



## Mains Practice Question

Q. "Integrity without knowledge is useless and knowledge without integrity is dreadful." Examine how the balance between ethical integrity and professional competence is vital in public service. (150 words)

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### Approach :

- Define ethical integrity and professional competence in the context of public service.
- Discuss the importance of these values in public service.
- Discuss the dangers of integrity without competence.
- Highlight the need to balance ethical integrity and professional competence.
- Conclude with a suitable way forward.

### Introduction:

Public service demands not only **technical expertise** but also moral uprightness. Ethical integrity ensures actions are guided by **public interest and values**, while professional competence ensures **efficient, effective, and lawful execution** of responsibilities. An imbalance between the two can lead to either inefficiency or misuse of skills.

### Body :

#### Ethical Integrity:

- Ethical integrity in public service means adherence to **honesty, fairness, transparency, and accountability** even in difficult circumstances.
- **Example: Lal Bahadur Shastri**, as Railway Minister, resigned accepting moral responsibility for a train accident, showing **ethical accountability** beyond legal obligation.

#### Professional Competence :

- Competence is the **knowledge, skills, and experience** needed to perform duties effectively.
- **Example: E. Sreedharan**, the "Metro Man of India," combined project management expertise with ethical leadership to deliver projects on time with minimal cost overruns.

#### Need for Balance in Public Service

- **Integrity without competence:** Without competence, integrity alone may result in delays, poor policy execution, and loss of public trust.
- **Competence without integrity:** Without integrity, competence risks being used for corruption, favoritism, and abuse of power.
- Thus, **integrity guides 'what should be done', and competence ensures 'how it should be done'.**

#### Application in Governance

- **Policy Implementation:** Implementing welfare schemes like MGNREGA requires **knowledge of operational guidelines and ethical use of funds.**
- **Crisis Management:** In disaster relief, integrity ensures fair distribution of aid, while competence ensures quick logistical arrangements.
- **Technology Use:** A digitally competent officer can curb corruption in public distribution systems, but without integrity, technology can be misused for data manipulation.

## Conclusion :

Public service is a **blend of moral strength and technical skill.** In Aristotle's virtue ethics, excellence lies in the balance of moral virtue and practical wisdom. Thus, an ideal public servant is one who acts rightly and knows how to act rightly — making governance both just and effective.

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