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Q2

(a) Impact of digital technology as a reliable source of input for rational decision making is a debatable issue. Critically evaluate with a suitable example. (b) Besides domain knowledge, a public official needs innovativeness and creativity of a high order as well, while resolving ethical dilemmas. Discuss with a suitable example.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS IV · 10 marks · Ethics in Public Administration

Public / Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems; ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions; laws, rules, regulations and conscience as sources of ethical guidance; accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding; corporate governance.

Core demand of the question

- (a) Impact of digital technology as a reliable source of input for rational decision making is a debatable issue. Critically evaluate with suitable examples
- (b) Besides domain knowledge, a public official needs innovativeness and creativity of a high order as well, while resolving ethical dilemmas. Discuss with suitable examples

Revision summary

Digital technology can cut ghosts, map floods and widen tenders, which aids rational decisions.

It fails when data are wrong, the poor are off the dashboard, algorithms bias, or a click replaces a reason.

It is a necessary input, not a sufficient one.

Domain knowledge is the statute; innovativeness invents a lawful means when two harms collide.

COVID kitchens, camps for certificates, sequenced pollution closure and privacy-limited tracing are examples.

Introduction

Screens now feed the file. Part (a) asks whether that feed is reliable enough for a rational public decision. Part (b) asks why the Act and the manual still need an official who can invent a lawful third path when two bad doors are all that appear.

Body**(a) Digital technology as input for rational decision making**

- Rational decision making needs true facts, a clear objective, lawful options, and a reason that can be shown. Digital systems can supply speed, scale and a trail.

- **Agreement:** **Direct Benefit Transfer** and Aadhaar-seeded payments cut ghost beneficiaries and gave ministries a number they could audit, which is more rational than a paper muster that never existed.
- **Agreement:** satellite maps, flood models and COVID dashboards let a District Magistrate see a river and a ward that a weekly tour would miss.
- **Agreement:** **Government e-Marketplace** and e-procurement, where they actually run, reduce the irrationality of a hand-picked vendor.
- **Debate - garbage in:** a wrong Aadhaar link, a failed biometric, or a duplicated ration card becomes a confident machine no that starves a real person.
- **Debate - exclusion:** the poorest without a smartphone or OTP skill never enter the dataset, so the "rational" dashboard is a census of the connected.
- **Debate - bias:** an algorithm trained on past police or credit data can launder old prejudice as a score, as facial-recognition false matches have shown against the already over-policed.
- **Debate - deepfakes and social media:** a viral clip can stampede a decision before forensic truth arrives; digital volume is not digital reliability.
- **Debate - opacity:** a black-box denial without a speaking order is not reason; it is automation of unaccountable power.
- Example: a migrant's intra-State pass that existed only on an app during lockdown was digital input that looked rational and failed the person without data.
- Example: **CoWIN** helped ration vaccines at scale and still left some elderly dependent on a literate child for a slot.
- **Critical close:** digital technology is a powerful input, not a sufficient one. Rationality still needs a human last mile, an analogue door, open data quality checks, and a right to appeal a machine refusal.

(b) Innovativeness and creativity besides domain knowledge

- Domain knowledge is the Act, the map and the precedent. An ethical dilemma is often two lawful-looking harms, or a gap the drafter never imagined.
- Innovativeness is a new lawful means. Creativity is seeing a stakeholder the file forgot. Neither is a licence to break the law for a touching story.
- Example: during COVID-19, officers who knew only the **Epidemic Diseases Act** still had to invent community kitchens, migrant special trains and translated helplines - domain law plus creative logistics.
- Example: a widow without a death certificate. The creative officer does not forge the paper; she convenes the lawful revenue process, a camp, and a speaking sanction the day the record exists.
- Example: a riot. Domain knowledge is the CrPC. Creativity is separating rumour WhatsApp from a joint peace committee before a lathi becomes the only tool.
- Example: environmental closure of a red unit. Knowledge is the Water Act, 1974. Innovation is a sequenced seal, a CETP for the cluster, and a wage camp so migrants are not the unpaid price of clean air.
- **Ethical dilemmas such as privacy versus health tracing need creative design:** minimised data, a sunset, and no communal targeting - not a binary of total surveillance or total blindness.
- The **Second ARC** and mission-karmayogi language both treat problem-solving, not only noting skill, as competence.
- **Training must therefore include case drills:** illegal oral orders, missing documents, scarce beds. A public official who only recites the manual will freeze or will pick the politically easy

harm.

Flow diagram

Digital input -> Scale trail less ghost
Digital input -> Exclusion bias fake volume
Human appeal last mile -> Rational decision
Domain knowledge -> Lawful floor
Innovativeness -> Lawful third path
Lawful floor -> Ethical dilemma
Lawful third path -> Ethical dilemma

Conclusion

Digital feeds can make decisions faster and cleaner when data are true and the excluded have a door. They can also automate a lie. Domain knowledge is the floor. Innovativeness is the lawful third path that keeps ethics when the file offers only two cruelties.

Facts & figures

Direct Benefit Transfer

A Union payment architecture that uses bank and often Aadhaar seeding to reduce leakage; rational only when the account and the person match.

CoWIN

The COVID-19 vaccine registration platform; scale with a digital gate that still needed assisted access for many elderly.

Government e-Marketplace (GeM)

An e-procurement platform meant to replace opaque manual purchase with a wider, auditable vendor set.

Right to a speaking order

Natural justice and good administration require reasons; an unexplained algorithmic refusal is not a rational decision.

Mission Karmayogi

The National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building, which treats competency and problem-solving, not only noting, as trainable skill.