



Mains Practice Question

Q. Lateral entry of experts into civil services is seen as a way to bring fresh perspectives and expertise into governance. Discuss the merits and demerits of this approach. **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by mentioning what is lateral entry
- Delve into merits and demerits of Lateral Entry
- Conclude in a balanced manner quoting 2nd ARC.

Introduction

Lateral entry, the practice of bringing in experts from outside the civil service to fill **mid-level and senior positions**, offers a potential solution to the challenges of governance in a rapidly changing world.

- While it can bring in **fresh perspectives** and **specialized knowledge**, it also raises concerns about disrupting the bureaucratic hierarchy

Body

Merits of Lateral Entry:

- **Specialized Expertise:** Lateral entrants can bring in domain-specific knowledge and skills that may be lacking within the existing civil service.
 - This can be particularly valuable in areas such as **technology, finance, and healthcare**, where rapid advancements require specialized expertise.
 - The **appointment of R.V. Shahi as Power Secretary in 2002** led to significant electricity reforms.
 - His private sector experience in power generation proved invaluable in tackling complex sectoral challenges.
- **Fresh Perspectives:** External experts can offer a different viewpoint on **policy issues, challenging the status quo and fostering innovation**.
 - **Vijay Kelkar's experience in fiscal reforms** made substantial impacts.
 - The **Kelkar Task Force on indirect tax reforms** suggested the introduction of a national-level GST, which has since been implemented.
- **Increased Efficiency:** Lateral entrants may be more accustomed to **working in a results-oriented environment**, which can help to improve efficiency and decision-making within government departments.
 - Lateral entrants in the **Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology** could bring insights on **AI implementation or cybersecurity measures** that are current with global best practices, potentially streamlining processes and improving efficiency.
- **Attracting Top Talent:** Lateral entry can be a way to **attract highly qualified individuals who might not otherwise consider a career in the civil service**.
 - This can help to enhance the quality of governance and improve public service delivery.

- As of **August 2024**, a total of **63 appointments** through lateral entry have been made over the past 5 years, with 57 lateral entrants actively serving.

Demerits of Lateral Entry:

- **Disruption of Bureaucratic Hierarchy:** Introducing **external experts into the middle and senior ranks of the civil service** can disrupt the existing hierarchy and create tensions between career bureaucrats and lateral entrants.
 - The **resistance from career bureaucrats** who may view lateral entry as a threat to their career progression can **manifest in various forms**, from non-cooperation to active sabotage of initiatives led by lateral entrants.
- **Cultural Mismatch:** Lateral entrants may **struggle to adapt to the bureaucratic culture** and processes, which can lead to inefficiencies and conflicts.
 - A lateral entrant **accustomed to quick decision-making** might struggle with the multi-layered approval processes typical in government.
 - This cultural **mismatch could result in frustration, reduced effectiveness**, and potentially high turnover rates among lateral entrants.
- **Potential for Misalignment of Interests:** External experts may have their **own personal or professional interests** that could influence their decision-making.
 - This could lead to conflicts of interest and undermine public trust.
- **Challenges in Integration:** Integrating lateral entrants into existing teams and projects can be difficult, requiring careful planning and management.

Conclusion

In addition to encouraging lateral entry into civil services, as recommended by the **2nd Administrative Reforms Commission**, there should be a focused effort to cultivate specialization within the bureaucracy. This could involve creating **specialized cadres for sectors such as technology, finance, and healthcare**, introducing mandatory domain specialization after ten years of service, and forming partnerships with leading universities for the ongoing professional development of civil servants.

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