

1. You are posted as the secretary of the education department in a state. The state government has just launched a scheme for awarding scholarships to meritorious students to pursue higher education abroad. The undergraduate students having exceptional academic record would be awarded hundred percent tuition fees and living expenses at a university abroad. You are heading a committee of bureaucrats and academicians that will shortlist the candidates after scrutinizing their academic performance. While going through the list of candidates you realise that one of the candidates applying for the scholarship happens to be the daughter of your best friend. Her academic credentials are really good and there are high chances of her getting this scholarship.

Do you see a conflict of interest here? Discuss. Is there a way to address this conflict? If yes, what are the alternatives available? Examine.

### Stakeholders in the case

- The secretary of education department
- Other students applying for the scholarship
- Reputation of education department
- Society at large

Conflict of interest refers to conflicts between one's professional responsibilities as a public servant or as a member of an organization and one's private interests as an individual. It is the most obvious ethical dilemma.

In this case, there is a conflict between neutrality (selecting only the deserving students) and personal commitments (rejecting daughter of best friend, if the case maybe).

### Way to address

#### Approach 1 – Recuse from panel

##### Merits

- Conflict of interest will be resolved.
- Objectivity in selecting candidates will be maintained.
- Department's reputation as being objective will be upheld.
- No impact on personal relationship if friend's daughter is not selected.

##### Demerits

- Do not know the credentials and value system of successor.
- Might impact the working of committee as well as result in delays.
- Lead to escapism, as many situations will have some conflict of interest.

#### Approach 2: Keep heading the committee

##### Merits:

- Selection might get completed within the given timeframe.

**Demerits**

- May blot department's image of being neutral.
- Impact personal image in department, might be seen as partial.
- Impact on personal relation if daughter is not selected.

**Approach 3:** Keep heading the committee, but make the conflict known to the members and keep the selection process transparent.

**Merits**

- Upholds department's image as being neutral and transparent.
- Increase personal reputation of being impartial and objective.
- Students will not feel that the board is biased.
- Not impact the personal relations as well.

In this way, duty can be discharged without an impact on personal relations. As every other situation can have some conflict of interest and one must choose a middle path.

**2. Abhishek, an IAS officer, is heading the IT Committee constituted for improving the services being provided by the State Transportation Department by leveraging information technology solutions. In the deliberations of the committee, it was concluded that a special purpose vehicle headed by an independent CEO, preferably from the private sector having experience in IT projects would best suit the needs of upgrading the services offered by the department. However, hitherto the department was headed and manned only by civil servants. The very idea of a CEO coming from the private sector and heading the most important division of the department is meeting stiff resistance from within the department.**

**How can Abhishek deal with this problem? Is this a typical problem with all the government departments? Critically analyse.**

**Introduction**

Resistance to change is a natural reaction, especially when dealing with government employees. Change is uncomfortable and requires new ways of thinking and doing. People don't fear change, though, they fear the unknown. The present case showcases the transportation department employees resistance to change and accept the much needed alternative of involving private sector participation which has been suggested by IT committee headed by IAS officer Abhishek.

**Body**

Abhishek can deal with the given problem in the following manner:

- Disseminating information about the reasons and process for intended changes can tend to reduce fear and increase positive feelings. Here, the new person bringing in enthusiasm and energy can be highlighted.

- Further, receiving both effective communication, plus being actively involved in the change efforts, can have significant effects on reducing people's resistance. In fact, employee participation is the greatest factor in reducing tensions due to new recommendations.
- Convincing the staff of no major changes in the work culture of the department and ensuring that their job security is maintained even after the new CEO's arrival.
- Circulating the committee recommendations within the department and conveying the urgent need to implement the said recommendations for overall improvement of the department as the department needs to keep pace with the changing needs of the times.
- Highlighting the lack of available expertise of the domain within the existing officer cadre and the need to bring in private participation for the same as India has a developed IT industry which would provide much needed expertise for the government department's functioning. Also, in-service training can be provided to suitable staff from existing strength if available.
- Finally, the technological assimilation and modern work culture in the department would be difficult to achieve if the same attitude and practices are continued without due appraisal and study on their effectiveness.

Implementing the committee's recommendation after the above due deliberations would help in smooth transitioning towards the required goal of attaining a public services department serving the public effectively.

## II. Is this problem typical to all government departments?

- Such a phenomenon is considered a problem typical to all government departments as such an entry undermines the career progression avenues of existing civil servants and also hampers the employment opportunities of young aspirants looking to enter the famed civil services for a fulfilling career thus leading to resistance against it.
- Also, the exposure and sensitivity to the country's complex socio-political milieu and to the needs of the common man, which widespread field experience provides to government servants, may not be available in the private sector since the private sector does not have the same width and depth of exposure to this type of field experience.
- Existing government servants also fear the issue of conflict of interest when it comes to entrants from the private sector which could jeopardise the functioning of the government.
- At the same time, the experience of domain level experts in Planning Commission and NITI Aayog as well as former Governors of RBI (Bimal Jalan and Raguram Rajan), Sam Pitroda (Head of many technology missions), etc shows that many government departments can be receptive to this change.
- Further, there is growing realisation that the administrative problems at the implementation level (district, tehsil, panchayat) require intervention of specialists with domain expertise and not generalist who head the department in the capacity of Secretary.

- The private sector can help catalyze the career civil servants to specialise in their chosen field. This will infuse much needed competition at the senior levels of management in the bureaucracy which is non-existent at present.
- Many other aspects of the issue also need to be considered too where the reservation aspect becomes important as neglect on this aspect may raise multiple questions which are of legal, political and social nature.

### Conclusion

Private entry into government services is not a new idea but it has not been followed as an institutionalized practice earlier. Although there are some shortcomings with this approach, that need to be addressed, there are many benefits associated with such a move which should, hopefully, catalyze the rule bound bureaucracy to become the agents of change; a role which the founding fathers, like Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru, had envisaged for the civil services. This should be the ideal for Abhishek while dealing with the present scenario i.e to fulfill the ideals of founding fathers.

