

Case Study Series: Learning from Innovative Civil Servants

Case Title:

The use of unconventional methods by forest rangers to apprehend timber smugglers

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The cases for this series are being collected by interviewing civil servants working in different South Asian countries. This collection initiative is an attempt to document different innovative initiatives taken by civil servants and, in the process, encourage other civil servants to become more innovative in their own workplaces. If you are aware of other such instances of innovation, please send us an email (parvez.yousuf@northsouth.edu), and we will get back to you to collect more information.

Case 6: The use of unconventional methods by forest rangers to apprehend timber smugglers

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Illegal timber smuggling

Mr. X started working in the forest department of one of Bangladesh's hilly regions. It is a place where lots of timber yielding trees can be found. Soon after he joined, Mr. X noticed that timber smuggling was a major problem affecting the area. Smugglers would get the timber by felling the trees in the forest late at night. Mr. X also noticed that the smugglers were using trained dogs which helped to alert them regarding forest rangers' position. As a result, these dogs were removed by the forest rangers.

But, a few days later, the smugglers incorporated a whole new strategy, cutting the trees at night but in separate groups. When one of them would cut down a tree, the forest rangers would immediately run to the hill where the tree had been cut down. But then another group would cut down trees on another hill and smuggle the timber away as the forest rangers

were unable to reach that hill on time. In this way, they started playing rat and mouse with the forest rangers.

An unconventional solution

One day, Mr. X was sitting in his room, trying to figure out a way to apprehend the timber smugglers. In the room, a mosquito coil had been lit to prevent mosquito bites, which can often lead to malaria – a common problem in the hill tracts. Noticing the burning coil, suddenly, he had an idea. He took note of how much the coil would burn every 10 minutes. He also did the same for 20, 30, 45, and 60 minutes respectively, using a marker on the coil to

Problem

For years, some timber smugglers had been cutting the streets on a hilly forest range and smuggling the timber away.

Solution

The forest rangers took an unconventional and creative approach- using mosquito coils and firecrackers- in order to apprehend the timber smugglers.

Outcome

Members of the timber smuggling ring were arrested and the smuggling of the timber was reduced.

keep track. The next morning, he went to the city and bought around 500 firecrackers. Then, returning to the office, he started cutting the coils according to the markings of the different time periods.

One night, before the smugglers arrived, and as instructed by Mr. X, the forest rangers set the firecrackers and the coils, setting the latter on fire. He told two of his staff members to sit quietly in the observation tower with their rifles. Others were instructed to hold positions with rifles away from the road that the smugglers used.

As per their new strategy, the smugglers entered the forest in groups. After a while, firecrackers began to explode at different points on the hillside. Mr. X and his team had taken up positions on both sides of the road. When they saw the smugglers running along the road, they began to fire blank shots. Scared, the smugglers jumped and fell into the cane bushes which lay on both sides of the road. Later, all the members of the smuggling ring were arrested.

Declarations

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[Baniamin, H. M., & Jamil, I. \(2021\). Effects of representative bureaucracy on perceived performance and fairness: Experimental evidence from South Asia. *Public Administration*.](#)

[Baniamin, H. M., Jamil, I., & Askvik, S. \(2020\). Mismatch between lower performance and higher trust in the civil service: Can culture provide an explanation? *International Political Science Review*, 41\(2\), 192-206.](#)

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