



Mains Practice Question

Q. Define "Conflict of Interest" and explain how it influences the decision-making process of public servants. If faced with a conflict-of-interest situation, how would you resolve it? **(250 words)**

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Approach

- Briefly explain the concept of "Conflict of Interest".
- Discuss the influence of conflict of interest in the decision-making process of public servants.
- Describe the process for resolving conflicts of interest.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

"Conflict of Interest" situation arises when there is an actual or apparent conflict between public duty and private interest of a public official. In such a situation, an official's private interests could improperly influence the performance of official duties. Conflict of interest reduces public trust and confidence in the integrity and impartiality of public functionaries.

Body

Influence of Conflict of Interest in Public Servants' Decision-making:

- **Biased Decision-making:** Public servants may prioritize personal interests or the interests of a particular group over the public good when faced with a conflict of interest. This can lead to decisions that benefit themselves or their associates rather than the broader community.
- **Loss of Objectivity:** Conflicts of interest can cloud judgment and undermine the objectivity of public servants. They may find it challenging to make impartial decisions when personal interests are at stake.
- **Favoritism:** Public servants with conflicts of interest may show favoritism towards individuals or organizations with whom they have a personal relationship or financial interest, leading to unfair treatment of others.
- **Compromised Integrity:** Engaging in decision-making while having a conflict of interest can compromise the integrity of public servants and erode public trust in the government and its institutions.

To resolve a conflict-of-interest situation, public servants should adopt:

- **Disclosure:** Publicly or formally disclose the conflict of interest to relevant parties, such as supervisors, colleagues, or stakeholders. This step is essential for transparency and allows others to assess the situation objectively.
- **Assessment:** Evaluate the nature and extent of the conflict of interest. Consider the potential impact on decision-making, the organization, and the stakeholders involved.
- **Decision-making:** Determine the best course of action to address the conflict. This may include recusal from decision-making processes, modifying behavior to mitigate the conflict, or seeking guidance from ethics advisors or committees.

- **Recusal:** If necessary, remove oneself from decision-making processes where a conflict exists. This step helps ensure that decisions are made impartially and without bias.
- **Mitigation:** Take steps to minimize the impact of the conflict of interest on decision-making. This could involve implementing safeguards, such as oversight mechanisms or transparency measures.
- **Monitoring and Review:** Continuously monitor the situation to ensure that the conflict of interest is effectively managed. Regular review and assessment can help identify any new conflicts or changes that require attention.
- **Documentation:** Maintain records of the conflict of interest, disclosure, and actions taken to resolve it. Documentation helps demonstrate compliance with ethical standards and organizational policies.

Conclusion

By effectively managing conflicts, the public servant demonstrates its commitment to transparency and ethical conduct in the best interests of the people they serve.

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