

MAINS MASTERY 2026 · GS PAPER IV · QUESTION 4(B) · STUDENT EDITION

Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity

THE QUESTION, AS SET IN UPSC CSE MAINS 2026

Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

Directive: How | 10 marks | 150 words | Ethics: public service, work culture

1 **PYQ Deep Decode**
Demand, hidden demand, structure, form

2 **PYQ Intelligence**
2013 to 2026: effective service delivery

3 **Additional information**
The terms, the matrix, the method

4 **Pitfalls and variations**
Corrections and changed directives

5 **The model answer**
A contrast table and a method

6 **Other ways to write it**
Outlines, and when each works

7 **Quick recall**
Sixteen facts for Mains and Prelims

8 **Write it yourself**
A seven-point self-check

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Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

1 PYQ Deep Decode

Read the question the way the examiner set it: the demand, the hidden demand, the structure that follows from both, and how the answer should be presented, opened and closed.

1.1 The demand

The question gives the definitions and asks for a method. **How do you strike a balance** between efficiency and effectiveness **to enhance productivity**? So the answer must briefly show why each alone fails, and then spend most of its words on **how** the two are combined, with administrative examples. "You" places the candidate in the role of a public servant: the answer should read as a working method, not a management lecture.

Words in the question	What they ask you to do	What goes wrong if you miss them
Efficiency is doing things right	Process: least input, time and cost per output. Measured by outputs, unit costs, turnaround.	Treating efficiency as speed alone.
effectiveness is doing the right thing	Purpose: choosing the right goal and achieving the intended outcome for citizens.	Treating effectiveness as "results" without asking whose and which.
How do you strike a balance	Give a method: sequence, measures, review, people and values. This is most of the answer.	Only defining and contrasting the two terms.
to enhance productivity	Relate conventional productivity, outputs per unit of input, to public-sector performance, which must also consider outcomes, quality, access, equity and public value.	Productivity as output per hour, as in a factory.

THE DEMAND IN ONE LINE

Show that efficiency without effectiveness is busy futility and effectiveness without efficiency is wasteful success, then give a working method that first fixes the right outcomes and then delivers them with the least waste, sustained by measurement, review, capacity and integrity.

1.2 The hidden demand

This is a GS IV question, so the balance is also **ethical**. "The right thing" is not only the right target; it is the right outcome for the right people, reached by fair means. Efficiency pursued alone tempts officials to **chase numbers**: counting toilets built rather than used, files closed rather than grievances resolved. An indicator becomes misleading when officials optimise the indicator rather than the outcome: Goodhart's law, often expressed in Marilyn Strathern's 1997 phrasing. A strong answer shows that **values decide what "right" means** in both halves of the sentence, and that productivity in government is judged by citizens' outcomes, with dignity and equity.

Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

Each point should name a step of the method, show it in administration, and say what it guards against. The last column is where the hidden demand begins.

Step	In administration	What it guards against
Purpose first	Define outcomes before processes (Outcome Budget, 2005).	Efficiently doing the wrong thing.
Measure what matters	Track use and results, not only outputs.	Target-chasing and gaming.
Integrity in process	Speed within rules and fairness.	Cutting corners that hurt the vulnerable.

WEAK

Both efficiency and effectiveness are important, and a civil servant should balance them through good management and the use of technology.

STRONG

First fix the outcome citizens need, then streamline the process that delivers it; measure use and results rather than outputs, review often, and let integrity limit how speed is gained.

1.3 The structure

The question has **one explicit demand** (how to balance), with a short contrast as its base. So a useful answer has a **brief contrast** and a **longer method**. The shares are of the body between the introduction and the conclusion; they are a teaching guide, not a UPSC rule.

Introduction	1. Why each alone fails about one-third	2. Striking the balance about two-thirds	Conclusion

Part 1 **Why each alone fails** about one-third

Efficiency alone	Busy futility: outputs without outcomes; gaming of targets.
Effectiveness alone	Wasteful success: results at excessive cost or delay.

Part 2 **Striking the balance** about two-thirds

Sequence	Purpose first, then process.
Measures	Outcomes as well as outputs.
Review	Regular review and citizen feedback.
People, values	Capacity and integrity.

1.4 How to present it

The form follows the question. The contrast is a comparison, which a **small table** carries in few words; the balance is a method, which **headed points** carry best, each with one administrative example.

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Form	Fit here	Reason
Contrast table, then method points	**Best**	Compact contrast; most words go to "how".
Two-by-two matrix, then points	Good	Vivid, but costs space in a 10-mark answer.
Essay on management	Weak	No method and no public-service example.

1.5 The introduction and the conclusion

The introduction serves the whole question. It defines both terms and productivity in public service, so that the balance has a measure.

The conclusion settles the demand. It gives the rule: effectiveness sets the direction, efficiency sets the pace; do the right things, then do them right.

2 PYQ Intelligence 2013 to 2026

The idea's origin and its place in Indian administration, its line of GS IV questions on effective service delivery, and what to prepare next.

2.1 Where the idea comes from, and where it is applied

A GS IV concept question is not driven by the news, but the distinction has a clear origin and a long record in Indian administrative reform. GS Paper IV was held in late August 2026. Everything in this table predates the examination.

When	What happened	Why it matters for this question
May 1963	Peter Drucker, "Managing for Business Effectiveness" (Harvard Business Review): the confusion between effectiveness and efficiency stands between doing the right things and doing things right; nothing is so useless as doing efficiently what should not be done at all.	An influential early formulation of the distinction; the question closely reflects it.
2005	The Union Government presents its first **Outcome Budget**, linking spending to physical outputs and outcomes.	Effectiveness written into budgeting.
1 January 2013	**Direct Benefit Transfer** begins, paying benefits into beneficiaries' bank accounts.	An efficiency reform that also serves effectiveness.
25 March 2015	**PRAGATI**, a platform for review of projects and grievances at the highest level, is launched.	Review that ties pace to purpose.
2017-18	The **Output-Outcome Framework** appears in the Union Budget documents for 2017-18; from mid-2017 NITI Aayog's Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office coordinates the monitoring exercise with Ministries.	Outputs and outcomes measured together.
January 2018	The **Aspirational Districts Programme** tracks district progress on 49 key performance	District development progress monitored through multi-sector indicators; efficiency of resource use

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When	What happened	Why it matters for this question
	indicators in five themes: Health and Nutrition; Education; Agriculture and Water Resources; Financial Inclusion and Skill Development; Basic Infrastructure.	requires separate assessment.
2 September 2020	**Mission Karmayogi**, the National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building, is approved.	People as the link between the two.

Efficiency and effectiveness: the four combinations

	Effective (right goal achieved)	Ineffective (wrong goal, or goal missed)
Efficient	**Desirable performance.** Intended, justified outcomes with efficient resource use, while safeguarding quality, equity and legality.	**Busy futility.** Targets met at low cost but outcomes missed: assets built and left unused.
Inefficient	**Wasteful success.** The outcome achieved, but late and at excessive cost.	**Failure.** Wrong goal, pursued wastefully.

A teaching matrix, not an official classification. The balance moves an organisation towards the top-left cell: effectiveness chooses the column, efficiency chooses the row.

2.2 The skill UPSC keeps testing

These questions share one concern: **whether administration delivers outcomes for citizens**, and how competence, focus and integrity produce them. Questions are verbatim unless marked.

Year	The question as UPSC set it, or a marked summary	What it asked of you	What changed in 2026
2013 GS IV	Q1: What do you understand by 'values' and 'ethics'? In what way is it important to be ethical along with being professionally competent?	Competence and ethics together.	Competence as efficiency; ethics in choosing the right thing.
2019 GS IV · Q2(a)	Effective utilization of public funds is crucial to meet development goals. Critically examine the reasons for under-utilization and mis-utilization of public funds and their implications.	Effective use of public money.	From funds to productivity as a whole.
2022 GS IV · Q1(a)	"Wisdom lies in knowing what to reckon with and what to overlook." An officer being engrossed with the periphery, ignoring the core issues before him, is not rare in the bureaucracy. Do you agree that such preoccupation of an administrator leads to travesty of justice to the cause of effective service delivery and good governance? Critically evaluate.	Focus on the core: effectiveness.	An earlier precedent: prioritising core issues over peripheral administrative preoccupations.
2024 GS IV	Summary, not verbatim: Q4(b), on excessive attachment to procedural form at the expense of substantive justice and the true intent of rules.	Form against substance.	Procedure as efficiency, purpose as effectiveness.

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Year	The question as UPSC set it, or a marked summary	What it asked of you	What changed in 2026
2024 GS IV	Summary, not verbatim: Q6(b), how Mission Karmayogi, which aims at a very high standard of conduct and behaviour, would enhance civil servants' productive efficiency and grassroots service delivery.	Capacity and productive efficiency.	The closest precedent: from one programme to a general method.
2025 GS IV	Summary, not verbatim: Q6(a), workplace measures for a value-based and compliance-based work culture; Q6(b), accountability, leakages and better utilisation of public funds.	Work culture and stewardship of funds.	Productivity as an ethical duty.
2026 GS IV	Same paper, summary: Q5(a), how an administrator should balance strict enforcement of rules against remote schools with children's right to education.	Rules against outcomes.	Two questions on means and ends of administration in one paper.

Also related (summaries): 2015 Q5(b), whether bureaucratic and democratic attitudes can be balanced for better administration; 2019 Q2(b), non-performance of duty as a form of corruption; 2019 Q4(a), the citizens' charter movement; 2022 Q2(a), civil servants interpreting the same rules differently; 2023 Q1(a), moral integrity and professional efficiency in corporate governance; 2025 Q5(b), civil servants as enablers rather than only regulators. **Also relevant (verbatim):** 2021 Q6(a): "An independent and empowered social audit mechanism is an absolute must in every sphere of public service, including judiciary, to ensure performance, accountability and ethical conduct. Elaborate." 2023 Q5(b): "'Probity is essential for an effective system of governance and socio-economic development.' Discuss." **Verbatim:** 2017 Q2: "Examine the relevance of the following in the context of civil service: (a) Transparency (b) Accountability (c) Fairness and justice (d) Courage of conviction (e) Spirit of service."

CARRY THIS METHOD TO ANY "HOW DO YOU BALANCE" QUESTION

1. **Define** both sides and the goal they serve.
2. **Show** what each alone produces.
3. **Give a sequence**: what comes first.
4. **Give a measure** that captures both.
5. **End with** the value that holds the balance.

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2.3 What to prepare next

IDEAS

Output and outcome	Output: what is produced (classrooms built). Outcome: what changes (children learn).
Goodhart's law	When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure (Marilyn Strathern's phrasing, 1997, of Goodhart's 1975 point).
Economy, efficiency, effectiveness	The "three Es" of value for money in public audit; equity is often added as a fourth.
Yogah karmasu kaushalam	Bhagavad Gita 2.50: yogah karmasu kaushalam, skill in action, within disciplined, equanimous action; detachment from the fruits is taught in 2.47.

INDIAN PRACTICE

Outcome Budget (2005)	Spending linked to outputs and outcomes.
Output-Outcome Framework	Scheme indicators monitored by NITI Aayog's DMEO.
Aspirational Districts (2018)	Outcome indicators and ranking.
Mission Karmayogi (2020)	Role-based capacity building for civil servants.

3 Additional information

Everything needed to answer this question well. Tier 1 holds what the demand needs; Tier 2 places it within the wider debate on performance in government.

TIER 1 · ESSENTIAL: THE TWO TERMS, PRODUCTIVITY AND THE METHOD

The method in five steps

1. Purpose
Fix the outcome citizens need.

2. Process
Design the least wasteful route to it.

3. Measure
Track outcomes as well as outputs.

4. Review
Correct course with data and feedback.

5. People, values
Build capacity; keep integrity.

Subject	What it is	Why it matters for the answer
THE TWO TERMS AND PRODUCTIVITY		
Efficiency	The ratio of outputs to inputs: least cost, time and effort per unit of output. Doing things right.	The process side.
Effectiveness	The degree to which the intended outcome is achieved. Doing the right things.	The purpose side.
Productivity in public service	Conventional productivity relates outputs to inputs; in public service, performance is also judged by outcomes, quality, access, equity and public value, which cannot always be reduced to one ratio.	Why both are needed.
WHY EACH ALONE FAILS		
Efficiency alone	Outputs rise but outcomes do not: assets built but unused; files closed but grievances unresolved; targets gamed.	Busy futility.

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Subject	What it is	Why it matters for the answer
Effectiveness alone	Outcomes achieved, but late, at high cost, or by consuming resources that other needs required.	Wasteful success.
STRIKING THE BALANCE		
Purpose first	Decide the outcome and the target group before designing the process. Outcome Budgets and the Output-Outcome Framework do this for schemes.	Efficiency then serves the right goal.
Then streamline	Process re-engineering, digitisation, single-window systems, removal of duplication; Direct Benefit Transfer can reduce intermediary processing and delays, provided beneficiaries retain access to banking services and effective grievance redressal.	The least wasteful route.
Measure what matters	Pair output indicators with outcome indicators (use, learning, health), and audit for gaming.	Guards against Goodhart's law.
Review and adapt	Regular review (PRAGATI), dashboards, social audit and citizen feedback.	Course correction keeps both aligned.
People and values	Capacity (Mission Karmayogi), delegation with accountability, and integrity: speed gained by cutting fairness is not productivity.	The ethical balance.

In time-critical work, efficiency directly serves effectiveness. Delayed disaster relief or epidemic response can defeat the purpose; the two concepts still remain distinct.

Some slower procedures are part of effectiveness. Hearings, appeals and consultation protect fairness, legality and the durability of decisions. They should be made efficient, not bypassed.

TIER 2 · EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING: THE WHOLE TOPIC AROUND IT

Where the balance works

1. **Clear outcomes:** one goal, measurable, owned.
2. **Data:** real-time dashboards and verification.
3. **Delegation:** decisions close to the problem.
4. **Feedback:** citizens report what reached them.

Where it breaks

1. **Target fixation:** outputs counted, outcomes ignored.
2. **Rule fixation:** procedure followed, purpose lost.
3. **Haste:** speed that bypasses due process.
4. **Silos:** each office efficient, the system ineffective.
5. **Capacity gaps:** good design, poor execution.

Two debates worth knowing

Should government be run like a business?

New Public Management promoted managerial autonomy, performance measures, competition and private-sector techniques in government. Critics caution that legality, universal access, accountability and equity are public obligations, not costs to be cut. The balanced reading: **borrow the tools, keep the public purpose**.

Do performance targets help?

Targets focus effort and make performance visible. They also invite gaming and neglect of what is not measured. The balanced reading: **few targets, tied to outcomes, checked independently**.

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4 Pitfalls and variations

The mistakes that cost marks here, the claims never to make, and how the answer changes when the question changes.

4.1 Six pitfalls, each with its correction

Only definitions

~~Efficiency is X and effectiveness is Y.~~

Most of the answer must be the method of balancing.

One beats the other

~~Effectiveness matters more than efficiency.~~

Effectiveness sets direction; efficiency sets pace; both make productivity.

Factory productivity

~~Productivity is output per employee.~~

Output per unit of input alone is insufficient; citizen outcomes, quality, equity and public value must also be assessed.

No example

~~Use technology and good management.~~

Outcome Budget, DBT, PRAGATI, Mission Karmayogi.

Ignoring values

~~Speed at any cost improves productivity.~~

Speed that cuts fairness is not productivity in government.

No view

~~Thus both are important.~~

Do the right things first, then do them right.

4.2 Never write these

- "Efficiency and effectiveness mean the same thing."
  One is about process, the other about purpose.
- "The line was coined by Warren Bennis."
  Drucker drew the efficiency-effectiveness distinction in 1963; Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus later contrasted managers, who do things right, with leaders, who do the right thing (Leaders, 1985). Do not conflate the two.
- "Outputs prove outcomes."
  A school built is not a child taught.
- "Procedure is always inefficiency."
  Some procedure protects fairness and rights.
- "Productivity in government is output per employee."
  Output per unit of input alone is insufficient; citizen outcomes, quality, equity and public value must also be assessed.

4.3 If the question changes

If it asks	The structure becomes	What must change
Outputs versus outcomes	Definitions; examples; measuring outcomes	Measurement at the centre.
Rules versus results	Purpose of rules; flexibility; accountability	Procedure at the centre.
Work culture in government	Attitudes, incentives, capacity, leadership	People at the centre.

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If it asks	The structure becomes	What must change
A **case study** on a lagging scheme	Diagnose purpose and process; options; action	A decision, not a method.

5 The model answer

One model answer, written to the 150-word limit, in the form this question calls for: a short contrast table, then a method in headed points. The introduction covers the whole question; the conclusion settles its demand.

Model answer ### Contrast table and method **151 words**

Efficiency uses resources prudently; effectiveness secures the right public outcomes. Productivity improves when citizens receive timely, accessible, equitable services without unnecessary costs or compromised rights.

	Efficiency	Effectiveness
Asks	Doing things right?	Doing the right things?
Measures	Cost, time, outputs	Outcomes, impact
Alone risks	Busy futility	Wasteful success

Striking the balance

- **Purpose first:** identify needs with citizens; for scholarships, prioritise eligible students receiving support on time.
- **Streamline processes:** simplify approvals and use DBT where suitable, retaining access and grievance remedies.
- **Measure both:** compare processing time and cost with actual receipt, inclusion and citizen satisfaction.
- **Review openly:** use dashboards, independent audits and feedback to correct exclusion and gaming.
- **Adapt:** disaster relief needs speed; benefit denial requires notice, reasons and appeal.
- **Build capacity:** train staff, delegate responsibly and ensure integrity through accountable decisions.

Effectiveness chooses legitimate public purposes; efficiency avoids waste in achieving them. Neither faster exclusion nor expensive success is truly productive governance.

DEMAND
A short contrast, then a method of balancing

HIDDEN DEMAND
Values decide what 'right' means; outcomes over outputs

STRUCTURE
About one-third, then two-thirds

BALANCE
Introduction 25 words, conclusion 21 words; 151 words in all

Why it works: the introduction defines both terms and productivity; the table gives the contrast and what each alone produces in few words; the six points give purpose-setting, process improvement, measurement, review, context-sensitive judgement and capacity with integrity; the conclusion settles the order of the two.

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6 Other ways to write it

The model answer above remains the answer. These outlines show how a different, equally valid answer could be built, and when each choice works.

Approach	How it is built	When it works
Matrix answer	The two-by-two matrix, then three steps to reach the productive cell.	When you draw quickly.
One scheme, end to end	Take one programme and show purpose, process, measure and review.	When a single example is vivid.
Open with Drucker	Introduction: doing efficiently what should not be done at all; then the method.	When you want a sharp start.
For 15 marks	Add both notes (speed as purpose; procedure as protection) and both debates.	When there is room.

7 Quick recall and Prelims crossover

Facts for rapid revision and Prelims.

1	**Efficiency**: outputs per input; doing things right.	9	**Outcome Budget**: first presented **2005**.
2	**Effectiveness**: intended outcome achieved; doing the right things.	10	**DBT**: from **1 January 2013**.
3	**Drucker**, HBR, **May 1963**.	11	**PRAGATI**: **25 March 2015**.
4	**Output**: what is produced; **outcome**: what changes.	12	**Output-Outcome Framework**: **2017-18**; NITI Aayog DMEO.
5	**Goodhart's law**: **1975**; Strathern's phrasing, **1997**.	13	**Aspirational Districts**: **January 2018**.
6	**Three Es**: economy, efficiency, effectiveness.	14	**Mission Karmayogi**: **2 September 2020**.
7	**Gita 2.50**: yogah karmasu kaushalam.	15	Productive: efficient **and** effective.
8	**New Public Management**: business tools in government.	16	Busy futility: efficient, ineffective.

THE ONE SENTENCE TO CARRY OUT OF THIS DOCUMENT

Decide what is worth doing before deciding how fast to do it; a road built quickly to the wrong village is not productivity.

Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

8 Write it yourself

Write the answer in 150 words without looking back, then check it against each line below.

	Check	Yes / No
1	Are both terms and **productivity** defined?	
2	Is what each produces **alone** shown briefly?	
3	Is there a **sequence**: purpose, then process?	
4	Are **outcomes** measured, not only outputs?	
5	Is there at least one **administrative example**, and a value?	
6	Does the conclusion give a **view**, at about the length of the introduction?	
7	Is it **150 words or a little over**, with no claim from section 4.2?	

Sources

- P.F. Drucker, "Managing for Business Effectiveness", Harvard Business Review (May-June 1963).
- Ministry of Finance: Outcome Budget (2005); NITI Aayog, Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office: Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework.
- Press Information Bureau: Direct Benefit Transfer (2013); PRAGATI (2015); Aspirational Districts Programme (2018); Mission Karmayogi (Cabinet approval, 2 September 2020).
- C.A.E. Goodhart (1975); M. Strathern, "Improving ratings: audit in the British University system" (1997); Bhagavad Gita 2.50.
- UPSC Civil Services (Main): GS Paper IV question papers for 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026.

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YOUR NEXT STEP

Now write GS Paper IV 2026 again.

You now know what this question asked, what it expected without saying so, and how its answer is built. Write the whole paper under the clock, have it evaluated, and read the feedback against this document.



1 Write the full paper in three hours

2 Self-check this answer with section 8

3 Have the paper evaluated

4 Read the feedback against this document

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