



# Newsletter\_8\_Piyush\_Kamal\_Ex-IRS

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## The process of resolving ethical dilemmas in Public Administration.

The study of human actions, differentiating between good and bad, and understanding its consequences lead to ethics.

The 'means' and 'end' of any decision making and its impact are equally important for it to label as 'ethical' or 'unethical.'

Unlike problems, dilemmas cannot be solved from a binary perspective in which they are often presented to decision-makers. In fact, an ethical dilemma is a state of confusion where an individual faces multiple ethical options in a given situation. It is not selecting good from bad but often a selection of good from a 'lesser' or 'equal' good.

For instance, the policy decision to clamp a nationwide lockdown during the corona pandemic presented an ethical dilemma before the policymakers to protect the citizen from the virus at the cost of national economic growth. The values of life versus livelihood versus the fundamental freedom of individuals presented ethical dilemmas before the policymakers.

The problem with ethical decision making is that a decision in itself cannot be taken in a vacuum; one single decision affects lots of other decisions, and the key is to strike a balance to ensure a win-win situation is arrived upon.

## Resolving ethical dilemmas by following these three basic principles —

In ethical decision making, three basic principles can be used for the resolution of problems. These three principles are that of intuitionism, moral idealism, and utilitarianism.

- **The principle of intuition:** It works on the assumption that the person in charge is competent enough to understand the seriousness of the situation and act accordingly. The final decision does not bring any harm to any person involved directly or indirectly.
- **The principle of moral idealism:** It works on the presumption that there is a clear distinction between good and bad, between what is acceptable and what is not, and that the same is true for all situations. It, therefore, asks to abide by the rule of law without any exception.
- **Utilitarianism:** It concerns itself with the results or the implications. There is no clear distinction between what is good and what is bad; the focus is on the situation and the outcome. What may be acceptable in a certain situation can be unacceptable under different circumstances. It underlines that if the decision's net result is an overall increase in the positive outcome, the decision is the right one.

The additional criteria that integrate and rearrange the process of dealing with ethical dilemmas in public administration are:

- (1) Democratic **accountability** of administration,
- (2) The rule of law and the principle of **legality**,
- (3) Professional **integrity** and
- (4) **Responsiveness** to civil society.

Unlike professionals and the general public, public servants play multiple roles in their personal, professional, work jurisdiction, and social spheres. The prioritization of roles for them varies due to the diverse nature of work and its impact on the ground level.

Due to the multiplicity of roles, diverse nature of duties, and impacts of decision making, civil servants face many complex ethical dilemmas in their professional life.

Therefore the skill of an administrator is often tested along with a daily commitment. Especially when there is a lack of clear authority lines, constantly

changing public mandates and frequent transfers. As a result, they are often required to act vigilantly amidst pressure and provide the best public service to the common citizens.

An ethical dilemma's biggest challenge is that it does not offer an obvious solution that would comply with ethical norms. Yet, these steps can help bring better clarity into resolving them.