

Central Recruiting System
(Ministry of Civil Service - Oman)
Ms. Fatma Al Bulushi, System Analyst

I. Background information

Ministry of Civil Service (MoCS) is responsible for recruiting Omani job seekers for the 34 units (Ministries and Government Units) under the Civil Service Law. MoCS receives different requirements for recruitment from these units through the Human Resources Management System (HRMS). Traditionally, once these requirements were received, MoCS will place advertisements in the local newspaper as and when there were enough requirements. Now this is done 3 times a year to notify job seekers of available vacancies.

The response to these job advertisements is usually overwhelming. In 2010, 568 vacancies were advertised in the 1st notification which resulted in receiving 31,141 applicants. Imagine going through this 3 times a year? Subsequently, applicants were required to submit their applications and CV's by hand to the recruitment department situated in Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman. This would mean that the applicant would have to travel from the various regions to the capital city. The Sultanate of Oman has a total land area of about 309,000 square km and is divided into 9 administrative regions. This would mean that an applicant from the Dhofar region in south would have to travel more than 1000 km to Muscat in north to submit their applications. This caused a lot of inconvenience for the applicants as they will have to travel from far off places, queue and wait for a long time to submit their applications and get approval from MoCS Recruitment department. The rush to submit their applications on time would turn the Recruitment department into a frenzy especially on the closing date of the application. Morale of the department staff were badly affected when they had to work long hours just to accept, endorse and process the applications.

In addition, after submitting the applications, all applicants would have to take a paper-based written qualification examination. It took a long time to grade the score, pre-qualify the candidates and select them for formal interviews. The candidates who cleared the written exam would then be called for an interview which was also manually documented. The whole recruitment process takes about 11 months. Also, there was not enough transparency in the process as the applicants do not know how they fare and why they did not get the desired job application. This led to suspicions and accusation that the recruitment process is not just and fair.

II. Goals & timeframe

Based on the problems faced in the traditional recruitment process, the MoCS introduced a new system of recruitment which used the Short Message Service (SMS) of the mobile phone. In the Sultanate of Oman, the mobile penetration rate is about 120% and it is the most successful form of communication today given the vast area of the country.

In August 2007, the new recruitment system using SMS was introduced. Job seekers can apply for jobs in the Civil Service by sending an SMS with their Manpower Registration Number and the corresponding job identification number published in the advertisements. Through integration with the Ministry of Manpower, National Manpower System, the system validates the applicants' data in seconds. The job seekers can apply for jobs in the Civil Service anytime, anyway, eliminating the need to travel to the capital just to submit the applications and sit for the entrance examinations.

The applicants' qualification is verified electronically via the HRMS and records from the Ministry of Manpower. Qualified applicants then go through a computer based examination to test their aptitude and knowledge at designed regional centres nearest their home. The examination system contains a database of more than 9000 questions in different fields with different levels. The test is graded by the computer-based system and the individual score is given directly to the applicant immediately after the exam via a big screen in the waiting area and also the notice board. The best 5 candidates will be channeled to the interview on the same day. This increases transparency, there will be no complains of favoritism as the test is electronically graded and applicants know how they fare.

An integrated interview system is then used to record interview evaluations by 2 members (one from Ministry of Civil Service and one from Unit requesting the job). Candidates will be able to know if they are nominated after the interview. The Hiring Unit will be notified of the nominated candidate through the Human Resources Management System.

From an initial 11 months' time frame, the whole process is shortened to less than a month and less than a week, from testing to nomination. This is a huge saving of 40 weeks plus the eradication of having to travel, queue for approval and anxiety in waiting for examination results.

Apart from time savings, the frenzy during each recruitment exercises is totally eliminated and now HR Departments in the respective units and in MoCS can focus on quality manpower planning and management. As such the Morales of the staff are increased.

- Chronology

Phase 1- In 2007 : MoCS carried out the following key activities;

- a) Gathered users' requirement and worked with various stakeholders to streamline the recruitment processes.
- b) Worked with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education teachers and lecturers to develop 9000 multiple choice questions for the examination bank
- c) worked with Ministry of Manpower to integrate the Recruitment System with the National Manpower System
- d) Developed the Recruitment Module as an extension of the Human Resource Management System
- e) Developed the examination and the interview modules
- f) Worked with a local company to test the SMS application solution
- g) Piloted the SMS application process for one of the recruitment exercises

Phase 2 - In 2008: the IT Department revised and updated the Recruitment System based on the lessons learned from the pilot test in Phase 1. MoCS began deploying the system nationwide including the examination module and the interview module.

With the successful implementation by end 2008, MoCS was able to eradicate the real problem of long waiting time for civil service job application.

III. Project's added value and importance

The project saved the MoCS about OMR 459,172 (US \$ 1,200,000) and the rest of the recruiting Ministry OMR 707,553 (US \$ 1,840,000) yearly from cost of advertisements, transportation and manpower. Total saving is OMR 1,166,725 or US\$ 3,040,000 yearly.

While the objective of the system is not profit generation, the SMS service is bringing in revenue for MoCS which is then reinvested in new upgrades to the system. This is because the service is done in a Public Private Partnership model which revenue generated from the SMS is split between the MoCS and the vendors. Based on the latest statics there are 62,274 subscribers to the service.

IV. Challenges:

In the initial phase of deployment, MoCS team faced some issues with manpower applicants' data, which are used to validate and match the job requirements. They started to validate the data manually but it was still taking too much time. The problem was solved in a meeting between MoCS and the Ministry of Manpower. Basically, the solution was to fix the data fields and validate any new entries. Other than that MoCS did not face any other major obstacles as all stakeholders and users are greatly relieved with the implementation of the new ways of applying and processing of jobs in the civil service. It is to everyone's advantage to have an effective, efficient and transparent process and system.

V. Relevance of the project to the respective Action Line

The e.Oman central recruitment system is an efficient tool targets providing a state of art recruitment services to citizens using ICT and the advantage of high mobile penetration rate in Oman. Collaboration with stakeholders and telecom providers is a key success factor of the system. The system is also promoting transparency in the human resources sector in addition to streamlining the relevant procedures. The system was created and developed by talented young Omanis.

VI. Conclusion

The solution created confidence and transparency between MoCS and citizens. This solution is transferable and can be used by any organization who may wish to use it in their recruitment procedure. The organization can create their own questions bank and specify interview criteria in this solution. In fact organization like the Diwan Royal Court is already looking at implementing the system in their hiring process.

Civil Service is an essential part of any country; there are always public services that cannot be carried out by a private organization. Oman has a young population; about 50% is still in school. As such there will be continuous citizens joining the workforce especially the Civil Service. This will ensure the continuity of the system and the process.