Case Study: "The Failed Launch in Brazil"

Company background

A French mid-sized software company, **LyonSoft**, develops project management tools for small and medium businesses. LyonSoft has strong roots in France and operates a centralized decision-making structure in Lyon. The company's culture values expertise, clear hierarchy, precise planning, and formal communication.

In 2024, LyonSoft decides to launch a new version of its platform in **Brazil**. The Brazilian market is growing fast, and local competitors are increasing pressure. LyonSoft creates a local subsidiary, **LyonSoft Brazil**, in São Paulo, and hires a Brazilian country manager, **Mariana Silva**, plus a local sales and marketing team.

A joint project team is set up:

- French team: 4 members (product manager, developers, marketing lead, project coordinator)
- Brazilian team: 5 members (country manager, sales reps, marketing specialist, customer support)

The French team visits São Paulo for a 3-week launch preparation.

What happens in the first weeks

1. Meetings and decision-making

In the first week, Mariana proposes a more flexible launch plan, with fewer rigid deadlines and more time for local market testing. She suggests:

- Extending the launch timeline by 2 months
- Testing different pricing strategies
- Adjusting marketing messages to Brazilian culture

The French product manager, **Pierre Dupont**, insists on following the original plan:

- Launch must happen on the scheduled date
- Pricing is fixed by the French headquarters
- Marketing messages are finalized and cannot be changed
- All decisions must be approved by the French director

Pierre often says: "We cannot change the plan; headquarters expects results on time."

Mariana and the Brazilian team feel frustrated. They believe the French team is **too rigid** and **not listening to local reality**. Pierre feels the Brazilian team is **unprofessional** and **not serious about deadlines**.

Over time, meetings become tense. The French team sits at one end of the table; the Brazilian team at the other. Handshakes are firm; some French people avoid eye contact when disagreeing; some Brazilian colleagues speak loudly and interrupt.

2. Communication style

During meetings, the French team often uses formal language, avoids direct criticism in public, and prefers written confirmation after meetings. The Brazilian team uses informal language, speaks more openly, and expects quick verbal agreements.

When Pierre gives feedback in French to a Brazilian colleague during a meeting, the colleague feels publicly criticized and becomes silent. The French team interprets this as **lack of engagement**. The Brazilian team feels the French criticism is **too harsh** and **not respectful**.

Later, the Brazilian team discusses the problem informally with friends, calling Pierre "cold" and "arrogant." The French team, in private, calls Mariana "unreliable" and "not serious about deadlines."

3. Hierarchy and authority

At LyonSoft France, the hierarchy is clear: the French director is the final decision-maker. Subordinates are expected to follow instructions and rarely challenge decisions publicly.

In Brazil, the company is more informal. Mariana expects to have **more autonomy** and to negotiate with Pierre as an equal partner. She tries to involve her team in decisions and encourages open discussion.

When Mariana proposes changes to the launch plan, Pierre responds:

"I am not allowed to change the plan. You must follow the French direction."

Mariana feels that Pierre is **disrespecting her role** and **ignoring her local expertise**. She begins to bypass Pierre and directly contact the French director, which makes Pierre feel undermined.

4. Risk and uncertainty

The French team prefers to avoid uncertainty:

- They want detailed contracts
- Clear procedures
- Exact timelines
- Minimal deviations

The Brazilian team is more comfortable with uncertainty:

- They see the market as dynamic
- They prefer to adapt as they go
- They accept some improvisation
- They are more willing to test and adjust quickly

When the Brazilian team suggests changing the marketing message during the launch, the French team sees this as **breaking the plan** and **introducing risk**. The Brazilian team sees the French approach as **too rigid** and **not market-sensitive**.

The crisis

Three weeks before launch, a key problem emerges:

- The Brazilian marketing team realizes that the current slogan does not work well in Portuguese and may even be misunderstood.
- Mariana asks to change the slogan.
- Pierre refuses, saying the slogan is already approved by headquarters and cannot be changed.

The Brazilian team feels the slogan will damage the launch. Mariana threatens to delay the launch if the slogan is not changed. Pierre refuses to delay.

The conflict escalates. The French director is forced to intervene. The launch is delayed by 1 month, and the slogan is modified.

The relationship is damaged:

- The French team feels the Brazilian team is **unreliable**.
- The Brazilian team feels the French team is **arrogant and disrespectful**.
- Trust is low. Collaboration becomes difficult.