Good Governance Practices in Public Administration

DOCUMENTATION OF ONLINE RECRUITMENT PROCESSING SYSTEM

OF

STATE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

July 2014

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction1			
2.	Situation before the Intervention			
3.	3. Key Challenges faced by the innovators		.6	
4.	STRATEGY ADOPTED			
a		Technology	.7	
b	•	Grievance Redressal Mechanism	. 8	
C.	•	Communication and dissemination strategy	. 8	
d	•	Institutional arrangements	. 8	
e	•	ORPS components	. 8	
f. ORPS Process Flow		ORPS Process Flow	.9	
g	•	Privacy and Security1	14	
5.	r	esults1	15	
6.	S	ustainability1	17	
7.	KEY Lessons LEARNT		17	
8.	Replicability		20	

List of Figures

Figure 1: ORPS Website	2
Figure 2: Manual process flow	
Figure 3: The ORPS-Process Flow	9
Figure 4: MIS reports from ORPS	
Figure 5: Applications processed by APPSC	

List of Tables

Table 1: Services offered by the Application

1. INTRODUCTION

India has been harnessing the benefits of ICT to provide integrated, expanded and efficient governance to its citizens. eGovernance has brought large improvements in the way government operates and relates to its stakeholders. On the independence day of 2002, the Prime Minister of India outlined a comprehensive plan to speed up eGovernance at all levels. The Centre and the States have taken several initiatives to realize this plan and have made rapid strides in eGovernance implementation.

One such initiative is the Online Recruitment Processing System initiated by the Public Service Commission of the erstwhile united State of Andhra Pradesh ('PSC' or 'the Commission' hereafter). ORPS (http://www.apspsc.gov.in) is an online system that has improved the management of government recruitment in the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

a. Need for Online Recruitment

Efficient recruitment calls for employing the right person, in the right location, at the right time, at the right cost. A flawed recruitment process leads to shortage of quality staff to deliver services to citizens. It also increases the expenditure on interim solutions such as the engagement of contract staff ¹.

The strict processes mandated for government recruitment often make them complex and time consuming. Greater use of technology would help the government reduce recruitment time and increase transparency.

Online recruitment involves the use of internet to process job applications in a speedy and efficient manner. According to Lukaszewski et al. (2009), online recruitment is superior in many ways to traditional methods of attracting job applicants. It is quicker, more informative and offers unrealized potential for cost savings. Thus, governments have increasingly focused on developing effective online recruitment strategies.

b. Online Recruitment Processing System of the Commission

Public Service Commission, the nodal agency for government recruitments, receives large number of applications in response to notification of jobs. Due to manual recruitment

¹ Recruiting civil servants efficiently, National Audit Office, London <u>http://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/0809134.pdf</u>

processes and staff shortage, the PSC recruitment process could take as long as five years, rendering uncertain the employment-status of lakhs of applicants. It is in this context that an Online Recruitment Processing System (ORPS) was introduced in 2008 by the Commission, resulting in a significant improvement in the efficiency of its recruitment processing.

ORPS automates the pre-examination and post-examination processing of applications. It aims to overcome the deficiencies in the conventional process, provide easy access to the applicants and reduce the workload of officials. ORPS allows applicants to enter details in the online platform, obtain an acknowledgement and confirm their application through payment of fee to the bank. After verification, a final application form is generated and stored in PDF format on the main server and made available to the applicant. Based on verification of details, list of rejected applicants is posted on the website for applicants to submit objections (if any). A final list of admitted applications is then published with a provision for hall ticket generation. Applicants are notified via SMS regarding hall ticket downloading facility. After the examination, the list of qualified applicants for interview is published followed by the merit list after the selection.

ORPS offers 'anywhere any time' access to applicants for all direct recruitment and departmental tests conducted by the PSC. It minimises the uncertainty of application delivery and offers applicants, the provision for filing objections if their applications are rejected. It also envisages the facility of help desk support to answer applicants' queries to minimise mistakes. Enabling online issue and downloading of hall tickets has reduced the level of uncertainty. There is also a strong network of fee collection centres across urban and rural areas.

Figure 1: ORPS Website (http://www.apspsc.gov.in/)					
Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission					
Main Website	All Mark lists All Ir	terview lists			
Notifications Click Here	Press Notes Click Here				
Keys :					
Notification Keys Objection Noti.No: 07/2013 Medical Officer Unani in A.P. Unani Medical Services Under Ayush Department SC/ST backlog Vacancies Limited Recruitment-2013 Objections Results : Keys					
	Notification				Results
Notification No. 19/2012, Lectures in Government Polytechnic College in A.P. Technical Education Service. (General Recruitment) Subject Wise Selection List					
Notification No. 5/2008 & 19/2008, Inspector of Boilers in A.P. Boilers Service. Selection List					
Notification No. 22/2012, Physical Directors in A.P. Collegiate Education Service. (General Recruitment) Selection List			Selection List		
Notification No. 33/2007, Assistant Commissioner of Endowments in A.P. Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Service. Selection List					
Noti.No:23/2012 Librarians in A.P. Collegiate Education Service General Recruitment Selection List			Selection List		
Noti.No.26/2012, Researc	h Assistant Non-Engineering Research Laboratories Ser		n A.P.Enginee	ring	Selection List
Online Application Sub	missions :				
Notification No.	Application	Challan Start Date	Last Date for Payment of fees	Last date fo Submitting Application	
Click Here for Detailed	Departmental Tests November 2013 Session	19/08/2013	25/09/2013	30/09/2013	Sample User Guide Get Challan

c. Documentation Methodology

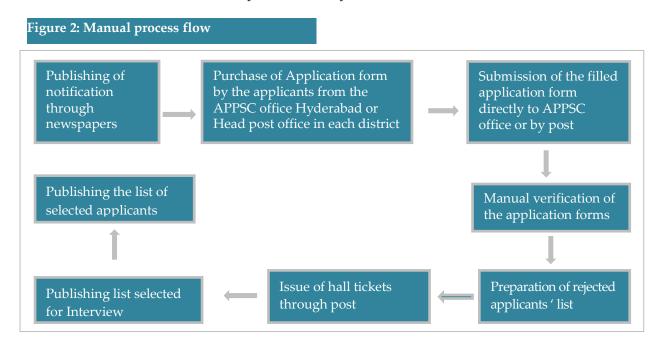
The following sections comprise a documentation of ORPS. The format for this documentation has been prescribed by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG), Government of India. Accordingly, the documentation of ORPS is presented in seven sections, namely (1) Situation before the intervention, (2) key challenges faced by innovators, (3) strategy adopted, (4) results, (5) sustainability, (6) key lessons learnt and (7) replicability.

This documentation is based on detailed primary and secondary research. Primary research involved consultation with key stakeholders of ORPS such as applicants, the PSC officials, technical team at the Centre for Good Governance (CGG), Hyderabad and the help desk staff. As part of the secondary research, previous documentations on ORPS and some other relevant literature were referred to as listed in the bibliography.

2. SITUATION BEFORE THE INTERVENTION

Before the introduction of ORPS, the manual system of application process was time consuming, cumbersome and costly. The manual process flow followed by the Commission before the introduction of ORPS is briefly described below:

a. Manual Process Previously Followed by the PSC



Description of manual process

Upon the communication of a set of vacancies by the Finance Department, the Commission gives notification through newspapers. Applicants bought application forms from the PSC counter at Hyderabad or from the General Post Office in district headquarters. They then filled in the OMR application forms along with supporting documents and submitted these at the counters or through post.

The Commission thereafter manually verified the received applications, prepared the list of rejected applications, issued hall tickets and delivered them through post. Applicants had no opportunity to know the status of their application, give feedback or file objections. For grievance redressal, applicants had to personally visit the PSC offices. Hall ticket lost in transit or otherwise meant cumbersome follow-ups with the PSC. After the exam, the Commission published the list of interview candidates and later the final merit list.

b. Key Issues in Manual Process

The public service recruitment process in the State faced the following issues prior to the implementation of the Online Recruitment Processing System (ORPS):

- i. **Issues faced by applicants**: Following issues were faced by the applicants with the traditional application system:
 - Uncertainty about accuracy/sufficiency of the filled-in application: The manual system offered limited options for the applicants to find out the accuracy and sufficiency of information submitted by them. This meant that applicants could rarely file objections when the Commission rejected their applications.
 - Long queues for purchase of applications: The applicants stood in long queues at the PSC counters to buy the application forms, a time consuming and draining chore. Besides, the authorities at the application counters often took arbitrary decisions affecting the applicants. There were instances when forms were not available for all applicants which meant loss of precious opportunities for some applicants.
 - **Postal costs and uncertainties:** The applicants were required to incur dual postage costs, once to request the application and then to submit the

applications. Besides, they faced uncertainties owing to postal delays and defaults.

ii. Issues faced by the Commission

- Large cycle-time: In the State, about one lakh applicants compete for about 500 government jobs. This translates to a pre-examination workload of around 100 days for the PSC staff while the final selection took another 40 to 50 days. Thus, the cycle time of the recruitment process was high, consuming about half-a-year per every major recruitment-drive.
- Arduous task: Receiving and scanning the paper applications was a tedious task involving considerable manual work. For each application received, the staff was responsible for the following tasks:
 - Collecting the postal applications
 - Separating demand drafts from the application form, listing them and depositing them in Bank
 - Printing and sending hall tickets by post
- **Cumbersome storage and retrieval:** The large volume of applications required large physical storage spaces besides making their retrieval a cumbersome task.
- Large scale consumption of paper and print: The Commission had to print about one lakh application forms with several pages which meant consumption of huge quantities of paper and print resources.
- Data inconsistency and errors: Data integrity was a persistent problem and guaranteeing a one hundred percent error-free rate was a tall task. Owing to the human involvement at certain stages of the recruitment processing, one could not rule out errors.

c. Catalyst for Change from the Existing System

During 2008, the extant issues were compounded by the Government's decision to remove the recruitment freeze. The Commission received close to 10 lakh applications in 2008 for different vacancies. Manual processing of these applications would have meant the creation of at least 40 more sections in the Commission. Hence the Commission requested the Centre for Good Governance (CGG), Hyderabad to develop an online system for recruitment processing.

3. KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY THE INNOVATORS

- a. Change management: The willingness of PSC staff to change to a new and unfamiliar system was a key challenge faced during the implementation of ORPS. It was initially difficult for them to adapt to a new work environment in which technology played a decisive role. With the strong support of the top officials of the Commission, CGG technical team was able to handhold the PSC staff and equip them with the required knowledge and skills.
- **b.** Selection of banking service provider: Selection of a banking service provider was essential to integrate the online cash transactions for recruitment process. After considering several aspects, the State Bank of India was selected as the banking partner.
- **c. Integration of multiple interfaces:** As the system brought together many service providers, the creation of seamless interface between their servers was a major challenge. For instance, given the security concerns of providing direct access to the Bank server, the Bank agreed to share the summary of daily transactions with CGG through emails.
- **d.** Awareness generation and facilitation of citizens: A large number of applicants to the PSC notifications come from low-income segments and rural area with limited familiarity or access to computers. The introduction of the system gave rise to concerns about exclusion of such applicants due to their difficulty in applying through the system.

To ensure transparency, the ORPS team developed a website² providing information on all job notifications and examination dates and offering facility for application submission and publication of results. Further, a help desk was created to handle grievances/feedbacks/requests from applicants. All notifications instructed applicants to apply only through the online system. The notifications carried and carried detailed user guides on using the PSC website for applying for the listed vacancy.

² Although APPSC earlier had a basic website, CGG developed a completely new website with interactive features for APPSC as part of the ORPS project

4. STRATEGY ADOPTED

a. Technology

- i. Accommodating new technological changes: The online processing of applications for direct recruitment is a technology-based process. The introduction of technology in service delivery requires certain changes in the administration. Through ORPS, the manual systems in the Commission have been gradually replaced by computerized systems for handling daily operations. This is especially true for divisions which handle exam notifications, hall ticket issue, and interview notification. Yet, much of ORPS has been outsourced to CGG which handles the actual processing of applications.
- ii. **Capacity building of officials:** PSC staff were trained in online application processing by the technology team and the help desk personnel from CGG.
- iii. Website interface: The PSC website (http://apspsc.gov.in) was created as a platform to introduce the ORPS. It disseminates information on following recruitment related matters:
 - Notifications on direct recruitment/departmental exams
 - Press notes/important orders/circulars on recruitment
 - Syllabus and old question papers, career advancement schemes
 - Access to the web pages of UPSC/other PSCs.
- iv. Software: ORPS has been developed on the Java-Struts platform with ORACLE database with a Linux environment. It is supported by a strong firewall, 100 MBPS bandwidth internet connection and a 128 GB server.
- v. **Hardware:** Two servers support ORPS, an application server that accepts online applications and a data server for storage. CGG ensures timely updation of software and maintenance of hardware. The system is fully equipped to handle heavy traffic even during dates closer to submission.

During peak times, upto 10 lakh applications are successfully handled with regular monitoring of traffic. The system is also integrated with mobile technology to send SMS on confirmation of payment, examination dates, hall ticket and results to applicants. The online fee paid by the applicants covers the cost of SMS alerts.

b. Grievance Redressal Mechanism

A help desk has been set up to address the concerns of applicants in application process or hall ticket downloading. The help desk support is available on all working days between 10.30 AM-1.00 PM and 1.30 PM-5.00 PM. They can be contacted through call at +91-040-23120055 (local call charges applicable) or through email at appschelpdesk@gmail.com. Currently, four trained personnel handle the help desk queries through four telephone lines (extendable upto 10 lines as per demand).

c. Communication and dissemination strategy

Multiple strategies are adopted to ensure that applicants have access to the requisite information at the right time. Notifications on various exams are regularly published in the newspapers and the website. Applicants can file their grievances or submit feedback to appschelpdesk@gmail.com or call the helpdesk number. Information such as interviews/verification dates are also communicated by SMS to the applicants. Thanks to these, today applicants are able to easily access and use the website, as proved by the daily hits of 20,000-30,000 on the website.

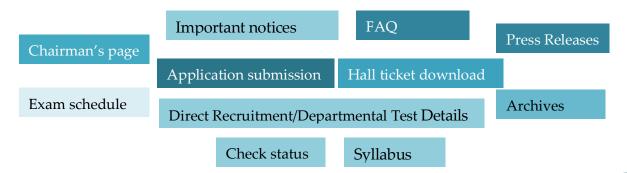
d. Institutional arrangements

As most components of ORPS are outsourced, no major institutional change has been effected in the set up of the Commission. The Commission has however computerized the notification section and ensured technological coordination among all sections. It has also recruited contractual computer professionals to coordinate with the CGG team and manage requisite technical tasks within the PSC.

e. ORPS components

The three components of ORPS are briefly described below:

i. **APPSC website:** Some of the key field of the website are listed below:

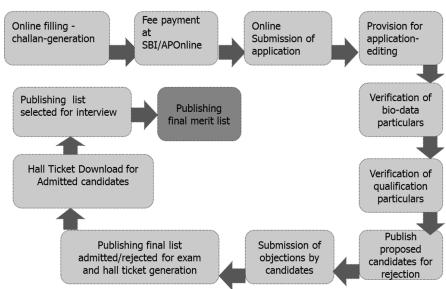


- ii. **Main website page:** The PSC website provides link to the 'main website' which contains information and links to current examinations and notifications. The page is simple, user friendly and easy to load. This makes sure that the applicants from rural areas with low internet connectivity can also access the page and apply.
- iii. **Recruitment processing system:** This is an internal application exclusively for the PSC staff for performing their activities. Each user has a user id and password which enables them to login and do the following:
 - Verify application data (name, qualification, photograph, etc.)
 - o Accept/reject, publish the list of applicants proposed for rejection
 - o Verify the objections received and finalize the list of eligible applicants
 - Add examination centre details
 - Generate hall ticket number and reports (nominal rolls, index lists etc.,) for conducting the examination.

f. ORPS Process Flow

The step-by-step process involved at each stage of the recruitment through ORPS is captured below:

Figure 3: The ORPS-Process Flow



- Requirement submission: The requirements for online application for a notification are provided by the Notification wing of the Commission to CGG. CGG develops prototype online forms for the following:
 - o Generating challan (for payment of fee at SBI/APOnline)

• Application submission which are then verified by the APPSC team.

Once prototypes are approved, CGG hosts these in the website once the Commission notifies the posts. CGG sends the notification details to SBI which creates account numbers for fee payment such that there is one account number for every one lakh applicants expected. Along with the online form, the website has the detailed notification and user guide containing step-by-step instructions on filling the application form.

ii. Online filling: Applicants responding to notification first logs onto the website, read the notification to assess their eligibility and select the *Get Challan* tab given against a particular notification. The applicant is first asked to select *Declaration 1* which states that he has read the notification particulars, following which he is required to enter his personal details including the following:

0	Name	0	Mobile number
0	Father's name	0	Domicile
0	Date of birth	0	Educational details
0	District	0	Post applied

On successful submission of these details, the system generates a *challan* with a 10 digit unique number (as per the Treasury Department orders) and a bank account number. This challan can downloaded from website as and when required till the last date of payment by providing the *challan* number and date of birth.

iii. Payment of fee: The applicant then uses the *challan* to pay the prescribed fee³ in any one of the APOnline centres/SBI branches and obtain his copy of *fee paid challan* with journal number details⁴. SBI sends two files of consolidated data (of a particular day) of payments made at (i)SBI branches across the country (ii) APOnline centres, through email to CGG (by 1 PM on next working day). CGG team uploads these files onto the PSC's Recruitment Processing System (RPS).

³ SC, ST, BC, & Ex-Service Men are exempted from payment of fee

⁴ Banks do not charge the applicants or the application developer any processing fee for this purpose. RBI, in order to encourage e-governance applications pays Rs 40 for online transactions to these operation handling banks such as SBI. In case of the banks utilizing the help of intermediaries like APOnline, a nominal rate (RS 6 in this case) is paid to the intermediaries. Banks take the help of intermediaries for wider coverage and avoidance of long queues at bank branches

iv. **Submission of application:** After payment of fee, anytime after 2:00 pm on the next working day, the applicant can enter the payment details to access the online application. The applicant has to upload a scanned copy (jpeg format) of his photo with signature along with the application. Applicant then fills up the online form, submits the same and receives a pdf document of completed application with a unique application number. Applicant can download the same and take a printout for his record. After submission, the applicant can check the status of application through a link, *check application status* on website.

After the application is filled-in, details are cross-verified with the information supplied by the bank. A final application form with details captured initially during the issue of *challan* and later during the payment of application fee is generated and stored in pdf format on the main server.

v. **Application editing**: Applicants can request corrections in the details submitted by sending an email⁵ to <u>appschelpdesk@gmail.com</u> which are then sent to CGG for follow up. The applicant receives a mail from the PSC helpdesk upon registration of the request. Requests for editing are only encouraged until the preparation of nominal list.

During the examination, applicant is shown the details entered in the nominal list and invited to point out any corrections required. The information verified by the applicant in the nominal list at the time of examination is considered by the Commission as final. In case of major notifications like Group-I and Group-II, applicants can directly submit revised data into ORPS. PSC staff can approve or reject the corrections requested.

System Generates following MIS reports to facilitate Pre-Examination process:

MIS on Applications

- No.of Challans Generated day wise
- No.of Applications Submitted day wise
- Challans generated but not submitted Applications - day wise
- Examination Centre wise
- Subject Wise (if applicable)

MIS on Fee transactions

- Payments received as per SBI day wise
- No.of Journal Numbers claimed by the Applicants - day wise
- Balance Journal Numbers day wise
- Subject Wise (if applicable)

Figure 4: MIS reports from ORPS

⁵ When an applicant makes a call and place the request for editing, the help desk staff advice the applicants to place the request through email and provide necessary guidance. Applicants are not permitted to send the request for editing through post or calls

- vi. **Verification of bio-data particulars:** After the period during which editing can be done, the concerned Deputy Secretary (DS) and his team verify the candidate details to drop fake and defective applications. For this, the information in the application form is classified as follows:
 - *Qualification (Valid/Invalid)*
 - Name of Applicant (Valid/Invalid)
 - Father Name (Valid/Invalid)
 - Address (Valid/Invalid)
 - Whether Payment confirmed
 - Whether Duplicate or Not Duplicate (REFERENCEID of original application will be marked against duplicate)
 - Applicant Photograph (Valid with signature, Valid without signature, Full Paper Scanned Photo, Invalid Photo (Celebrities, Sceneries, Animal etc.,), Blurred Photo and No Photo (Invisible Photo)

After verification, the DS freezes the 'check qualification process' and navigates to another screen where all applications are segregated into following three categories:

- Yet to be decided (whether duplicate or not)
- Application proposed for rejection
- Admitted Application

The yet to be decided applications are verified and marked as *duplicate* or *not-duplicate*. The DS then proceeds to verification of *Applications proposed for rejection* and finally the *Admitted Applications*. After verification of all categories, he downloads the pdf document containing *Application proposed for rejection* and obtains approval from the Secretary of the PSC. Thereafter, the list of candidates proposed for rejection is published on the website and SMS alerts are sent to applicants to submit objections if any.

- vii. **Submission of objections**: Objections received from *rejected applicants* are verified and segregated into *accept/reject* categories. Upon approval of the *accepted/rejected* list by the Secretary of the PSC, the facility for submitting objections is frozen.
- viii. **Publishing the final list and generating hall tickets**: The Assistant Secretary (Exams), PSC can download the list of *admitted/rejected* applicants and decide (together with concerned DS and confidential section) the dates for conducting written examination. They then obtain approval from the PSC, posts examination

schedule on the website and plan for procurement of venues. Facility to add/edit/delete venues is provided to AS (Exams) in RPS. The concerned DS through a service 'generate hall ticket' provided in ORPS generates Hall Ticket Numbers in the following format:

- First two digits Notification Number
- Third and fourth Digit Centre Number
- Last four digits Serial number in that centre

The DS then assigns venues to hall tickets through *assign venue* service. Thereafter, hall tickets are hosted on the website for downloading by candidates who are alerted through a system generated SMS. Hall tickets are printed by the applicants to carry to examination centres⁶. The concerned DS generate reports such as nominal roll, index list, venue allotment report and question paper packing report from the ORPS and download them into CDs for storage and printing.

ix. **Publishing list of applicants selected for interview**: After the examination, the list of qualified applicants for interview is published.

To generate the list of applicants to be called for interview/verification of certificates (in 1:2 ratio), total number of vacancies are matched with the marks of written examination. Based on the marks of written examination and interview, qualification, zone preference, post preference, etc., merit list with details like posts eligible for, posts preferences, zone preferences can be prepared by the system. The merit list is downloaded by the confidential section and orders are obtained from the Commission after circulation.

x. Publishing the merit list: The merit list prepared by the confidential section in excel format is uploaded into the system. To ensure confidentiality, hall ticket numbers of candidates are replaced by barcodes. By matching the attributes of vacancies with the attributes of applicants in merit list, ORPS, with its built-in 'engine for selection' completes the selection process as per the rules. Once the interviews are over, the merit list of selected applicants is published on the website and a press note is issued.

⁶ Venues are separately sent a venue allotment report with total details as to the number of applicants expected, subject of their examination. Another report called nominal report with student records with pictures, details of the series option are sent for their verification during the exam.

Table 1: Services offered by the Application

S.	Service
No.	
1	Online Challan generation
2	Fee Payment by the applicants
3	Fee payment uploads from the info received from bank
4	Bio data verification
5	Qualification Check
6	Filing objections by the applicants to proposed rejection
7	Approve/Reject the objections raised by the applicants for proposed rejection
8	Publish Rejected list on web with reason
9	Provide Examination venues for conducting Examination for the said notification
10	Generate Admit card Numbers
11	Assign Venues to the generated admit cards
12	Download Admit cards
13	Generate Attendance sheet, Index list, Rejected lists
14	Publish Examination Keys
15	Inviting objections to the published keys
16	Publish Final Keys
17	Publish Marks List/interview list of the applicants
18	Publish Selection List of the Applicants
19	Publish Press notes in respect of the notifications from time to time
20	SMS Services – Payment of fee, Application submission, admit card download
21	MIS Reports
22	Grievances redressal
23	Help Desk Services

g. Privacy and Security

Being the official recruiting system of the State, ORPS needs to maintain strict privacy and security procedures. ORPS is managed in a highly secure environment. The servers are managed by CGG with regular checks and updation for pre-empting security threats. The network employed for ORPS uses a multi-layered security system. Unified threat management system is used so that outsider cannot locate the relevant information on the server.

ORPS has a role-based access system whereby the live server can be accessed only by the system administrator and not the entire ORPS team. The ownership of the entire

data vests with the PSC. Access to department personnel is given through a separate application which runs on 'http' (encrypted connection) to ensure data security. The periodic audit checks have ensured that the network is strong enough to prevent any intruders.

5. RESULTS

ORPS has brought tangible and intangible benefits for all stakeholders which are briefly discussed below:

Benefits to applicants:

- i. *Anytime, anywhere application*: ORPS enables the applicants to apply for notified vacancies from anywhere at any time of the day during the notified period.
- ii. *Time saving*: ORPS has drastically reduced the time required for filling and submission of applications through a simple online interface. Applicants are not required to stand in long queues or travel for getting or submitting their applications.
- iii. *Transparency:* ORPS has brought in transparency and accountability to recruitment processing as all information pertaining to a notified vacancy is available on the website. Applicants can track the status of their application, obtain details of their rejection, submit objections and can obtain the merit list at every stage. This ensures that applicants do not miss out on a job opportunity on account of minor mistakes in their application or malpractices.
- iv. *Cost saving:* ORPS has brought drastic reduction in the cost of application. It has eliminated all postal charges and has reduced the transaction cost associated with application.⁷
- v. *Eliminating uncertainties:* Applicants can download hall tickets from the APPSC server as against the conventional system of waiting for postal delivery of hall tickets which created huge delays and uncertainties.

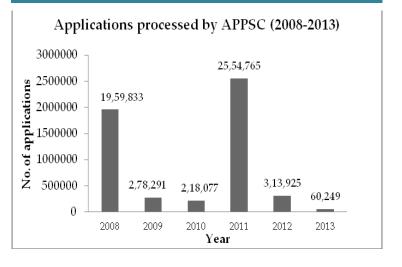
⁷ Transaction cost is a cost incurred as a part of participating in a market or engaging in a transaction. In the case of applying to APPSC, cost such as information cost which is incurred in order to attain information about the application status, query regarding application etc can be considered as transaction cost.

Benefits to the Commission

i. *Processing of large number of applications:* The main result of ORPS can be seen from the fact that it Figure 5: Applications processed by APPSC

seen from the fact that it has processed **more than fifty lakhs applications** since its implementation at minimal additional costs and overheads on the organisation.

ii. *Reducing work load:* ORPS has reduced the pre-examination work of PSC staff. Workload has



also reduced as applicants themselves enter the application details and thus prevent data entry errors by PSC staff. As the application details are already in the server, it becomes easy to categorize and sort them. The time taken for pre-examination work has reduced from 100 days to 70 days.

- iii. *Time saving:* ORPS has resulted in reducing the recruitment cycle time by almost fifty percent. This is a huge benefit especially when the Commission has to conduct recruitment for large number of vacancies at a time.
- iv. *Saving storage space:* As the data is entered and managed in virtual space, the physical space required for storing application has become negligible whereas data retrieving has been made easier. ORPS has also resulted in minimizing the use of paper in the application process.
- v. *Ensuring data integrity:* The integrity of data is ensured as a result of built-in validation of ORPS. ORPS has also reduced human involvement and the resultant errors.
- *vi. Awards:* ORPS system has won the eWorld forum 2012 awards for Best Government to Citizen (G2C) Initiative of the Year.

6. SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of ORPS can be assessed by analysing the sustainability of infrastructure, financial sustainability and sustainability of human resources.

- a. **Technological sustainability:** The technology infrastructure of ORPS is sustainable as it has the capability to manage as many as one lakh applications a day. This ensures that no applicants experience difficulty in filling the application, even on peak days. Increasing penetration of internet in rural areas is expected to make ORPS more sustainable.
- b. Financial sustainability: ORPS requires applicants to pay Rs. 25 as processing charge (in addition to statutory fees) for online application. This amount is used by the service provider to maintain the ORPS infrastructure with no burden on the Government. By partnering with SBI which has an extensive presence across the State for financial interface, ORPS has ensured access for every applicant to pay the fee from nearby locations⁸. This has also eliminated the need for exclusive fee collection centres for ORPS and has brought down the cost of implementation.
- c. **Training:** Implementation of ORPS requires the PSC staff to be trained in computers and the ORPS system. These trainings are undertaken regularly by CGG in the State Training Institute or in CGG premises with minimal burden on the Commission. ORPS has been made simple enough so that users require minimal training for operating the system thereby reducing recurring costs of training.

7. KEY LESSONS LEARNT

The ORPS team has learnt and incorporated many lessons since its implementation to improve the system and to deliver the service effectively. Key lessons from implementation of ORPS are discussed below:

a. *Support of top leadership is crucial*: ORPS was initiated due to increase in the quantum of applications for government posts and was the first initiative of its kind in the country. In overcoming the main hurdle of convincing the key stakeholders including the PSC staff about the utility of such a system, the top

⁸ SBI has the largest network of branches in India.

leadership of the Commission (Chairman, Members and the Secretary) played a crucial role.

- b. *Coordination between technical service provider and the PSC has been critical:* There is a strong mechanism for coordination between the technical service provider and the PSC. This coordination happens both at the leadership as well as the staff level. Both the PSC and the service provider discuss and decide on the modalities of functioning before each notification. The unique structure of the service provider (CGG) brings on board, persons with technical experience and experience of working with government.
- c. *Capacity building of the PSC staff:* The training of the PSC staff was conducted in order to make them aware about the technical details of ORPS. This capacity building was essential because ORPS required a huge change in the way recruitment process was conducted. APPSC has also deployed outsourced staff with computer knowledge to quicken the process.
- d. *Establishing a dedicated helpline*: ORPS has a dedicated help line accessible through email and phone. The helpline work from both the service providers' premise as well as from the PSC. The help desk has played a major role in giving clarity to applicants in addressing their queries. Help desk mechanism has eliminated all uncertainty during all stages of application and has increased the confidence of citizens in the ORPS system. The number of complaints has also come down over the years, thereby indicating the efficacy of help desk.
- e. *Including "frequently asked questions" and user guide in the website*: During the application process, there are many areas which applicants may find difficult. ORPS had identified such areas and have introduced "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) in the website as also elaborate user guides along with each notification. Many applicants find these facilities highly useful in filling the application.
- f. *Resolving all complaints before exam:* ORPS has managed to resolve most complaints before the exams. While there is no option for direct editing after submission, the help desk facility ensures rectification of several mistakes. Further, the facility for rejected applicants to submit objections act as another checks and balance. These elaborate yet easy mechanisms ensure that most

complaints are resolved before the beginning of exams and applicants do not bear the burden of raising grievances during the examination period.

- g. *Ensuring extensive network of fee collection centres*: Choice of SBI and APOnline as financial partners has ensured that applicants have access to the vast network of SBI branches for fee submission. This has proved a crucial success factor for ORPS as it catered to the requirements of large number of applicants from far flung areas.
- h. *Making ORPS compulsory*: All applications to APPSC can only be filled through ORPS.⁹ ORPS could not have been such a success if APPSC had given option for applicants to use the manual application system.
- i. *Measures to achieve scalability of ORPS*: Some more measures which can be taken by ORPS to increase user satisfaction are listed below:
 - <u>Increasing the working hours of call centre</u>: The call centre services could be extended to 24 hours.¹⁰ This can help the applicants during the last few days of application as the call centre will be flooded with calls during the day time.
 - Ease of financial transactions:
 - *Increasing the number of financial partners*: Citizens may be allowed to submit their *challan* payments through any nationalized bank instead of restricting the facility to SBI.
 - *Multiple payment modes*: At present internet banking is available only in a limited way through APOnline. This can be extended and applicants can be given the option of completing all the steps of application processing within a limited time period through internet banking/ debit card/credit card transactions.
 - <u>Bilingual notifications</u>: Provisions may be made for bilingual notifications and applications so as to extend services to aspirants who are familiar only with the regional language.

⁹ This is opposed to systems in other recruitment where the applicants are given an option for using manual application although online application is incentivised.

¹⁰ At present only IVR system is working 24 hours.

- <u>Interactive website</u>: Features like online chat, discussion forums; live community chat, etc., may provide opportunities for aspirants to interact with each other and share their experiences for better performance.
- <u>mGovernance</u>: ORPS can develop a smart phone application from which the applicants can use at all the stages of application. This could help ORPS take advantage of unfolding smart phone revolution in the country. More steps are required to ensure that applicants indeed receive messages¹¹. Other features like tips, online book store and free e-books may be of use to applicants.
- <u>Accessibility:</u> Measures can be taken to make the website more accessible for persons with disability.

8. REPLICABILITY

Owing to its success, ORPS has been implemented in other departments and PSUs of the State Government. As ORPS reduces the work load of the recruitment staff, the staff in other public sector undertakings has been requesting their management to replicate ORPS. CGG has been approached by other state government departments and public sector undertakings to implement a similar system. The low cost of technology, user fee model and the drastic reduction of manual work can be considered as the main factors for the easy replication of ORPS.

The model is being replicated by the following state departments:

• Power Companies:

- o APTRANSCO (Transmission Corporation of Andhra Pradesh Limited)
- APGENCO (Andhra Pradesh Power Generation Corporation Limited)
- CPDCL (Central Power Distribution Company of Andhra Pradesh Limited)
- NPDCL (Northern Power Distribution Company of Andhra Pradesh Limited)
- SPDCL (Souther Power Distribution Company of Andhra Pradesh Limited)
- EPDCL (Eastern Power Distribution Company of Andhra Pradesh Limited)

¹¹ As per the response from the sample of applicants on whom a questionnaire was administrated as a part of this study a large number had reported that they did not receive messages during all stages of application (SEE annexure 1 for the questionnaire).

- Chief Commissioner of Land Administration for VRO/VRA (Village Revenue Officers/Village Revenue Assistants) Recruitment
- Excise Department Constables Recruitment
- State Road Transport Corporation JA (Junior Assistants), TST/MST (Traffic Supervisor Trainee/Mechanical Supervisors Trainee), Constables, OUT (Officers Under Trainee) Recruitment
- Education Department for DSC (Departmental Selection Committee) Recruitment, APTET (Andhra Pradesh Teacher Eligibility Test), DIETCET (District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET)/ Elementary Teacher Training Institutes Common Entrance Test, LPCET (Language Pandit Common Entrance Test), Model School Teachers Recruitment.

Conclusion

The key factors for the successful implementation of ORPS are administrative and political willingness, collaboration with committed technology partners, robust internet and telecommunication facilities in the state and transparency in financial linkages. Today, owing to ORPS, optimism and reliability have replaced the perception of inefficiency that the public service recruitment process was synonymous with. Realizing its potential, several other state governments have been seeking CGG's assistance in designing a similar system for their respective states.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1. (n.d.). Center for Innovations in Public System. Online Processing of Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) Applications. Andhra Pradesh
- 2. (2012). One World Foundation India. Online Recruitment Processing System of Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission Applications
- 3. (2008). Commission, Andhra Pradesh Public Service. *APPSC Website*. http://www.apspsc.gov.in/ (accessed November 2013- January 2014).
- (2008). Commission, Andhra Pradesh Public Service. *Main Website*. http://website.apspsc.gov.in/home.appsc;jsessionid=CA051015EEAC52756CAC233AA184 D13E (accessed September 2013-January 2014).
- 5. (2013). Centre for Good Governance. Nomination of ORPS for United Nationa Public Service Award. November 2013 (Internal documentation)
- 6. (2012). Centre for Good Governance. ePASS. *Regional Conference on Reforms for Citizen Centric Governance, March 5-6, 2012.* Puducherry.

ABBREVIATIONS	

APPSC	Andhra Pradesh Public Service Commission
AS	Assistant Secretary
CGG	Centre for Good Governance
DS	Deputy Secretary
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
MIS	Management Information System
ORPS	Online Recruitment Processing System
RPS	Recruitment Processing System
SBI	State Bank of India