



Mains Practice Question

Q. Ethical leadership demands both compassion and pragmatism. How can a leader balance these conflicting demands without compromising on moral values? **(150 words)**

27 Feb, 2025 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing about the characteristics of Ethical leadership
- Give Conflict Between Compassion and Pragmatism
- Highlight the Strategies to Balance Compassion and Pragmatism
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Ethical leadership is characterized by **integrity, fairness, and accountability**. A key challenge for ethical leaders is balancing **compassion** (empathy, kindness, and welfare-oriented decision-making) with **pragmatism** (realism, efficiency, and results-driven governance).

Body

Conflict Between Compassion and Pragmatism:

- **Compassion** emphasizes ethical considerations, humanitarian values, and individual well-being.
 - **Pragmatism** prioritizes results, efficiency, and the larger good, sometimes requiring tough decisions.
- A leader faces dilemmas where choosing one over the other may seem inevitable.
 - **Example: Mahatma Gandhi promoted non-violence (compassion)**, yet took pragmatic decisions like **supporting recruitment of Indian soldiers to World War I** to gain British trust for India's self-rule.

Strategies to Balance Compassion and Pragmatism

- **Ethical Decision-Making Framework**
 - Using **philosophical principles** such as **Kantian ethics (duty-based)** and **Utilitarianism (greatest good for the greatest number)** to ensure decisions are morally sound yet practical.
 - **Example: Nelson Mandela's** decision to pursue reconciliation rather than retribution post-apartheid - balancing justice (pragmatism) and forgiveness (compassion).
- **Adopting a Context-Sensitive Approach**
 - Leaders should adapt strategies based on situational demands while upholding core ethical values.
 - **Example: Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery (compassion)**, but delayed full emancipation initially to preserve the Union (pragmatism).
- **People-Centric Governance**
 - Policies should balance immediate relief (compassion) with long-term sustainability

(pragmatism).

- **Example: The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (food security during Covid-19)** addressed immediate distress, while Atmanirbhar Bharat focused on economic revival.

- **Ethical Communication and Transparency**

- A leader should articulate decisions honestly, gaining public trust even when tough choices are made.
- **Example: Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** promoted scientific temper, ensuring both aspirational leadership (compassion) and technological advancement (pragmatism).

- **Institutionalizing Ethical Leadership**

- Establishing checks and balances like **ethical codes, accountability mechanisms, and inclusive decision-making** can help ensure both moral values and efficiency are maintained.
- **Example: Civil Services Code of Ethics** promotes impartiality and integrity while enabling result-oriented administration.

Conclusion

Ethical leadership requires **wisdom, adaptability, and a moral compass** to navigate complex governance challenges. By employing a balanced approach—guided by ethical reasoning, transparency, and long-term vision—a leader can uphold **both compassion and pragmatism** without compromising moral values.

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