ENGINEERING

FRAMING THE FINDINGS

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. What does acting with integrity look like for Lena in this case?
2. How should engineers think about integrity when economic and social benefits genuinely conflict with environmental harms?
3. Is “selective emphasis” different from lying? Where is the line?
4. To whom does Lena owe primary responsibility — the client, the public, the environment, regulators, or her employer?

Facilitation of this Caselet

Take the framing versus lying distinction seriously. The client is careful to say he is not asking Lena to lie, and the project manager echoes this. All writing involves choices about emphasis, sequence, and language. Ask students where they think the line is between legitimate professional communication and something that compromises integrity, and what makes that line so difficult to locate in Lena's specific situation. The caselet is most instructive when students feel the genuine difficulty of the distinction rather than dismissing it as transparent rationalization.

Start with the two reports sitting side by side. The caselet’s most precise moment is when Lena finishes the revised draft and rereads it alongside the original. All the data is still there. No numbers have been changed. And yet the two reports tell noticeably different stories. Begin discussion there rather than at the client's request or the project manager's justification. Ask students what exactly has changed between the two versions, and whether a difference that lives entirely in emphasis and framing is a meaningful difference at all. That question is harder than it first appears, and it should not be resolved too quickly.

Resist reducing the client and project manager to villains. The economic benefits of the development are real, and the project manager's point that engineers should be reasonable partners to their clients is not without merit. Ask students to take seriously the argument that Lena's original report may itself reflect a kind of framing, one that foregrounds ecological costs and treats economic and social benefits as secondary. The question of whose interests a report serves is live on both sides of the revision.

Close with the responsibility question. The final discussion question asks to whom Lena owes primary responsibility: the client, public, environment, regulators, or employer? This tends to generate strong and divergent answers, which makes it a strong closing move. Push students who land on a single answer to account for the others. The more productive conclusion is not a hierarchy of obligations but an honest reckoning with the fact that Lena's professional role puts her at the intersection of multiple legitimate claims, and that integrity in that position requires holding all of them rather than resolving the tension by privileging one.

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