

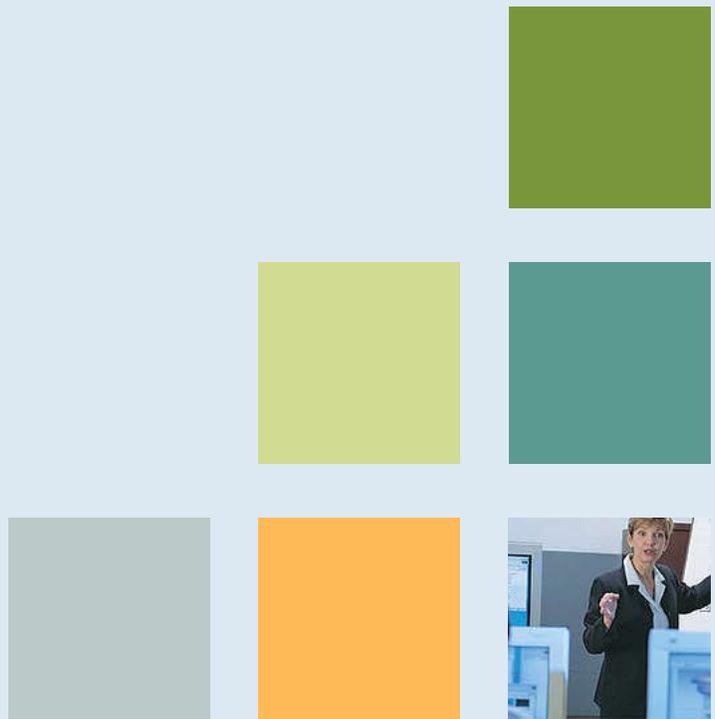
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SOCIETY FOR HUMAN  
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

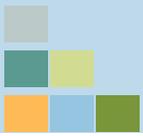
# The Vigilance Project— A Case Study

Peter G. Dominick, Ph.D.

Instructor's Manual



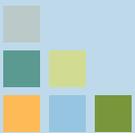
EMPLOYEE AND  
LABOR RELATIONS



# The Vigilance Project—A Case Study

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## TEACHING PLANS

### Introduction

This case provides an opportunity to look at how several different factors interact to affect conflict and team performance. These include contextual issues like a merger, cultural values and physical location. They also include team dynamics and leadership and, last but not least, intrapersonal and interpersonal needs and concerns. Remind students that the case is presented largely from the perspectives of the Americans involved.

### Recommended Pre-Reading

Instructors may choose their own modules and reading assignments on conflict, team facilitation and team effectiveness. The following sources were used by the author in writing this case study and may be helpful to instructors:

Fisher, R., and Shapiro, D. (2005). *Beyond reason: Using emotions as you negotiate*. New York: Penguin Books.  
[www.beyond-reason.net](http://www.beyond-reason.net)

Hofstede, G.H. (2003). Cultural dimensions web site: [http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede\\_dimensions.php](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php)

Polzer, J. (2003). *Identity issues in teams*. Harvard Business School Publishing (#9-403-095).

Graham, J. (2003). *Culture and human resources management*. The Oxford handbook of international business (in Alan M. Rugman and Thomas L. Brewer, Eds.). Oxford University Press.

Hofstede, G.H. (1984). *Culture's consequences: Individual differences in work-related values*. Sage Publications.

Erskine, L. (2006). *A tale of two dimensions: Perceptions of relational distance between leaders and followers*, paper presented at 21st Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Dallas, TX.

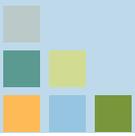
### Case Discussion

The case discussion questions are in outline form below. Next to each main question are the relevant page numbers from the teaching notes. If you want to focus class discussions on particular questions rather than raising all issues in the case, the page numbers can be a helpful shortcut for finding specific information.

## DIAGNOSING UNDERLYING CAUSES

### Why is this case about conflict? What conflicts do you see developing?

- Where do you see conflicts in the case (p.9)?
  - > Conflicts about how to run the project.
  - > Conflicts based in group identity. To what extent are the core team members in the case establishing a team identity?
- How would you describe interdependence among the members of this project team? Include in your response the core team and overall project team (p.9).
  - > Do you think all team members share the same views on the ways in which they are interdependent?
    - Pooled
    - Reciprocal
    - Sequential
- How do you think the people in this case are feeling? Should emotions matter (p.10)?
  - > What are some positive ways emotions can affect conflict?
  - > What are some negative ways emotions can affect conflict?
- Emotional concerns framework (pp.10-11).
  - > Appreciation concerns (pp.11).
    - Were there some opportunities for Didier to express more appreciation? [*Note to instructor:* consider having students role play the phone call between Didier and Frank Lanigan.]
    - What might the American team members have done to help their counterparts find more merit in their views?



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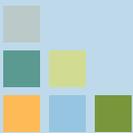
- > Affiliation concerns (p.12).
  - What are some things that the project leader could have done to address concerns over affiliation?
  - Could the American team members have done more to promote affiliation?
- > Autonomy concerns (p.13).
  - How can team leaders minimize concerns over autonomy?
- > Status concerns (p.13).
  - How might status concerns have gone unaddressed in the core team?
  - What can we do as team members to acknowledge others' status?
  - What can we do to ensure that our own status is recognized by others?
- > Role concerns (p.14).
  - Might things have gone differently had Frank not become withdrawn after the phone call from Didier?
  - Does the case offer any examples of extra-role behaviors that affected team dynamics?
    - ▲ Could the American team members have done more?
    - ▲ What about the French team members?
- In what ways does the case demonstrate the relationships between task conflict and affective conflict (pp. 14-15)?

## How is distance affecting team dynamics and performance?

- Are there other ways to think about distance besides physical separation (p.15)?
  - > What are some other issues that come from having team members located on two continents?
  - > Do you think the team would have the same problems if its members were located on the East and West coasts of the United States, or in different parts of France?
  - > What about people located in the same building? Could they encounter some of the same problems?
- [Note to instructor: organize student responses under two broad headings: structural/physical distance and emotional/psychological distance (pp.15-16).]
- How do you think these various forms of distance affected the strength of associations that were being formed among team members (p.16)?
- Do you think lack of trust causes people to feel distant, or is lack of trust the result of other kinds of emotional distance (p.16)?
- How have culturally based differences in values affected dynamics in the core team (p.16)?
  - > Which of Hofstede's cultural values dimensions are most relevant to events in the case? [Note to instructor: responding to this question will depend on how familiar students are with these dimensions and will require that they know what the scores are for France and the United States. You will find this information on pages 17 and 21-22.]
    - Power distance
    - Uncertainty avoidance

## Analyzing the Intervention by Senior Management

- What do you think about the decision to appoint subteam sponsors? What problems can it solve? Which problems might it not solve (pp.17-18)?
- What are some things you like about the approach (p.18)?
- What don't you like about the approach (p.18)?
  - > What are your thoughts about the e-mail that was distributed throughout the entire division and not just to members of the team?
- Can you assess the value of this intervention in relation to issues identified through the emotional concerns framework (pp.18-19)?
- How might this intervention affect some of the issues based on distance (p.18)?



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- What is the best role for the sponsors? Do you think they should function more as mediators or as judges in disputes (p.19)?
  - > Which approach would better serve the interests of the company at this point?
  - > What kinds of training or experience should Halina and Teo have in order to take on their roles?
- What actions would you take if you were assigned to be a subteam sponsor (p.19)?
  - > Would you be proactive?
  - > To whom would you reach out?
- Might things have been different if a human resources or organizational development specialist were part of the team from the beginning (p.19)?
- In addition to using subteam sponsors, what other kinds of interventions might you try at this point in the project (p.19)?

## Case Wrap-Up (p.20)

- This case provides opportunities to consider how cultural differences and the effects of a merger interact with each other and influence team dynamics.
- Anticipating, understanding and responding to emotional concerns are important parts of successful conflict management and are critical to team development. This case introduces one particular framework for understanding emotional concerns in conflict.
- Students gain a more complete appreciation about how to manage and support virtual teams by drawing on a broader definition of distance.

## Additional HR Function Questions

In terms of human resource functions and activities, the issues discussed in this case are most relevant to organizational development and internal consulting; however, you might also have students examine ways in which the case illustrates the relevance and effect of other HR functions. Examples of questions to explore with your students are listed below.

### *Staffing and Selection*

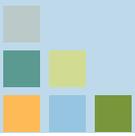
- In addition to technical skills, what does this case say about the kinds of skills that must be considered when staffing important projects?
- What are some barriers that can prevent full consideration of these other skills when trying to staff a project or select people? What might you do to address these limitations?

### *Training and Development*

- What kinds of training would have been helpful during the early stages of this project?
- What kinds of training and development activities would you have incorporated into this team's efforts? When would you have done them?

### *Performance Management*

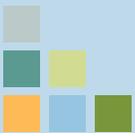
- How would you evaluate the performance of this project's core team members? What criteria would you use? How would you gather that information?
- From where should members of this project's core team expect to get feedback? What kind of feedback tools might you use, if any?
- How should people be rewarded for their work on this project? As individuals? As a team? What are some factors you should consider to determine the best reward structure for this project?



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## *Mergers and Acquisitions*

- What could this case say about the role HR can or should play to ensure the success of mergers and acquisitions?
  - > Blending organizational cultures.
  - > Blending national cultures.
  - > Morale and uncertainty.
  - > Talent retention.
- Although this case deals with a drug safety database, what lessons can we learn about designing human resource information systems after a merger (and in general)?



## TEACHING NOTES

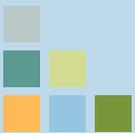
### Case Overview/Synopsis

This case follows a project team as they work to implement a safety database tracking system within a major international pharmaceutical company. The company was formed through the merger of two organizations. Team members are located in the United States and in France, and conduct much of their work virtually. In spite of their technical skills and abilities, the team struggles to collaborate; after more than a year of work, key conflicts remain unresolved—many of which are not apparent to all team members. The case concludes with senior management appointing process advisors and implementing a conflict escalation process. Whether these interventions are effective or even appropriate remains an open question for students to explore. Although based on actual events, the names of the organizations and individuals involved have been changed.

The case provides opportunities to consider related perspectives on diagnosing process issues facing many global virtual teams. It can be a useful part of curriculum related to internal consulting, facilitation skills, conflict management and/or team leadership.

### Case Learning Objectives

1. **Conflict.** Conflict is fundamental to most meaningful relationships, especially teams and groups. This case challenges students to recognize the emotional concerns underlying many aspects of team and interpersonal conflict. It highlights that team leaders must be aware of these concerns in order to facilitate trust and development.
2. **Distance.** Ongoing collaboration between geographically distributed colleagues is increasingly common in today's global economy. In addition to physical and temporal separation, though, there are other significant forms of distance. This case encourages students to think about distance in alternative forms (psychological, social, cultural and identity-based) and to appreciate how addressing those other forms can close gaps caused by time and space.
3. **Team Process Interventions.** People fall into behavioral patterns relatively quickly, and team dynamics are no exception. This case requires students to think about the challenges of reversing counterproductive team processes in the midst of compelling deadlines.



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## CASE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Why is this case about team conflict? What conflicts do you see developing?**

**How is distance affecting team dynamics and performance?**

**What do you think about the decision to appoint subteam sponsors? What problems can it solve? Which problems might it not solve?**

### Assigning the Case

Student materials include an overview page with a brief summary, a description of learning objectives and the case discussion questions. The overview page will guide students in what they should look for as they read, and may be particularly useful when assigning the case to less experienced or undergraduate students. If the case is presented to graduate students or students with more real-world experience, this page can be omitted to further challenge their analytical skills by requiring them to identify key themes and create their own structure for analyzing case events.

Expect to spend 50 minutes covering each of the case questions. All three case questions could be covered in a single graduate class lasting two and one half hours or more. Alternatively (and assuming you plan to have your students address all three case questions), if you teach undergraduate class sessions that last 50–70 minutes each, you might decide to spread the case out over three separate class meetings.

### Case Preparation

The following case analysis elaborates on each of the discussion questions. Expect to spend about three hours preparing to use this case in the classroom. As you read, you will see probing and follow-up questions as well as actions you might take when discussing this case with your class. Use these questions and suggested actions at your discretion depending on the dynamics that emerge within the class and the points you want to stress with your students. The teaching plan section of this document includes an outline of case questions with cross-references to associated pages in these notes.

## CASE ANALYSIS

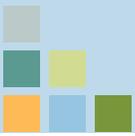
### Introducing the Case

A good way to draw students into the case is to explore the extent to which they have ever had similar experiences. Ask for a show of hands by those who have ever worked on an information technology project such as the implementation of a human resource information system (HRIS). You might also ask for a show of hands by those who have ever worked on international teams or on a team whose members were in different locations. Depending on the responses, ask students to use these experiences as discussions evolve.

If your students are less experienced, ask for a show of hands by those who have worked on team projects. Ask if any are willing to admit having been a part of a team whose members did not communicate well or in which there was a lot of conflict. It can help to share if you also have been a part of less-than-successful teams at one time or another.

Another approach is to ask students to identify one or two people from the case with whom they relate. Explore what it is about their own experiences and background that draws them to the individual(s) they identify. Encourage students to keep those connections in mind as the case discussion proceeds.

The case was written to help students explore emotional aspects of conflict and the varying ways in which distance affects team dynamics. You may decide to present some basic ideas about these concepts before assigning the case. Alternatively,



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you can use the case as the basis to introduce and explain these concepts. The two perspectives overlap, and you may decide to focus on one of them instead of both.

## Case Discussion Questions

### Why is this case about team conflict? What conflicts do you see developing?

In opening your discussion, acknowledge that there are several related perspectives from which this case might be examined (for example, communication, leadership and project planning) but for the purposes of this class, you will look at the case from the perspective of conflict.

Ask students where they see conflicts developing in the case. Students may say that conflicts exist in the core team and that there is a growing frustration among the project's subteams. As the discussion continues, encourage students to explore these conflicts further. Some students will identify that core-team members have different views about how the project should be run; the U.S.-based members advocate decentralized communication and the French-based team members favor a more centralized approach. Other students may identify that the lack of trust within the core team is driving conflict and that Didier, the project manager, appears to be doing little to build unity.

Some students may also position the team's conflicts within a broader context based on other groups with which the various team members identify. For example, the most obvious of these may be cross-cultural distinctions. Some students will also recognize the distinctions based on the merger that formed PharMed. Remember that most of the U.S.-based team members and all of those on the core team were previously employed by ValMed. All of the French-based members of the core team came from PharmCO, the more dominant partner in the merger that formed the new PharMed. As a prelude to discussing the emotional concerns underlying conflict, stress how group identities provide individuals with emotional connections to others and help shape the ways in which we define ourselves.

You might also ask students what they think about the extent to which the core team members in the case are establishing a sense of team identity. This question can lead to some lively discussion about what must occur during the early stages of team development and/or why it is important for team leaders to foster unity and connections with other team members.

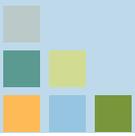
There are a variety of benefits that come from a sense of team identity, including cohesion, loyalty, trust and cooperation (Polzer, 2003). Students should recognize that none of those benefits are characteristics of this core team. Some students will note that the core team is divided into two groups, and it is with these subgroups that team members identify.

Capturing student perspectives on a flip chart or a board can help convey the various levels at which conflicts exist and the ways in which they are related. For example, you can graphically position issues like trust, communication and leadership as underlying contributors to the substantive differences about how to manage information flow between the subteams. Please refer to the flip chart template found on page 21 of this document.

Introduce the notion of interdependence as fundamental to both teams and conflict management. The very definition of a team is largely based on the extent to which an individual's performance is linked to the efforts and performance of others. By the same token, conflicts arise because people are interdependent. A key step in constructive conflict management requires that people acknowledge the ways in which they are interdependent.

Consider asking students: "How would you describe the ways in which team members are interdependent?" and/or: "Do you think all of the team members recognize their interdependence in the same way?"

This is actually an important point in the case because core team members are divided about how they see the nature of interdependence within this project (Refer to reading by Wageman, 2001).



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Remind students that the American members of the core team advocate more dynamic interaction among project team members. In their view, interaction with subteam members must be more dynamic for people to get the information they need and to make coordinated adjustments and changes. They are concerned about the overuse of top-down communication to keep people informed. Their perspective characterizes reciprocal interdependence. Activities with a high level of reciprocal interdependence are such that each person's work on one part serves as input for another person's work. It implies dynamic exchanges between team members with people making more or less continuous adjustments based on what others do or don't do.

Another form of interdependence, pooled interdependence, also acknowledges inter-related effort but stresses that individuals work on separate components that are combined into a whole. A third form, sequential interdependence, stresses the ways that team members transfer their work from one person to another after completing their particular part.

Although it is a stretch to say that the French team members wholly discount the reciprocal nature of the work to be done, it is probably fair to say that they see the work as being more pooled or sequential. At the very least, they have different views about how to best keep people connected. Encourage students to explore the merits in Karine's and Merline's position that information flow upward through them as the global user and global IT leads—for example, it can help ensure appropriate resource allocation; it may be easier to see the big picture. At the same time, encourage students to think through the limitations in terms of task performance, interpersonal trust and teambuilding.

Students' thoughts on the interpersonal trust and teambuilding can also help you segue to a discussion about emotions and conflict.

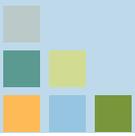
Ask students: *“How do you think the people described in this case are feeling?”*

As you list their responses on a flip chart or board, ask students if they think that emotions should matter. Depending on student backgrounds, this may lead to an animated discussion. Encourage students to explore the ways in which emotions can be both obstacles and assets to conflict resolution. Emotions may be obstacles when they divert attention away from facts and substance, making the conflict more personally oriented; they can lead to selective perception and defensiveness; or generally damage a relationship when we let them get the better of us. They can also be used to exploit vulnerabilities, e.g., playing on our emotions.

Emotions can also be helpful. Expressing positive feelings, for example, can reduce fear, defensiveness or suspicion, allowing people to let their guard down and be more open to exploring underlying interests. Positive emotions help build relationships and enhance trust.

Whether we view emotions as having a potentially positive or negative effect on conflict, they are a reality. Recognizing emotional states and concerns is an important component of building teams and managing conflicts. At this point, introduce the emotional concerns framework for understanding and managing conflicts. The framework offered in these teaching notes was developed by Roger Fisher and Daniel Shapiro and is discussed at length in their book, *Beyond Reason: Using Emotions as You Negotiate*.

Their framework stresses that five core concerns drive emotional reactions to most conflict. They are appreciation, affiliation, autonomy, status and role. Recognizing and addressing these concerns enables parties in a conflict to establish a better foundation for win-win solutions. List each of these concerns on the flip chart or board and encourage students to think of ways in which they apply to the events in the case.



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Appreciation involves recognizing value and/or expressing gratitude for what others say, do or contribute. Expressing appreciation encourages parties to identify with each other, an outcome that is particularly important in team development. Expressing appreciation requires active listening and the willingness to find merit in others' points of view—even if you disagree.

There are a number of ways in which a lack of appreciation features in this case. One major example includes the extent to which the American team members want to be appreciated for their past experience with a similar project. Encourage students to consider other specific incidents from the case, such as the phone call from Didier to Frank telling him not to bring up plans without prior approval. Asking students to role-play this incident can be a helpful way to drive home some points about appreciation.

Ask the students: *“How might Didier have handled this issue differently? What could he have said or done that would have demonstrated appreciation and still enabled him to get his point across?”*

Many other aspects of the case—the frustration about not being able to get items on the meeting agenda, the arbitrary manner in which meetings were cancelled and the comment about the core-core team—also suggest that a lack of appreciation was a concern for the Americans on the core team.

Student discussion will likely focus on what the French team members, especially Didier, failed to do in terms of appreciation.

Ask students: *“What could the American team members have done to help their counterparts recognize the merit in their views and express appreciation toward them?”*

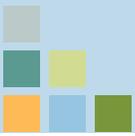
Fisher and Shapiro stress that people should keep several strategies in mind. These include asking questions that require people to look at things from your perspective. “Why do you think I feel we need to facilitate more interaction between subteams?” Another strategy is using metaphors, because they allow parties to discuss shared emotional experiences without being explicit. (For example: “After my last comment, a chill seemed to come over the group. How can we warm things up?”) Asking others what they hear you saying can also help. So does being prepared to convey your points concisely. Although the case does not give much information about how the Americans responded during any given conversation, take advantage of the opportunity to get students thinking about how to get others to express appreciation.

Affiliation refers to the ways in which individuals feel connected to other people or groups. It is analogous to the idea of team identity and cohesiveness. A strong sense of affiliation encourages individuals to care for others and look out for others' interests as well as their own. In many ways, this case centers on a failure to address affiliation concerns.

Encourage students to identify some key issues that made affiliation challenging. They should recognize that the American group and French group were essentially from two different companies; the fact that one company in the merger was more dominant did not help.

Some students may also note that the project consisted of personnel from two different divisions within the company, information systems and drug safety. This is a good point in general but this distinction does not appear to be all that central to the problems this particular team experienced. It can still be worthwhile to engage the class in a discussion about how discipline-based identities can sometimes be a barrier to collaboration.

Cultural differences are another challenge, as is the fact that the team is separated by time and geography. Both of these points are further elaborated in relation to the second case question about how distance affects the team.



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*Ask students to explore some things that could have or should have been done to help address affiliation concerns.*

Fisher and Shapiro point out that people need to spend time seeking out connections, especially when those connections are not apparent. These may include establishing links based on other factors like age or experience, personal interests, professional background or common concerns. The case suggests that little was done to help team members bond. Students may also note that more efforts to meet face-to-face could have helped. In response to this point, remind students that the team did have two face-to-face meetings.

*Ask students why they think those meetings did not seem to do much in terms of building team cohesiveness.*

Encourage students to consider the formality of the first meeting and the fact that little seems to have been done to help the team move beyond the niceties of the typical formation stage in any new team's lifecycle. In relation to the second meeting, students should recognize that the cancellation of the cross-cultural workshop could also be interpreted as another example of conflict avoidance, or at least a missed opportunity to engage in constructive discussions about team processes. In other words, just bringing people together in one place does not transform them into a team.

Students would be correct to argue that as the project leader, Didier should have been more sensitive to the need to build a sense of unity and affiliation. He does not appear to have considered it a priority. It is important to point out, however, that others on the team could also have done more.

*Challenge students to consider what the American team members might have done to help promote affiliation.*

This might have included more frequent references to common interests and concerns. We might also wonder about the extent to which the American team members made any kinds of extra efforts on the part of their French team members or alternatively, asked them for favors that would have enabled their French colleagues to feel both generous and connected.

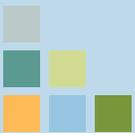
This can also be a good point in the discussion to get students thinking about the ways in which team dynamics can spiral in either a negative or positive direction.

*Encourage students to think about the difficulties that go with trying to initiate connections when you feel others have not put forth initial efforts.*

Autonomy concerns center around an individual's need to feel as though he or she is free to act. People get offended or frustrated when they feel as though others limit their ability to act beyond what they think is appropriate. Direct students to consider ways in which autonomy concerns appear in this case. Examine the controlling ways in which Didier is described to have run meetings. The fact that the Americans consistently felt as though their input was disregarded also left them feeling powerless to act.

A more specific example of autonomy concerns is when Frank Lanigan became more withdrawn after Didier told him not to present plans without prior approval. Point out that in this instance, Didier may have felt that his own autonomy was questioned when Frank presented a plan without consulting him first.

The case also includes more subtle examples of issues that relate to autonomy. Ask students to look at the top-down approach to subteam communication through the lens of autonomy. The merger that formed the new company is a factor for students to explore. Mergers are generally emotionally charged events as employees attempt to sort out new roles and responsibilities, blend values and integrate operating procedures. More typically than not, these transitions generate concerns over one's freedom to act. Students should appreciate that team members probably brought such concerns with them into the project, especially the Americans who were former employees of ValMed.



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Autonomy concerns have as much (if not more) to do with the way decisions are made as they do the decisions reached. Explore this issue by asking students for suggestions on what teams and team leaders should do to minimize concerns about autonomy. Students should recognize, for instance, that the Vigilance team never seems to have explicitly established ground rules for decision making and that soliciting input from stakeholders seems to be more the exception than the rule. Help students recognize the relationship between autonomy concerns and team process, especially the ways in which teams establish norms for information sharing and decision making.

Status is a fourth concern that can affect the way individuals approach conflicts. It refers to perceptions of the individual's own standing in relation to others with whom they are interdependent.

Status is an important structural characteristic of any team or group and it can have a profound affect on how information is exchanged and used. Stress to the students that all teams make status distinctions. The key is to ensure that those distinctions are consistent with the purposes for which the team was formed in the first place.

Addressing status concerns does not require ignoring genuine differences in standing. It does, however, require that we attempt to understand how every member of a team has what Fisher and Shapiro refer to as a particular status based on experience, expertise or background.

Ask students: *“In what ways might status concerns have gone unaddressed within the Vigilance project core team?”*

A prime example is how American team members' prior experience with the Perspective project was ignored. Encourage students to consider how Didier's remark about the “core-core team” served to inflame concerns the Americans may have had about their status in relation to their French colleagues.

The French team members were located at corporate headquarters, and this may have contributed to status concerns. Stressing this point can be very useful for many of your students, especially those who are or who will be working for U.S.-based multinational organizations. It can serve as a reminder to be sensitive to local concerns and perspectives when representing corporate headquarters on a team or group.

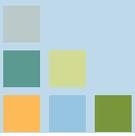
Encourage students to consider how the merger plays into status concerns. If no one mentions it, remind students that the Americans on the core team all came from ValMed, the company that was essentially absorbed during the merger with PharmCO. This point may be easily overlooked since it is confounded with nationality differences within the team. Taking into account that the new company was only recently formed, ask students to reflect on how the former ValMed employees may still feel vulnerable about job security, especially since they are located so far from corporate headquarters.

Depending on the amount of time you wish to devote to this topic, you can also ask students: *“What can team members do to acknowledge others' status?”*

Students should recognize that concerns over status are closely tied to how other core concerns are addressed. For instance, taking the time to seek out others' opinions reinforces autonomy and also lets them know their input is valued. This can convey a sense of importance (status) while helping the team member to feel appreciated.

You can also ask: *“What can we do to ensure that our own status is recognized by others?”*

This question may require more thinking, but is a useful point for reflection. Fisher and Shapiro encourage people to take pride in their own areas of status (e.g., experience, expertise, background and abilities). They also point out that



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recognizing others' status can make them more open to acknowledging your own unique contributions.

Role concerns relate to an individual's feelings about whether what he or she is doing is purposeful, personally meaningful and consistent with other goals and values that matter to them. One way to understand the reactions of the American team members is by recognizing that they felt as if their roles were being marginalized. They were excluded from certain core-team decisions and felt that their previous experience was inappropriately ignored.

Encourage students to reflect on whether they think the American team members did enough to respect the conventional roles of their French colleagues. The case does not give a great deal of information for students to use; nonetheless, students should be open to the point that the Americans did not appear to have been particularly concerned about the kinds of role pressures their French colleagues might have been experiencing.

Apart from the conventional or formal roles, draw students' attention to the ways in which the creation of process roles in teams is dynamic and normative. Our choices about how to act and react can reinforce others' perceptions and expectations of our role on a team.

*Ask students to consider Frank's reaction to Didier's phone call telling him not to present plans unless they are approved ahead of time. Might things have been different if Frank did not become so withdrawn as a result?*

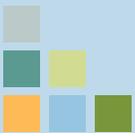
Fisher and Shapiro note that conflict resolution frequently requires individuals to go beyond the confines of their existing roles, be they based on their formal position or process roles derived from existing team patterns and dynamics. Examples would include helping a colleague perform a function that is not normally part of one's own job; stepping in to manage a conflict between colleagues; or in some cases, just sharing information that people might not otherwise have had access to.

Ask students to consider whether the case offers any examples of such extra-role kinds of behaviors or efforts. Some students may argue that the decision by the American team members to seek intervention from Lance Paulson is an example of extra-role efforts. Others might argue the opposite, suggesting instead that the Americans should have done more to work directly with their French colleagues. Could the Americans have made more of an effort to contact their French colleagues outside of team meetings? Was there more they could have done to better organize information that would make their case more compelling? There is validity in both perspectives, and the case does not provide any definitive answers one way or the other. The point is to get students to think about the kinds of extra efforts that go into building relationships and overcoming conflicts.

In concluding your discussion of conflict in the case, there are some key points to stress:

- First, conflict is a fundamental part of team development. The main issue is not whether conflict will occur, but how team leaders and members will deal with it.
- Second, emotional reactions to conflict are natural and even necessary. Understanding core concerns that drive emotional reactions may not always ensure positive outcomes, but they will increase the chances dramatically and will likely improve relationships.

You might also choose to position your wrap-up of the emotional concerns framework within a broader distinction between two types of conflict (Jehn, 1997). Task conflicts are those centered on what and how things should be done. Moderate levels of task conflict tend to enhance team performance. Affective conflict refers to interpersonal differences and tensions. It undermines effectiveness and leads people to withdraw from their work, as we saw occurring in this case. The challenge, however, is that the two types of conflict frequently go hand-in-hand. For instance, it is not unusual for people to feel emotionally connected to their ideas, suggestions or work output. As a result, they might feel personally attacked when their work is criticized or rejected. By the same token, some might feel that their own position or status is threatened by others' contributions. Research shows that the way people communicate and the extent to which they trust each other



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moderates if, when and how task conflict morphs into more disruptive affective conflict. From this perspective, students should appreciate that by addressing emotional concerns in conflict, we can build trust and promote communication that reinforces collaboration, ultimately leading to productive levels of task conflict and lower levels of affective conflict.

## **How is distance affecting team dynamics and performance?**

Because this case focuses on a global team that conducts much of its work virtually and not through face-to-face communication, it provides opportunities to get students thinking about the nature and meaning of distance in today's era of virtual teaming. If you choose to explore the case in terms of distance, stress that this perspective is not wholly distinct from the previous discussion of conflict but that it offers a different way of thinking about the challenges this team faced (and by example, virtual teams in general).

Most students will acknowledge that technology makes it increasingly possible for people to work together regardless of where they are located.

*Ask students to consider the point that as physical distance becomes less of a barrier to interaction, it helps to think about other ways of defining distance.*

For example, the term can also be used to describe the emotional or psychological gap between people who work in the same building and meet face-to-face on a regular basis. In other words, there is an emotional, interpersonal and physical perspective to distance. Researchers over the years have addressed these various types of distance; findings from these studies suggest that both physical and emotional distance have implications for performance as well as for other relationship-based outcomes like communication effectiveness, satisfaction with supervisors and perceived leader effectiveness (Erskine, 2006; Crouch and Yetton, 1988; Ibarra, 1995).

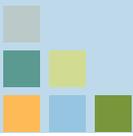
*Ask students for their thoughts about how distance is affecting the dynamics and performance within the Vigilance project team.*

Most students will focus first on the physical and temporal distinctions that make it harder for people to build relationships, share information and coordinate. If students have more experience in the professional world, they may relate to how, for instance, working across time zones affects collaboration. Some research suggests that we are more likely to trust people just because we believe they are located close to us, all other things being equal (Bradner & Mark, 2002). Making this point can be a good way to encourage students to think about alternative ways of defining distance. Consider posing the following questions:

- *What are some other issues that come from having team members located on two continents?*
- *Do you think the team would have the same problems if its members were located on the East and West coasts of the United States, or in different parts of France?*
- *What about people located in the same building? Could they encounter some of the same problems?*

List student responses a board or flip chart. One approach is to organize their thoughts into two broad categories: those points that refer to structural/physical distance, and those that characterize emotional distance (Erskine, 2006).

Structural distance includes the following subcomponents: physical (e.g., geographic proximity); channel of interaction (e.g., face-to-face versus computer mediated, synchronous versus asynchronous); and frequency of interaction. Emotional distance consists of demographic factors like age, ethnicity and education; social distance in the forms of power and/or status differences between actors; and affective distance which includes trust perceptions, relationship quality and “in” versus “out” group perceptions.



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As you guide students toward discussing examples of emotional distance, students should start to see connections to the previous discussions about conflict and emotional concerns. Earlier points about team and subgroup identity are especially relevant. In the case, it appears as if individuals' identities are primarily tied to other connections besides their membership on the project team. These include both national identities and their identities with their pre-merger organizations. In exploring these issues, encourage students to draw on what they learned about affiliation and status as emotional concerns driving conflict.

*When discussing these issues in terms of distance, ask students to consider how these concerns affected the strength of the associations that were being formed among team members.*

According to the social network theory, the strength of a tie is determined by both the distance and depth of relationships between two points, or “nodes” (e.g., individuals or groups). Weak ties exist when interaction is infrequent and those involved generally have less in common (Haythornthwaite, 1999). Students should recall that team meetings were frequently cancelled and that when meetings were held, there was limited effort to share and build common concerns.

Strong ties may reflect high levels of task interdependence, or it may be indicative of intimate trust-based relationships (Gibson & Cohen, 2003), neither of which easily characterizes the core team as a whole. Remind students that team members in the United States and France probably had different ideas about how they were interdependent. Individuals with strong ties are also likely to have common values, attitudes, backgrounds, experiences and frequent interaction. Ask students to consider the team in relation to each of these characteristics as well.

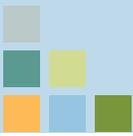
Ask students: *“Do you think lack of trust causes people to feel distant, or is lack of trust an outcome of other types of emotional distance?”*

This question helps students reflect on the dynamic nature of distance perceptions. Students should recognize how at one point, other emotional concerns undermine trust, but over time, the lack of trust can contribute to a greater sense of distance or isolation on the part of team members. Encourage students to appreciate how these dynamics can have a spiraling effect on the team process; one practical implication is that the longer the process issues go unchecked, the harder it can be to turn things around.

Culturally based value differences are also relevant to a discussion of distance and team effectiveness. Ask students to consider whether they can imagine any particular ways in which culturally based value differences affected the dynamics of the team. You will have to gauge whether your students are sufficiently familiar with ways of describing cultural values that affect work behavior. Stress that when it comes to discussing differences in cultural values, one runs the risk of making broad generalizations that may or may not apply to any particular individual within a society.

Even still, this case provides a good opportunity to consider the role of cultural value dimensions such as those articulated by Geert Hofstede (1984, 2001) when it comes to management, team dynamics and decision-making. Hofstede and his colleagues identified five core value dimensions that distinguish between cultures. They are power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation.

Two of these dimensions, power distance and uncertainty avoidance, are especially relevant to events in this case. Power distance refers to the extent to which less powerful members of organizations accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. In other words, it describes the extent that people acknowledge and accept hierarchically based status differences. Values about power distance, for example, could affect a person's willingness to question the assumptions of higher-ups in the chain of command or how they define effective leadership.



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Uncertainty avoidance focuses on a society's tolerance for ambiguity and the extent that its members feel comfortable in unstructured situations (those that are novel, surprising or different from usual). Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws, rules, and safety and security measures. In organizational settings, values favoring uncertainty avoidance could mean that people are less inclined to deviate from established plans or that they may react apprehensively to news that challenges the status quo. After describing these values, ask students how they might characterize France and the United States in relation to both constructs. Since ValMed, the company to which the American employees belonged before the merger, was Swiss-based, you might also ask students to describe Switzerland in relation to both constructs.

*Alternatively consider having students learn about Hofstede's model before or during the case. In addition to many textbooks that describe his model, refer students to the following URL: [http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede\\_dimensions.php](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php).*

At this web site, students can look up the cultural values profiles for the United States, France and Switzerland. It turns out that France and the United States differ quite dramatically on both dimensions. In terms of power distance, France has a score of 68 (out of 100), compared to a world average of 55 and a European average of 45. The United States scores a 40 on the same scale, and Switzerland scores a 34. With regard to uncertainty avoidance, the differences are even greater. France has a score of 86 compared to the European average of 74. The United States comes in at 46 (Switzerland's score is 58). You might also provide students with a copy of the dimension summaries and graphic comparisons presented later in these notes.

*Ask students if they can think of any ways in which these differences might relate to events in the case.*

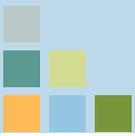
Have students explore how different values regarding power distance might account for the different reactions to how meetings were run. Differing perceptions regarding both power distance and uncertainty avoidance might also help explain the basis for conflicts over how best to manage communication and information sharing between subteams. The French team members favored having information flow upward through the global IT and user leads. Such an approach would favor hierarchy and stability over flexibility and open, less structured interaction. Explore uncertainty avoidance and power distance as a way to account for Didier's feelings about not wanting team members to introduce new plans during meetings unless they were first reviewed with him. Both dimensions could also account for Frank's strong reaction to Didier's position.

In concluding your discussion of distance-based issues in the case, stress that in today's era of global virtual teams, broader conceptualizations of distance are a useful diagnostic framework for practitioners trying to improve team process and performance. Looking at team dynamics through the lens of distance can be particularly helpful when it comes to building team identity and cohesion. You might also tie this discussion back to previous considerations of conflict in the case. In this regard, it can help to point out that using the emotional concerns framework for managing conflicts is one way to help reduce feelings of distance within a team or group.

**What do you think about the decision to appoint subteam sponsors? What problems can it solve? Which problems might it not solve?**

The case concludes with a description of how senior management intervened by issuing a general message throughout the division and appointing team sponsors. The previous two discussion questions focused students' attention more on the diagnosis of the issues and challenges for the team. This third question encourages students to explore what can be done to improve team dynamics and performance.

*Ask students to describe what they find appealing about the approach Lance and Jean articulated in the e-mail message.*



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List their responses on a board or flip chart. Students may say that it sends a message of accountability. Others will say that the e-mail is rather explicit about the need for the team to do a better job of listening and communicating (it stresses the need to consider best practices and prior experiences more completely). Still others may like the fact that the solution provides the team with a clear process for escalating conflicts.

*Ask students what they did not like about the approach.*

There are certainly some elements of the solution worth questioning. Why, for instance, was the e-mail distributed to the entire division and not just to members of the project team? Distributing it to the entire division may shed a less-than-favorable spotlight on the team as a whole. Ask students to explore the pros and cons of this more public approach.

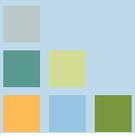
Some students may say that the e-mail appears to be directed toward the subteams and does not explicitly address issues and dynamics within the core team. One could argue that improving communication and the overall process for the core team can have the biggest effect on the success or failure of the project. Even still, the e-mail does express some clear expectations about team process. In that sense, it provides a template the core team could use to constructively reflect on its own norms. For instance, based on the e-mail, the team could take it upon themselves to review what they are and are not doing in relation to how they draw on best practices and past experiences and consider evolving regulatory requirements. The fact that the e-mail was from someone outside of the team actually gives team members the opportunity to discuss issues more objectively and may keep any exchanges from being seen as personal attacks. It is worth noting that at the time this case was written, the core team had yet to even discuss the e-mail as a group even though they had several weeks to do so.

Although Lance and Jean provided a process for conflict escalation, their approach does not necessarily address underlying interests and concerns that are driving differences in the first place. Students may argue that this is not a problem because performance is the overall priority. Ultimately, the team will be judged on whether it meets its task objectives. In support of their point, note that time demands must be taken into account when trying to decide how to resolve conflicts. This project is already behind schedule, and pursuing collaborative solutions to any conflict usually takes more time than decisive approaches or choosing compromise solutions.

At the same time, encourage students to see the bigger picture of developing leaders and relationships that can be a basis for future success. Point out that in addition to time demands and task importance, a third basis for defining interdependence in conflicts includes the extent to which the parties view themselves as being in an ongoing relationship. As members of the same department, the members of the team will probably continue to work together in the future.

*Ask students how they would assess this intervention in relation to the issues identified through the emotional concerns framework and the previous discussion of distance.*

In terms of status concerns, some students may suggest that the Americans on the team feel as though their status was elevated by getting top management to intervene. While this is a good point, encourage students to explore what the Americans should do with any elevated status they derive. How might they use it to engage their French colleagues in supportive and constructive ways? Team members' perspectives on affiliation might be affected because the e-mail was distributed division-wide. Being singled out in relation to the rest of the division could reinforce team identity among the people working on the project. This could be a positive outcome if team dynamics and performance become more successful. If the team continues to struggle, it will serve only to reinforce a more negative identity and in that sense, could contribute to a downward team spiral. There could be implications for autonomy and role as well—particularly for Didier,



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the project manager, who may feel as though his role and capacity to direct the project have been curtailed.

Students will probably agree that success or failure of the plan to introduce sponsors depends on the capabilities of Halina Ducret and Teo Reynard. The case does not provide any information about their facilitation or conflict management skills. Moreover, it is not entirely clear if Lance and Jean expected the subteam sponsors to serve more as facilitators or as decision makers. It is probably fair to say they are looking for a little of both. Nonetheless, encourage a discussion about the kinds of skills and behaviors that would be necessary.

*Ask students what kinds of training or experience they think Halina and Teo should have in order to take on their roles.*

You might also pose more specific questions, like: “*Do you think the interests of the team would be better served by having the sponsors function as mediators or judges? Which approach might better serve the interests of the company at this point?*”

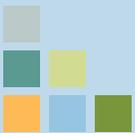
Follow up on these questions by getting students to think about how they would expect the sponsors to act as communicators, as listeners, as influencers. You can go further by getting students to describe the steps they would take if they were assigned to be a subteam sponsor. Would they be proactive? If so, to whom would they reach out and why? Based on the case information, there is no reason to think Didier knew in advance that the e-mail was being sent. Students should think about if or what they would say to the project manager. On the one hand, students may assert that Halina and Teo are in a position to help model effective collaboration behaviors and working with the project manager, if not the entire core team, is a necessity. Other students might point out that as team sponsors, Halina and Teo may not want to appear as if they are trying to take over control of the project. In making this later point, some may note that cultural values such as power distance come into play here as well.

Use these distinctions to stress that when people take on roles as facilitators or arbiters, it is helpful for them to candidly discuss boundaries and expectations that further define how they will be involved. Students should also appreciate that as sponsors appointed by top management, Halina and Teo have some legitimate authority to hold the team and its leaders accountable for improvements. One approach might be for them to establish key progress checkpoints and/or to work with the team to articulate some specific goals to improve processes and attain results.

*Ask students to consider how things might have gone differently if a human resource or organization development specialist had been part of the core team from its inception.*

The HR or OD specialist could have had a formal role as a team facilitator and process manager, freeing Didier to focus on technical aspects of managing the project. They might have been more effective at creating productive team norms early on. The team would have likely then devoted some initial time to developing as a unit. The HR or OD specialist could have helped draw attention to emerging concerns before they affected team performance. His or her presence would have given greater legitimacy to the importance of managing the team process. The HR or OD specialist might also have been helpful at drawing the team’s attention to how interpersonal processes relate to the eventual use of the system they are developing.

In concluding the discussion about how the e-mail and the appointment of sponsors could affect the project, ask students if they can think of any other useful interventions. Examples might include following through on the proposed cross-cultural workshop; some one-on-one coaching for members of the core team; and/or more specific efforts to work directly with Didier as the project leader. The current plan does not necessarily address the underlying concerns and issues that were driving conflict and inhibiting the team’s development as a cohesive unit. In and of itself, it is only an initial step; but



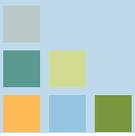
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it could be helpful, depending on how people follow through. Turning around a counterproductive team process can take time and requires consistent and thoughtful effort on the part of everyone involved.

## Case Wrap-Up

As written, the case and discussion questions have focused on emotional and interpersonal processes within the team. It has not offered opportunities to explore technical problems and challenges that the team faced. Ultimately, a complete understanding of any organizational problem requires consideration of its technical as well as social dimensions. The goal of this case, however, was to highlight particular ways of understanding and responding to interpersonal issues in teams or groups. At some point in their HR careers, your students will be asked to intervene in issues pertaining to team process effectiveness. Through the events discussed in this case, they should:

- Recognize that there are many levels to most conflicts between people and groups. Anticipating, understanding and responding to emotional concerns is an important part of successful conflict management and is critical to team development.
- When it comes to virtual teams, it is easy to focus on how team members are separated by time and space. In today's global economy, we have to accept that fact as a given. We can gain a broader appreciation for how to manage and support virtual teams by drawing on a broader definition of distance that includes social, cultural and emotional distinctions which not only create space between people, but also shape their identities.



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## Flip Chart Template

This section offers a template to organize student comments on a flip chart or blackboard.

Why is this case about conflict? What conflicts do you see developing?

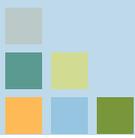
Sources of Conflict in the Case	Interdependence	Emotional Concerns	Task Conflict vs. Affective Conflict
	Pooled Sequential Reciprocal	Appreciation Affiliation Autonomy Status Role	

How is distance affecting team dynamics and performance?

Types of Distance	Effect on Team Dynamics	Cultural Values Dimensions
Structural/Physical	Trust	Power distance
Emotional/Psychological	Team identity and cohesion	Uncertainty avoidance

What do you think about the decision to appoint subteam sponsors? What problems can it solve? Which problems might it not solve?

Overall Reactions to E-mail Message	Effect On:	The Sponsor Role	Other Interventions
Pros	Emotional concerns	Why mediate?	
Cons	Distance	Why judge? Suggested actions	



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## Hofstede’s Cultural Values Dimensions<sup>1</sup>

**Power Distance Index:** The extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. This represents inequality (more versus less), but defined from below not from above.

**Uncertainty Avoidance Index:** Deals with a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Unstructured situations are novel, unknown, surprising and different from usual. Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws, rules, and safety and security measures. The opposite, uncertainty accepting cultures, are more tolerant of opinions different from what they are used to; they try to have as few rules as possible.

**Individualism:** On the one side versus its opposite, collectivism refers to the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. In societies that value individualism, everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. In societies that value collectivism, people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts and grandparents) which continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

**Masculinity:** Versus its opposite, femininity. Hofstede’s studies revealed that (a) women’s values differ less among societies than men’s values; (b) men’s values from one country to another contain a dimension from very assertive and competitive and maximally different from women’s values on the one side (masculinity), to modest and caring and similar to women’s values on the other (femininity).

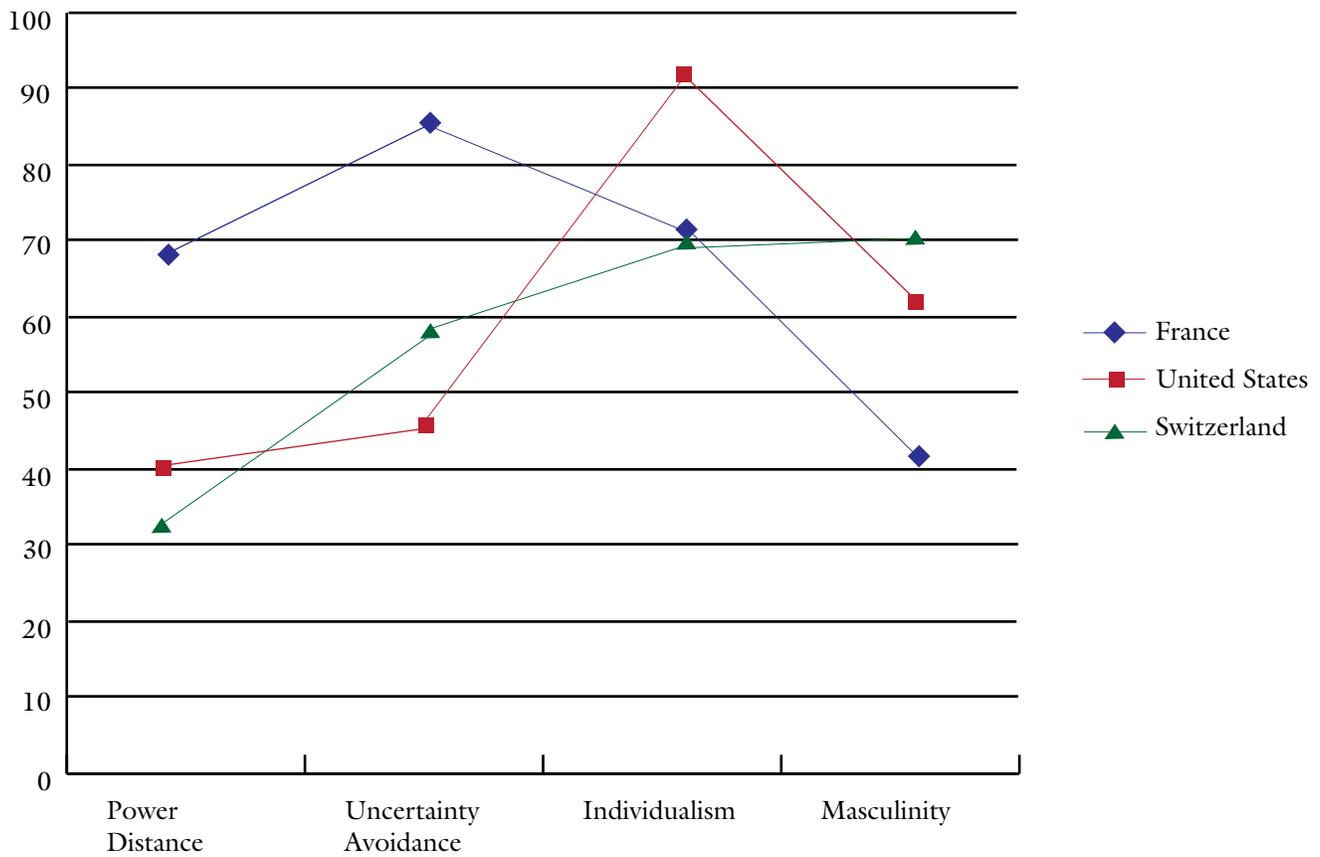
**Long-Term Orientation:** Versus short-term orientation was a fifth dimension later found in a study among students in 23 countries. Values associated with long-term orientation are thrift and perseverance; values associated with short-term orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations and protecting one’s image.

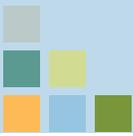
	Power Distance	Uncertainty Avoidance	Individualism	Masculinity	Long-Term Orientation
France	68	86	71	43	No data
United States	40	46	91	62	29
Switzerland	34	58	68	70	No data

<sup>1</sup> The source for these dimension descriptions as well as the data reported is Hofstede, G.H. (2003). *Cultural Dimensions Website*, [http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede\\_dimensions.php](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php).

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Graphic Representation of Differences in Cultural Values Dimension Scores





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