

A CAN OF WORMS AT BEHEMOTH UNIVERSITY.

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Case Objectives and Use

The case can be used in a faculty seminar (such as a seminar on professional ethics or on teaching by the case method), a graduate class in business ethics, or a seminar for doctoral students (as they prepare to embark on their academic careers). The objectives are:

- Review three common theories/guidelines for ethical decision-making: Categorical Imperative, Utilitarianism, and Personal Virtue.
- Learn how to apply these theories to situations that involve ethical issues.
- Explore approaches that managers can use to help insure that organizational members are sensitive to ethical issues within an organization.

Synopsis

This disguised case, based on actual events that took place at more than one university, describes a sensitive situation facing Dean Felix Schmidt at (fictional) Behemoth University. Dean Schmidt has just completed his first year as Dean when the chairwoman of the Finance department makes him aware that faculty may have developed a casual attitude towards the intellectual property rights of others. The first reported incident deals with revising a case for use as an exam. The authors have neglected to get the appropriate permissions (from either the author or the publisher).

Dean Schmidt's first reaction is that of disbelief. He thinks, perhaps this type of problem – which the Finance chair believes represents a lack of respect for intellectual property -- is confined to her department. But, a later conversation indicates that these practices are widespread. Examples given by the Finance department chair include other faculty members making illegal copies of copyrighted cases, as well as professors using each others' Powerpoint slides without attribution, displaying sloppy citation discipline when reporting on others' research, and failing to list research contributors as co-authors on papers. As he considers each situation, Felix Schmidt thinks that many of them are relatively minor. But, taken together they form a disturbing pattern. As the case closes, Dean Schmidt has to decide what steps he should take to change faculty members' attitudes and behaviors regarding intellectual property.

The authors developed this disguised case, based on actual events, for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of the situation. Names of people and institutions have been disguised. The case, instructor's manual, and synopsis were anonymously peer reviewed and accepted by the North American Case Research Association (NACRA) for its annual meeting, October 7-9, 2004, Sedona, AZ. All rights are reserved to the authors and NACRA. © 2004 by Janis L. Gogan and Ashok Rao. Contact person: Janis Gogan, Bentley University, Waltham MA. jgogan@bentley.edu