



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

You are a junior officer in a government department that deals with food distribution schemes. You have been working under a senior officer who is respected and admired for his efficiency and honesty. However, one day you come across some documents that reveal that he has been siphoning off funds from the schemes for his personal use. You are shocked and confused by this discovery.

What would you do in this situation and why?

03 Mar, 2023 GS Paper 4 Case Studies

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly explaining the case.
- Discuss about various stakeholders and ethical issues involved in the case.
- Discuss the various options available in front by junior officer.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

A junior officer in a government department that deals with public welfare schemes. He has been working under a senior officer who is respected and admired for his efficiency and honesty. However, one day he came across some documents that reveal that senior officer has been siphoning off funds from the schemes for his personal use.

Body

- **Stakeholders Involved:**
 - Government department,
 - Senior officer
 - Junior officer
 - Beneficiaries of the food distribution scheme
 - Society at large
- **Ethical Issue Involved:**
 - **Breach of trust:** The senior officer has breached the trust placed in them by the public and their colleagues by using public funds for personal gain.
 - **Misuse of Public Funds:** The senior officer's actions involve the misuse of public funds, which is illegal and unethical.
 - **Fairness and Justice:** The misuse of public funds is a form of corruption that **undermines fairness and justice in society**, and the ethical obligation to report such actions stems from the desire to uphold these values.
 - **Ethical leadership:** The senior officer's actions violate ethical standards of leadership and could undermine the **ethical culture of the organization**.
- **Options available to Junior Officer:**
 - **Reporting Him:** Report senior officer to the authorities and provide them with the evidence of his corruption.

- **Pro:** Reporting your senior officer may expose his corruption and bring him to justice.
- **Con:** It may damage his reputation and career and put me in danger of retaliation or harassment. It may also create distrust and conflict in my department.
- **Confront Him:** Confront your senior officer and ask him to explain his actions and to stop his corruption.
 - **Pro:** Confronting your senior officer may give him a chance to redeem himself and to stop his corruption,
 - **Con:** Further, it may also provoke him to deny or justify his actions, or to threaten or bribe me.
 - It may also create tension and awkwardness in my relationship with him.
- **Try to convince him:** Initiate a dialogue with the senior and try to persuade him to stop the corrupt practices. In case of failure in convincing him, I will report the matter to senior officials.
 - **Pro:** This will give the senior officer the chance of path correction without compromising my own integrity.
 - **Con:** It may give the senior officer an unnecessary opportunity to whitewash his wrongdoings and evidence tempering.
- **Ignore the Issue:** Ignore the discovery of malpractice by senior and continue working as usual.
 - **Pro:** Ignoring my discovery may save me from trouble and maintain the status quo.
 - **Con:** But it could make me complicit in his corruption and betray my values and principles.
 - Further, it may also **undermine my credibility** and integrity as a civil servant.
- **Apply for Transfer/Resignation:** Transfer to another department or resign from your job.
 - **Pros:** Transferring or resigning may help me avoid the ethical dilemma altogether.
 - **Con:** But it may also be seen as an act of **cowardice or escapism and running from my duty**. It may also deprive you of an opportunity to serve the public interest.

Conclusion

- The most ethical option available in front of me, would be to **first try to convince him for path correction and report in case he denies it**. This option is consistent with the **ethical obligation to uphold fairness and justice, and to prevent the misuse of public funds while giving him an opportunity to make amends**.
- If he is not convinced, reporting the corruption may also help restore public trust in the government department and **promote a culture of ethical leadership**.
 - While this option may have some negative consequences, such as damaging the senior officer's reputation and creating tension in the department, but **the potential benefits of reporting the corruption far outweigh the potential costs**.
 - Furthermore, I can take **measures to protect myself from retaliation or harassment by senior officer, such as seeking legal advice or reporting the matter to higher authorities**.