Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

You have just been appointed as Additional Director General of Central Public Works Department. The Chief Architect of your division, who is to retire in six months, is passionately working on a very important project, the successful completion of which would earn him a lasting reputation for the rest of his life. A new lady architect, Seema, trained at Manchester School of Architecture, UK joined as Senior Architect in your division. During the briefing about the project, Seema made some suggestions which would not only add value to the project, but would also reduce completion time. This has made the Chief Architect insecure and he is constantly worried that all the credit will go to her. Subsequently, he adopted a passive and aggressive behaviour towards her and has become disrespectful to her. Seema felt it embarrassing as the Chief Architect left no chance of humiliating her. He would very often correct her in front of other colleagues and raise his voice while speaking to her. This continuous harassment has resulted in her losing confidence and self-esteem. She felt perpetually tensed, anxious and stressed. She appeared to be in awe of him since he has had a long tenure in the office and has vast experience in the area of her work. You are aware of her outstanding academic credentials and career record in her previous organisations. However, you fear that this harassment may result in compromising her much needed contribution to this

important project and may adversely impact her emotional well-being. You have also come to know from her peers that she is contemplating tendering her resignation.

(a) What are the ethical issues involved in the above case?

(b) What are the options available to you in order to complete the project as well as to retain Seema in the organization?

(c) What would be your response to Seema's predicament? What measures would you institute to prevent such occurrences from happening in your organization?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2023	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

The case involves workplace dignity, abuse of authority, professional insecurity, gender sensitivity, psychological safety and institutional efficiency. The ethical response should protect Seema's dignity and well-being while preserving the Chief Architect's experience, ensuring project success through merit-based collaboration, respectful leadership, accountability and preventive workplace mechanisms.

Model Answer

Introduction:

The case reflects a conflict between **individual insecurity and institutional interest**. The Chief Architect's desire for recognition has resulted in behaviour that undermines Seema's dignity, confidence and contribution, ultimately threatening the project's success.

(a) Ethical issues involved:

Abuse of authority: The Chief Architect is using his seniority to intimidate and humiliate a junior colleague.

Workplace dignity: Public criticism, raised voice and repeated humiliation violate the principles of respect and dignity at work.

Professional jealousy: Insecurity over losing credit has displaced merit-based collaboration and institutional objectives.

Gender sensitivity: Repeatedly undermining a female professional can reinforce discriminatory workplace cultures and discourage women's participation.

Employee well-being: Persistent harassment is affecting Seema's mental well-being, confidence and self-esteem.

Organisational interest: Loss of a competent architect would deprive the project of valuable expertise and potentially delay its completion.

(b) Options available to complete the project and retain Seema:

Option 1: Ignore the Chief Architect's behaviour:
This may avoid immediate confrontation but would allow harassment to continue and could result in Seema's resignation.

Option 2: Remove or reprimand the Chief Architect immediately:
This may protect Seema but could unnecessarily waste his experience and create resistance during a critical project.

Option 3: Mediate and redefine responsibilities:
I would privately counsel the Chief Architect, acknowledge his experience and contribution, but make it clear that institutional objectives take precedence over personal credit. I would establish a **collaborative project team**, clearly define responsibilities and formally recognise contributions of all members.

Seema's suggestions should be objectively evaluated on merit. Her professional autonomy should be protected, while the Chief Architect's experience should be utilised through mentoring and technical oversight.

If harassment continues, I would initiate appropriate disciplinary mechanisms in accordance with service rules and workplace safeguards.

(c) Response to Seema and preventive measures:

I would meet Seema privately, listen to her concerns and assure her that **professional disagreement will never justify humiliation or harassment**. I would encourage her not to resign and assure her of a fair and safe working environment.

I would institute:

1. **Zero-tolerance policy** towards harassment, intimidation and public humiliation.
2. **Grievance and confidential reporting mechanisms** accessible to employees.
3. Regular training on workplace ethics, gender sensitivity and respectful communication.
4. Objective performance appraisal based on measurable contribution rather than hierarchy or personal preferences.
5. Mentoring, team-based decision-making and transparent attribution of professional credit.
6. Periodic review of employee well-being and workplace culture.

Conclusion:

Effective leadership requires converting **competition for credit into collaboration for institutional excellence**. By protecting Seema's dignity while constructively utilising the Chief Architect's experience, the organisation can safeguard both employee welfare and project success.

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