDY (IN PAIRS/20 MINUTES OF THOUGHT)

- The company *Game & Art* deals with the creation of video games intended for an international market (Europe, US, Asia, mainly). Originally created by **three young people**, it has gradually grown in size and today the company has six employees. At its head, we find **four partners**. The strategic decisions (recruitment, launch of new games, alliances...) are taken collectively by the partners. For each game, **a game designer** manages the overall quality of the product and its character of “playability”. He will take decisions, for example, on issues such as these: is this graphical refinement important or does it take too much time to release?
- The development time of a game is about **18 months**. However, competition in the market is very tough, and similar games could come out in the meantime, making the project obsolete. The company members are very close together, and often work over **ten hours a day**. The atmosphere is nice and creative; all the employees have the feeling of “sharing an adventure”. The financial investment in the games, which is essential to the company’s sustainability, is realized by **future producers**, approached during the presentation of prototypes in the international exhibitions. The company *Game & Art* only released a game at this time, three more games are in preparation, which require new investment and additional work. The firm needs new HR (other people are integrated into the company, but with fixed-term contracts) to develop these projects.

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- Unfortunately, the video game subsidiary of this audiovisual group is sold, and the buyers don't want to pursue the same investment policy. The company *Game & Art* is then forced to the cessation of payments. During the cessation of payments, another company in the sector, the company *Interactive*, is interested in some games and proposes to hire the team that was working on a very original game, the game **Mega**, on a fixed term of one year. This team is then in charge of the product realization for the company *Interactive*. It consists of **three computer programmers, two graphic designers** and a **game designer**. They are all about **25 years old** and are passionate about video games. They have been working together for at least two years; their relationships are based on a lot of implicit, strong complicity. Any new idea to improve the game is discussed among team members.
- ***Interactive*** is a medium-sized company in the audiovisual sector (it has 100 employees); it relies heavily on new products, and therefore on the integration of this small innovative team. *Interactive*'s General Manager takes charge of the operation. **The company operates in a matrix**, with two operational functions, design and marketing, a support function, administration and human resources, and a set of projects, of greater or lesser magnitude, for which there is a designated manager. In these projects, people who are also under the functional responsibility of the design direction intervene.

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- In the project of *Game & Art*, the six team members will be attached to the design function. The general manager wants to preserve the spirit that prevailed in this team, made of strong involvement and creativity. But it's also important, as the company is used to, **to involve in the project a person from the marketing function**, responsible for evaluating the market for the game and influencing the project being designed to adapt it to the targeted market. Thus, the team integrates the company, and a new person, **a marketing manager, joins the project**.
- Initially, the ex-*Game & Art* feel a bit like Martians in the landscape of *Interactive*: **they are implicitly brought to bend to certain habits of the company**. For example, arriving at 11am and leaving regularly at 1am is a practice that detonates, so they gradually adopt more “normal” schedules. But **the hard part is working with the new person on the team**. Older than the former *Game & Art*, he is also passionate about video games. But his expertise is more about existing markets, similar products, and he can misunderstand the relentlessness with which his new colleagues track down a detail of the program, while the competition is tough and other boxes are probably ready to come out of competing games. His remarks are often poorly accepted by the ex-*Game & Art*.

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- The **game designer** remains the leader of the team, but **he sometimes feels challenged by the newcomer who has the support of the marketing department**. Tensions are felt in the team. A clash occurs especially when a decision of the game designer who asked one of the computer scientists to rework a piece of the program is questioned by the marketing manager. Computer scientists also don't accept being criticized for their skills and the way they work in team. Little by little, each other distance themselves from the game. Informal talks are more and more numerous, interrupted when the game designer or the marketing manager arrive. Concentration on the game isn't very intense...
- After a while, **the game designer decides to resign**. The game is almost finished but the atmosphere has become moody and far removed from what he knew before. Two other members of the team decide to follow him. The finishing of the game will be done by other people. The game will be well accepted on the market. But the innovative team no longer exists and doesn't set up another project within the framework of *Interactive*.

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▪ Questions

1. What are the sources of conflict that can explain the stormy relations within the new team composed of former *Game & Art* employees and the marketing manager?
2. In your opinion, what actions could have prevented the tensions? Make some proposals.

