BUSINESS

CULTURE OR CONTROL?

FACILITATION GUIDE

Overview

These caselets are narrative accounts designed to stimulate dialogue about the virtues that shape professional life. They differ importantly from the ethical case studies most faculty and students encounter in professional training. Rather than presenting a moral dilemma to be resolved, each caselet illustrates the presence—or absence—of a particular virtue as it operates in everyday practice. The goal is not to reach a verdict on what a character should have done, but to explore what a virtue looks like in action—and what may be at stake when it is absent.

Caselets are organized by virtue and professional context, but many will resonate beyond their primary category. A caselet about curiosity in a business setting may illuminate curiosity in medicine or law. Instructors are encouraged to use caselets flexibly and across disciplines.

General Facilitation Tips

- **Focus on virtue, not verdict.** Keep discussion centered on how the virtue appears (or is absent) in the caselet, not on whether the character made the right call. If the conversation drifts toward "what should they have done?", redirect gently.
- **Start with observation.** Open by asking what students noticed before asking what they think. Grounding early discussion in specific moments from the caselet prevents premature judgment.
- **Use questions as starting points, not a script.** Follow student energy. If a student raises a more generative question than the ones provided, pursue it.
- **Push back on easy agreement.** If the room converges too quickly, the caselet's complexity may not have been fully engaged. Invite students to complicate their own claims and consider opposing readings.
- **Invite connection to professional life.** The richest moments often come when students link the caselet to patterns they've observed or anticipated: "I've seen something like this when . . ."
- **Let silence work.** Resist the urge to fill every pause. Students often need a moment to arrive at their most substantive responses.
- **Close with reflection.** Reserve a few minutes to ask students what will stay with them — a question, an image, an unresolved tension. A sentence or two naming what they now understand about the virtue that they didn't before is a strong closing move.

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Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Jean demonstrates a lack of humility or the wisdom of experience? What would it look like to apply both humility and experience to this conversation?
2. What is the business value of respecting the culture and expertise of a smaller company? What difficulties are there in maintaining different cultures within the same large company?
3. How does a humble approach to business integration differ from an arrogant one?
4. In what ways can humility serve as a strategic advantage in negotiation or business transactions? To what extent do most business decision-makers perceive humility as an asset? How should the collective valuation of a virtue within a field influence an individual's commitment to embodying that virtue?
5. Imagine that in addition to the caselet above, the following information is revealed,

   "At first, post-merger operations seemed smooth. Yet within months, Cresthold began experiencing high turnover with the new team, as key members of BrightMesa began leaving for new ventures. While exit interviews cited varied reasons, privately they spoke of feeling undervalued and constrained by Cresthold's bureaucracy. As the talent drain accelerated, BrightMesa's once-vibrant culture dissolved, undermining the deal's projected profitability and significantly devaluing the acquisition."

   How if at all would this change your thoughts on the caselet?

Facilitation of this Caselet

Take Jean's position seriously. Jean is not simply dismissive, she is experienced, and some of her skepticism about founder sentiment is grounded in real patterns. Avoid letting the discussion slide into an easy critique of corporate arrogance. The more interesting question is where legitimate experience ends and a failure of humility begins, and that line is genuinely worth carefully teasing out.

Explore humility as a strategic asset, not just a moral one. This caselet invites students to consider whether humility has business value, and whether that framing strengthens or weakens the case for it as a virtue. Push them on this: is humility worth practicing only when it pays off? What does it mean if the answer in professional life is often yes?

Elevate Sarah's role. Sarah is easy to overlook, but she is doing something important. She has spent time with BrightMesa, she pushes back, and she gestures toward a middle ground before being cut off. Draw students' attention to this dynamic. What does it cost an organization when the person closest to the ground-level reality is interrupted rather than heard? But on the other hand, at what point is it warranted to decide against such ground level advice?

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Handle the hypothetical outcome carefully. As with other caselets in this series, the follow-up scenario showing negative consequences can flatten discussion toward outcome-based reasoning. In this caselet, it is included mostly to illustrate the tensions and challenges of making decisions without full knowledge, and how that impacts a virtue like humility. But before tackling this hypothetical, encourage students to evaluate Jean's approach independent of what happens next. Was there a failure of humility in the room regardless of whether the acquisition succeeded or failed?

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