EXAM CASE: One Team or Two? Navigating Motivation, Team Dynamics, and Leadership in FjordEnergy

FjordEnergy, a mid-sized Norwegian energy technology company headquartered on Norway's west coast, has built a strong reputation for providing sustainable energy optimization solutions to municipalities and industrial clients across the Nordic region. With approximately 450 employees, the company is widely recognized as a leading player in its field. For years, FjordEnergy has cultivated a culture rooted in high trust, collaboration, transparency, flat organizational structures, and empowerment, reflecting core Nordic work values. Employees have enjoyed flexible working arrangements and active participation in decision-making processes. Many have been with the organization for more than a decade, valuing the meaningful nature of their work and the autonomy and freedom with which they perform.

Recently, however, the company has undergone significant change. Driven by rapid growth in renewable energy markets and increasing international competition, FjordEnergy pursued an expansion strategy through mergers and acquisitions. As part of this strategy, the company entered the wind energy market by recently acquiring Ventria, a technologically advanced French firm based in Normandy with 15 employees, known for its state-of-the-art expertise in onshore wind energy design solutions. While the acquisition strengthened the company's technical capabilities, it introduced different assumptions about how work should be organized and what constitutes effective performance and productive work arrangements.

To lead the newly formed Renewable Energy Unit, the company appointed Rasmus Nielsen, who has been with FjordEnergy for five years. After three years as a strategic analyst and two years leading the Data Analytics Unit with a team of 10 employees, Rasmus was promoted to Head of the Renewable Energy Unit. He now leads an international team of 25 employees, combining his original team in Norway with the team of a newly acquired firm Ventria.

Six months into his new role, Rasmus finds the situation more complex than he had anticipated. Rather than forming a unified team, he observes the emergence of two distinct subgroups with two different team identities. The Norwegian team values empowerment and autonomy, informal communication, and collaborative, shared decision-making, while the French team appears more comfortable with hierarchy, greater authority, receiving clear tasks from the leader, and more top-down decision-making. Although Rasmus actively tries to involve Ventria employees in FjordEnergy, he admits that he feels a stronger sense of identity with his Norwegian team and trusts and supports them noticeably more in their daily tasks.

His way to get Ventria's employees on board seems not to be working. "I thought bringing people into decisions would motivate them," Rasmus reflects. "That's what has always worked here. But now I'm starting to wonder if I'm actually creating confusion instead." He travels to France once a month, yet he senses that he has not fully gained the new team's trust. His attempts to involve them in collective decision-making have not had the intended effect. During

one meeting, a French team member commented, “We have a leader to make decisions. Why should we spend time discussing everything?” Rasmus admits, “Sometimes I feel like I’m leading two different teams, not one. Whatever I do seems to disappoint someone.” Rasmus also noticed lower openness to discussing challenging and sensitive topics on an expanded team. However, effective collaboration, sharing, and learning among all employees are crucial to the successful operation of his Renewable Energy Unit.

Rasmus is also increasingly concerned about motivation across the unit. As he becomes more familiar with individual team members, Rasmus also notices signs of job dissatisfaction. Catherine, one of the younger French team members, expresses mixed feelings about the new environment. “We are told to collaborate more and be more productive, but at the same time, there is no clear direction,” she explains. Having previously worked in a more structured setting, she finds the open and participatory approach unfamiliar and, at times, stressful and inefficient. “Back in our previous company, I knew exactly what was expected from me. Here, everything is open for discussion… ” Although she was initially excited about joining an established Norwegian leader in energy technology, she now feels the mismatch between her expectations and how collaboration between two teams unfolds. Catherine feels increasingly disconnected: “I don’t feel very connected to the team in Norway”, but she prefers not to voice her disappointment openly and hopes for improvement in the situation.

Hanne, an experienced and previously highly engaged member of the Norwegian team, also finds the situation increasingly difficult to navigate. “Before, we had time to discuss things properly and make decisions together. Now everything feels rushed, and we are not as inclusive as we have been,” she says. She values the Nordic way of working—balance, trust, and involvement—but feels these are gradually disappearing. “There’s less room for dialogue, and more decisions seem to come from the top.” At the same time, expectations for speed and productivity have increased. “It feels like we’re expected to deliver faster, but without the same level of clarity or shared understanding.” Over time, she has started to question whether the way of working she once valued still exists. Rasmus has noticed that Hanne has repeatedly expressed her work dissatisfaction concerns during recent unit meetings.

Rasmus Nielsen now finds himself navigating a situation that goes beyond integrating technical expertise. He must reconcile diverse expectations regarding leadership, motivation, and ways of working while delivering results in a fast-growing, competitive market. He is unsure whether the current challenges reflect temporary adjustment issues common during the acquisition or a deeper misalignment between the two companies' organizational cultures. The question is therefore: how can he build a shared team identity and way of working that enables the team to gain synergy and perform effectively despite geographical, cultural, and organizational distance? Or should he just preserve two different teams, each on its own terms?

CASE TASKS:
Based on the case description:

1. Explain the problems: Identify and analyze problems related to Rasmus and two employees' experiences and behaviors in the case description using relevant concepts and theories covered in the course.

2. Explain the potential causes of the problems: Describe possible causes of these problems using relevant concepts and theories covered in the course.

3. Provide the solutions: Describe possible solution(s) to Rasmus' current leadership challenges based on the causes and relevant concepts and theories covered in the course to support the arguments in your solution (s).

Source: Natalia Fey, 2026