

Discretion Under Curfew: A Manager's Ethical Dilemma

A. Uma Maheswari

Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship, Chennai, India

Abstract. A final-round recruitment process for ten mission-critical positions at Axion Global Services is abruptly disrupted when Section 144 is imposed in Hyderabad, shutting down all business venues and restricting movement. AGS, already facing declining SLA (service level agreements) performance, rising attrition, and contract-linked staffing deadlines, had identified one finalist per role after an extensive multi-stage national search. With candidates already in transit, some holding competing offer deadlines and one having resigned, the on-site manager must determine how to proceed without procedural guidance from headquarters. The case highlights tensions between legal compliance, organizational continuity, stakeholder expectations, and ethical decision-making under regulatory uncertainty.

Keywords: ethical decision-making, regulatory ambiguity, crisis leadership, managerial discretion, recruitment and staffing.

(This case is a composite educational scenario based on field observations and practitioner interviews. Identifiers, if any, have been substantially modified to ensure confidentiality.)

1. A City on Mute

The message from headquarters was short, almost too calm for the chaos it implied:

“Use your judgment. Document everything.”

The words replayed in Vijay Kumar's mind as he stood at the window of his Hyderabad hotel room. It was 7:00 AM on a Wednesday in May 2022. Outside, the usually bustling streets of Banjara Hills were silent under a city-wide curfew imposed overnight following violent political clashes. Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code had taken effect, restricting all public gatherings and urging citizens to remain indoors except for essential purposes.

Inside, Vijay's phone vibrated insistently with messages from ten shortlisted candidates scheduled for final-round interviews that morning. The hotel manager had informed him that all business activities were suspended; conference rooms were sealed, and Axion Global Services' (AGS) regional office was unreachable. Even AGS's virtual interview platform was offline for scheduled maintenance following a security incident. The meticulously planned recruitment drive—a

This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.

Readers who wish to obtain the full text version of the article can order it via the url

<https://www.neilsonjournals.com/JOBE/abstractjobe18vijay.html>

Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson pneilson@neilsonjournals.com

© NeilsonJournals Publishing 2025.

mission-critical event designed to stabilize the company—had collapsed overnight.

Vijay, the Regional Manager at AGS, had been sent to Hyderabad to oversee the execution of this crucial hiring round. The recruitment was designed to fill ten strategic roles necessary for restoring client confidence and operational stability after months of decline. The directive from his superiors was brief and strategically ambiguous: “Use your judgment. Document everything.” It empowered him to act while leaving accountability squarely on his shoulders.

Outside, the city was still. Inside, time was running out. Vijay knew his next decision could shape not only AGS's recovery but also his own professional integrity.

2. A Company on the Brink

Axion Global Services was a mid-sized government-affiliated logistics and supply chain management firm with approximately 4,800 employees spread across 23 Indian cities. For three decades, AGS had been the dependable backbone of public sector infrastructure—moving construction materials for highways, coordinating warehousing for railway projects, managing last-mile logistics for government buildings. What had once been a trusted operational machine was now straining under compounding pressures.

The pandemic had accelerated digital transformation across the logistics industry, and AGS had been caught unprepared. Competitors with modern tracking platforms and AI-driven route optimization were winning government tenders that AGS had once dominated. A wave of attrition followed, mid-level managers and technical specialists left for private sector firms offering better compensation and modern work environments. The company's operational core was hemorrhaging talent.

The numbers painted a stark portrait of decline:

Performance data captured the cumulative impact of these shifts (*Refer Exhibit 1: AGS Performance Snapshot*). Service Level Agreement compliance had fallen from 97% to 83%, prompting breach notices from two major government clients. Penalties exceeded 3.2 crores. Attrition had risen to 28%, and internal dashboards displayed increasing numbers of pending service tickets, delayed shipments, and unresolved client queries. Employees reported longer turnaround times and frequent rescheduling of critical tasks.

To arrest the decline, senior leadership initiated an aggressive, time-compressed recruitment drive targeting ten mission-critical roles (*Refer Exhibit 2: Profile of Mission-Critical Vacancies*).

These positions were not meant for expansion but for organizational triage, aimed at stabilizing execution, rebuilding predictive systems, managing