



Mains Practice Question

Q. "Moral courage often requires choosing between institutional loyalty and public interest." Discuss this statement with reference to bureaucratic ethics. **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining moral courage
- Highlight the difference in Institutional Loyalty and Public Interest
- Give Challenges in Choosing Public Interest Over Institutional Loyalty
- Highlight the Importance of Moral Courage in Bureaucratic Ethics
- Give measures to Balance Institutional Loyalty and Public Interest
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Moral courage is the ability to act ethically and stand by one's principles, even when faced with adversity. For bureaucrats, this often involves a conflict between **institutional loyalty** upholding organizational norms and commands and the **public interest**, which prioritizes societal welfare.

Body

Institutional Loyalty and Public Interest

- **Institutional Loyalty:** Faithfulness to the **rules, policies, and directives of the organization.**
 - **Example:** A bureaucrat adhering strictly to **government orders despite personal reservations.**
- **Public Interest:** Actions aimed at maximizing societal welfare and ensuring justice, fairness, and transparency.
 - **Example:** A civil servant **exposing corruption in a government scheme** to safeguard public resources.
- **Conflict between the Two:** Ethical dilemmas arise when institutional loyalty contradicts the welfare of the public.
 - **Example:** **Whistleblowing on institutional malpractices** despite the risk of professional consequences.

Challenges in Choosing Public Interest Over Institutional Loyalty

- **Risk of Professional Repercussions:** Acting against institutional orders can lead to suspension, demotion, or harassment.
 - **Example:** **Satyendra Dubey**, an engineer in the **National Highways Authority**, was targeted for exposing corruption.
- **Pressure from Superiors:** Bureaucrats may face intense pressure to conform to orders, even if unethical.
 - **Example:** The **Watergate scandal** revealed ethical conflicts within the administration.

- **Ambiguity in Rules:** Institutional frameworks may not always clearly define ethical boundaries, complicating decision-making.
 - **Example:** Lack of **whistleblower protection** often deters ethical actions.
- **Social and Political Consequences:** Acting against institutional norms may attract political or societal backlash.
 - **Example:** Public protests or criticism against perceived **“anti-establishment” actions**.

Importance of Moral Courage in Bureaucratic Ethics

- **Safeguarding Public Resources:** Upholding public interest prevents misuse of public funds and resources.
 - **Example:** **Ashok Khemka’s efforts** to expose irregularities in land allocation in Haryana.
- **Promoting Transparency:** Ethical actions ensure accountability and inspire public trust in institutions.
 - **Example:** **IAS officer Armstrong Pame** crowd-funded a road project for tribal welfare despite institutional delays.
- **Strengthening Democratic Values:** Acting in public interest reinforces fairness, justice, and equality.
 - **Example:** Ensuring marginalized communities receive their entitlements under welfare schemes.
- **Setting Precedents:** Acts of moral courage inspire future bureaucrats to prioritize ethics over compliance.
 - **Example:** **E. Sreedharan’s** commitment to professional integrity in the Delhi Metro project.

Balancing Institutional Loyalty and Public Interest

- **Ethical Training for Bureaucrats:** Incorporating case studies on resolving ethical dilemmas into training programs.
- **Strengthening Whistleblower Protection:** Ensuring **safeguards for those exposing institutional malpractices**.
- **Fostering Ethical Leadership:** Encouraging leaders to align institutional goals with public welfare.
 - **Example:** **Good governance** practices in Scandinavian countries.
- **Creating Transparent Mechanisms:** Institutional reforms to ensure decisions align with public interest without penalizing dissent.

Conclusion

Moral courage in bureaucracy **often demands difficult choices between institutional loyalty and public interest**. Ethical bureaucrats must navigate this tension by **prioritizing public welfare while striving to reform institutional systems from within**. By fostering moral courage, governance can truly serve the greater good.