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Challenge #8, Dissemblance

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➤ **INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 8, the authors explore the ethical complexity surrounding the concealment or distortion of the truth. Shelley, a customer service manager, is faced with an ethical dilemma regarding the disclosure of a GMAT waiver when applying for an executive MBA program. This waiver is a professional favor that she is urged to keep confidential.

➤ **ETHICAL COMPLEXITY**

Shelley's situation encapsulates the tension between professional advancement and integrity. The ethical complexity arises from the conflict between maintaining trust with the HR director, who provided the waiver under conditions of confidentiality and being transparent with others who assume she undertook the standard application process. This is further complicated when a vice president inquires about her GMAT score, putting her in a position where revealing the truth could betray the HR director's trust and potentially harm Shelley's prospects within the company.

➤ **RISK AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ETHICAL ACTION**

The risks in Shelley's scenario include damage to her reputation and relationships if the truth comes out, the loss of trust among colleagues, and potential professional repercussions. There is also a risk of contributing to a culture of favoritism and a lack of transparency within the organization, undermining fairness, and equity. However, there are opportunities for ethical action. Shelley could seek permission to disclose the GMAT waiver from the HR director, aligning with the values of honesty and integrity while respecting the origins of the waiver. She could also address the broader ethical implications within the company, advocating for a more transparent and equitable process for professional development opportunities. Shelley's ethical choice, therefore, revolves around balancing confidentiality obligations with the imperative of truthfulness, depending on how her decision aligns with her personal values and professional standards. Moreover, it is a chance to contribute to a corporate culture that prioritizes ethical behavior over expedient outcomes. The chapter, therefore, highlights not just personal ethical decision-making, but also how individual choices can reinforce or challenge the ethical norms of an organization. Shelley's decision could either maintain the status quo or catalyze positive change in her company's approach to ethical dilemmas.

➤ PERSONAL INSTINCTS, BIASES, VALUES, AND TENSIONS

In reflecting on the ethical dilemma presented, my instincts and biases come into play. Instinctually, there is an inclination to protect one's own career trajectory and professional relationships, which may be biased toward maintaining the secret of the GMAT waiver. This bias is rooted in the fear of potential negative repercussions and the desire to preserve established networks that could be beneficial for future opportunities. However, this bias is challenged by my values, which include honesty, transparency, and fairness. These values create a tension with the instinct to conceal the truth. There's an internal conflict between the immediate benefits of adhering to a request for confidentiality, the long-term implications for personal integrity, and the trust others place in me.

The personal tension escalates considering the broader implications of my actions within the organization. If I choose to keep the waiver secret, am I complicit in perpetuating an unfair system? Would my action erode the ethical culture of the company? These questions highlight the importance of considering not just the direct consequences of my actions, but also their indirect impact on the organizational ethos. In addition, there is a significant emphasis on the concept of treating others how I would want to be treated. Would I be comfortable in a workplace where such nondisclosure is the norm, knowing that it might disadvantage those who are unaware of or do not have access to similar waivers?

Ultimately, my insights lead me to prioritize integrity and fairness, even if it means facing immediate discomfort or disadvantages. Ethical action, in this context, is not only about making a choice that feels right personally but also about making a decision that would contribute positively to the ethical standards of the professional community. Balancing personal instincts and biases with core values is a dynamic process, and in such a situation, engaging in open dialogue with relevant parties to find an ethical resolution aligns most closely with my values.

➤ CRITICAL THINKING AND DISCERNMENT

The ethical quandary Shelley faces prompts several critical questions: Could keeping the GMAT waiver secret be justified under the principle of loyalty to the HR director? What are the long-term implications of such secrecy for my character and the organization's integrity? Is there a creative way to uphold honesty without causing undue harm? My imagination explores potential solutions, such as proposing a policy review on professional development transparency to senior leadership. This would address the issue systemically rather than focusing solely on Shelley's case. Another imaginative solution could be to use this situation as a teachable moment to advocate for equitable access to advanced training opportunities within the company. Also, consulting outside resources could involve seeking advice from a mentor with experience in ethical business practices or referencing ethical frameworks and guidelines from reputable institutions emphasizing organizational integrity. It might be beneficial to research cases with similar ethical dilemmas to understand how others have navigated such challenges and the outcomes of different approaches.

Moral action involves a multifaceted approach. First, it is necessary to uphold the truth by seeking permission to disclose the GMAT waiver to relevant parties. If this is not granted, it becomes

necessary to abstain from direct deceit when questioned about the waiver. A response that does not compromise integrity or confidentiality could be crafted, such as stating that the admission process was a valuable learning experience. Next, there should be a recommendation for a review of internal policies to ensure transparency and fairness in professional development opportunities. By doing so, I would contribute to building an organizational culture that prioritizes ethical conduct. Concurrently, it would be prudent to advocate for creating an open dialogue around ethical practices within the organization. Encouraging discussions about ethics helps to foster an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing concerns and contributing to the moral growth of the organization. Lastly, on a personal level, engaging in self-reflection to understand the underlying reasons for my response to the dilemma would be essential. This reflection ensures that my actions are consistent with my ethical convictions and helps to solidify my commitment to moral reasoning in the face of future dilemmas. In conclusion, the action to be taken is not just about navigating the immediate dilemma but also about leveraging the situation to reinforce ethical behavior and practice within the company. By approaching the dilemma with transparency, advocating for systemic change, and reinforcing a commitment to ethical practices, I would strive to align personal actions with broader organizational values.

➤ **COURSE MATERIALS INTEGRATION AND MISSING DATA ASSUMPTIONS**

Adam Smith, "The Benefits of Capitalism" (Honest Work, 533-535)

From Adam Smith, we draw the importance of transparent and fair markets, recognizing that ethical business practices lead to a flourishing society. This principle suggests that individual advancement should not come at the cost of compromising the market's integrity, which in Shelley's case translates to the internal market of career opportunities within her company.

Ciulla, "Meaningful Work and Meaningful Lives" (Honest Work, 590-592)

From Ciulla, we can assume that for Shelley, part of what makes work meaningful is not just work itself but doing it within the context of a morally sound environment. Therefore, contributing to a culture of secrecy and favoritism might detract from her sense of meaningful work, despite any personal gains.

In synthesizing these insights, we can reasonably assume that while Shelley might benefit in the short term from the GMAT waiver, the long-term impact on her sense of meaningful work, the trust of her colleagues, and the integrity of her company's culture could suffer. Given the lack of explicit data on company policy regarding such waivers, we can infer that such policies may either be non-existent or not well communicated. Hence, there's an opportunity here for Shelley to initiate a conversation about establishing clear and fair policies regarding professional development opportunities. Shelley could propose that her company take a cue from Smith's ethical capitalism by ensuring that advancement opportunities are transparently managed and distributed. By promoting these values, Shelley can align with the virtue ethics framework, which emphasizes developing moral character, and integrate the teachings from the course that highlight the importance of maintaining integrity and trust in business interactions.

➤ PRACTICE DILEMMA

In the practice dilemma involving Jeff, a sales representative for Great Rides, the reader is presented with a situation that tests the limits of business ethics in the context of potential bankruptcy. As Jeff prepares for a critical contract renewal with Carterville School District, he is confronted with a direct question from the district's manager about the financial stability of his company. The scenario poses a conflict between honesty and the survival of Jeff's company. Should Jeff disclose the precarious state of the company, potentially jeopardizing the contract and the jobs of his colleagues? Or should he misrepresent the situation, securing the contract but risking future trust and ethical integrity?

Drawing on themes from previous articles and lectures, we can dissect the dilemma further:

- Ethical Imperative: *Jeff must be honest in his business dealings, as trust is the foundation of any long-term relationship. Misrepresentation could lead to short-term gains but long-term consequences, including legal repercussions and damage to reputation.*
- System 1 and System 2 Thinking: *Jeff's immediate, stress-induced reaction (System 1) might lean towards protecting his company at any cost. However, engaging in reflective, System 2 thinking, he might find that honesty, though riskier, aligns with long-term ethical and strategic business practices.*
- Confronting ethical fading: *In the heat of the moment, the ethical implications of Jeff's decision might become obscured (ethical fading). Recognizing this risk, Jeff must keep ethical considerations at the forefront of his decision-making process.*
- Psychological Distance: *Behavioral ethics research suggests that psychological distance affects our moral judgment. Jeff might rationalize dishonesty as a necessary evil when considering the immediate threat to his company but might judge the action differently with temporal distance.*

To navigate this dilemma, Jeff could consider several solutions:

- 1) **Transparent Communication:** Jeff might discuss the company's challenges while emphasizing the steps being taken to mitigate risk, thereby addressing concerns without resorting to deceit.*
- 2) **Seeking Guidance:** Consulting with his superiors or a legal advisor could provide perspective on how to handle the negotiation ethically.*
- 3) **Revising Policies:** If the company frequently encounters such ethical dilemmas, it may be time to reassess the business model and policies to ensure sustainable ethical practices.*

By analyzing the ethical complexities of Jeff's situation, it is possible also to develop further questions to deepen its understanding:

- How can businesses prepare for transparent discussions about financial challenges without alarming stakeholders?*
- What are the ethical obligations of a company facing potential bankruptcy in terms of disclosures to clients and employees?*
- How might a policy of radical honesty affect business negotiations and the health of a company?*
- What frameworks can be employed to balance the need for survival with ethical business practices?*

All in all, Jeff's approach to the dilemma should prioritize maintaining ethical standards while seeking to protect the interests of Great Rides. Ethical business practices not only safeguard against legal consequences but also preserve the trust and integrity essential for any company's long-term success. While this approach may seem counterintuitive in a high-stakes negotiation, it aligns with the research that suggests ethical behavior is integral to both personal integrity and corporate viability.