BUSINESS

PARALYSIS OR PRECISION

CASELET

Emily is the Chief Product Officer at Lumina, a software company developing a new project management tool for marketing and other creative agencies. Well-liked by her colleagues, Emily also had a reputation for being precise and exacting. Known for refusing to make decisions without rigorous evidence and data, Emily insisted on understanding the ‘why’ and exploring every possible edge case. These qualities, rooted in a willingness to admit what she didn’t know, had undoubtedly driven her career success. To her team, her cautious, data-driven approach has felt like a reasonable and effective leadership style.

The team was two weeks away from their beta launch when they would release the software to a select group of users to test it in the real world. The engineering and design teams were exhausted but excited. The product wasn't perfect, but it was "minimum viable product” ready, and they were eager for user feedback. Emily had not been as closely involved in the later stages of this project, and during the final go/no-go meeting, she halted the process.

“I was looking at the way clients approve work in our system," Emily said. "We built it like a straight line: you make a draft, they review it, they approve it. But in reality, the design process seems cyclical and messy. If we force the users into a linear box, they won't just dislike the feature; they’ll abandon the platform entirely.”

Sarah, the Lead Engineer, pushed back. "Emily, we can fix those steps after we launch. We need to see if the system actually works first."

"But what if the system works perfectly for something they don't want?" Emily countered. "I’m not questioning if the code is solid; I’m curious if the idea is right. And while we’re at it, I think there are some reasons to be concerned about the integrated AI.”

One of the most exciting features of the tool was an AI assistant that could scan a client’s old designs to automatically suggest fonts and colors for a new project. However, Emily realized that for the AI to do its job, it had to upload the client’s private files to an outside company’s server.

“The AI works well,” Emily said, “but I’m curious about the legal implications for our users. If a designer uploads a proprietary image from a client, and our system sends that image to an outside company to scan it, did we just force them to violate their NDA?"

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Sarah rubbed her temples. "The terms of service cover us, Emily. We don't need to solve the whole legal landscape to launch."

"We might be legally safe, but are we trustworthy?" Emily asked. "I think we need to get a better understanding of the IP chain of custody before we let real users touch this. Let’s push back the launch, just by three weeks, to get a handle on these issues."

Later in the day Emily was reflecting on the meeting. She did trust her team, and she knew the benefits of being quick to market, but even just her brief exchange with Sarah had made her realize that she herself hadn't gone deep enough into this project, and that she had a fairly surface level understanding of some of these potential issues. As she dug deeper, she continued to discover new questions that the team hadn’t fully considered. Three weeks turned into two months, then six months, and the team worried that being beaten to the market was becoming increasingly likely. Emily acknowledged this risk, but she just couldn’t let them release an ill-considered or designed product.

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