



Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyze the concept of "ethical fading" in organizational contexts. How can public institutions guard against this phenomenon and maintain high ethical standards over time? **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining ethical fading
- Give Factors Contributing to Ethical Fading
- Delve into key Safeguards for Public Institutions
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Ethical fading is a psychological phenomenon where individuals gradually become less sensitive to the ethical implications of their decisions over time.

- This can lead to unethical behavior that would have once been unthinkable.
- It is a significant concern in organizational contexts, **where individuals are often faced with complex decisions** that involve balancing competing interests.

Body

Factors Contributing to Ethical Fading:

- **Pressure to Perform:** When individuals are under intense pressure to achieve specific goals or meet deadlines, they may be more likely to overlook ethical considerations.
 - For example, in the **Satyam Computers scandal**, pressure to maintain a high growth rate led to fraudulent accounting practices.
- **Groupthink:** When individuals within an organization are strongly influenced by the opinions of their peers, **they may be less likely to question unethical behavior.**
 - The **Adarsh Cooperative Housing Society scam** in Mumbai is an example of groupthink leading to corruption and misuse of public funds.
- **Desensitization:** Exposure to unethical behavior over time can lead to desensitization, making it easier to justify or ignore such actions.
 - The **Vyapam scam in Madhya Pradesh**, where admissions to medical colleges were manipulated through bribery, is a case in point.
- **Organizational Culture:** A toxic organizational culture that prioritizes short-term gains over long-term sustainability can create an environment where unethical behavior is tolerated or even rewarded.
- **Lack of Recognition:** A lack of recognition in a professional setting can contribute to ethical fading.
 - When hardworking employees are not rewarded or acknowledged, they may become disillusioned and less likely to **prioritize ethical considerations.**

Safeguards for Public Institutions:

- **Ethical Leadership:** Strong ethical leadership is essential to setting the tone for an organization.
 - Leaders should consistently **demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior**, and hold others accountable for their actions.
- **Ethical Training:** Regular ethical training programs can help employees recognize ethical dilemmas, develop critical thinking skills, and understand the consequences of unethical behavior.
- **Ethical Reporting Mechanisms:** Organizations should have clear and accessible mechanisms for employees to report unethical behavior without fear of retaliation.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Public institutions should be transparent in their operations and accountable to the public.
 - This includes **regular audits, disclosure of financial information, and mechanisms for public scrutiny**.
 - The **Right to Information Act in India** has empowered citizens to access information about government activities and hold officials accountable.
- **Ethical Codes and Policies:** Organizations should develop and implement ethical codes and policies that clearly outline expected standards of behavior.
 - These codes should be **regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changing circumstances**.

Conclusion

Ethical fading is a **pervasive challenge in organizations, but it is not insurmountable**. By fostering a strong ethical culture, providing comprehensive training, and implementing robust safeguards, public institutions can mitigate the risks associated with this phenomenon.

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