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IT initiatives in Government Job Recruitment: A Study on Telangana State Public Service Commission

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Abstract: Digital technologies have influenced more rapidly than any innovation in history. Every part of the globe is transforming rapidly with the advent of digital, including information and communication technologies which make things in life simpler and more accessible. These new technologies are mainly influencing our systems, institutions, service deliveries, and the functioning of society at large. This stage is called 'information society,' and the modern society constitutes a network society since the massive use of information and communication technologies in all spheres of social life. The developments in data sciences and the use of the newly emerged technologies have prompted many to claim that we have entered a new digital era. Telangana State Public Service Commission, a government agency meant to recruit government services, uses such innovative technologies for a more fair and transparent recruitment process

Keywords: 1. Digital Technology 2. Recruitment 3. Public Service Commission 4. Selection Process

INTRODUCTION

Digital Technology affects almost every aspect of social life, from food to transport, to access to food and healthcare, socialization, and productivity. With the power of the Internet, the idea of the 'global village' is becoming a reality. Technology has enabled global communities to form and ideas and resources to be shared more easily. People in India increasingly use digital technology in all aspects of life, including communication, networking, business expansion, education, defense, and space research. The private and corporate companies are using the Internet and digital technologies intensively in their recruitments, but interestingly the recruitment agencies in the government sector are still hesitant to adopt the new technologies in recruitment and selection processes in India.

This paper examines existing practices in job recruitment in the government sector by Public Service Commissions (PSCs) and other Recruitment Agencies and the use of new technologies. Further, the paper elaborates on various innovative adaptations in recruiting the Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC), a newly formulated State PSC, for a transparent and fair digital recruitment process.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN RECRUITMENT

The recruitment process is very complex in India as the job opportunities are shrinking, and the pool of qualified job seekers is increasing daily. Government recruitment is much more difficult with rigid rules, regulations, and other employment conditions than private and corporate job recruitment systems. Generally, recruitment is attracting, selecting, and hiring the most suitable applicants for vacant positions based on a candidate's individual properties and organizational fit (Melanthiou, Pavlou & Constantinou, 2015). The private sector in India uses traditional referrals, headhunting to digital recruiting methods using modern technologies and artificial intelligence to attract and hire the most qualified talent for a job opening. Since technology continues to change at a mind-numbing rate, more and more establishments are seeking help from recruitment specialists, outside firms performing a function broadly known as recruitment process outsourcing. These Recruitment Processing companies use all available digital technologies to process the applications and select the candidates. These recruiting agencies also use social media extensively in their recruitment practices (Allen, Mahto, and Otondo, 2007). Most establishments prefer online recruitment since it is cheap and flexible (Capelli, 2001). Contrary to this public recruitment system in India still follows the conventional methods in job sections. Radically changing our social and economic life, the Internet has significantly influenced the governance of institutions. According to Tong and Sivanand (2005), business life has become more skill-intensive due to increased global competition. Recruiting and attracting suitable applicants at the right time has become more critical and challenging.

The conventional recruitment processes cannot meet the needs of timely and effectively attracting qualified candidates (Yoon Kin Tong, 2009). Thanks to the integration of the developments in communication technologies and computer architectures, data transfer and sharing studies have revealed that the structures, called networks by computer networks or working networks, are widespread use in business applications. With the development of information technologies, significant changes have occurred in business and technology, and job applications and human resources recruitment processes are affected by these changes. Necessary human resources function those institutions use effectively from communication technologies is recruitment. As mentioned before, e-recruitment mechanisms started to become more and more popular owing to their advantages in allowing human resources professionals to target many candidates at a small cost (Faliagka, Tsakalidis, & Tzimas, 2012).

E-recruitment is an umbrella term involving all recruitment activities using various electronic means and the Internet (Holm et al., 2014). It implies publishing job posts (namely open positions online), having an online fill-in form available for applicants, and a web-based database to store applicants' resumes (Brandão, Silva, & dos Santos, 2019). E-recruitment encompasses three main

stages: attracting, sorting, and contacting applicants. The first stage covers all the processes regarding the suitable design of online portals and tracking potential candidates. The next step encompasses screening candidate profiles through sophisticated online mechanisms and tests.

In the last stage, in getting in touch with applicants, e-recruitment tools are pretty successful because they provide efficient communication mechanisms to be automated (Holm et al., 2014). E-recruitment allows candidates to have contact with more job opportunities and reach a greater flow of information (Sylva & Mol, 2009). They can learn more details about the vacant position and the job characteristics of that position through job ads. With the help of e-HR systems, organizations can be seen in various career portals and attract astronomical quantities of applicants with countless qualifications. In most e-recruitment processes, companies use an automated system wherein candidates are ranked according to their scores after being evaluated by a set of objective and credible criteria (Faliagka, Tsakalidis, & Tzimas, 2012).

Moreover, in the e-recruitment process, specialized selection tests, such as knowledge and personality tests that can be applied through the Internet, provide online feedback to the recruitment professionals about the qualifications of the candidates. That is to say, in e-recruitment, various preliminary online procedures can utilize to ensure the elimination of candidates that do not fit the demands of the vacant position (Brandão, Silva, & dos Santos, 2019).

PUBLIC SERVICE RECRUITMENTS IN INDIA

State Public Service Commission is an independent constitutional body in India. Apart from Union Public Service Commission, every state has a State Public Service Commission established under constitutional law. Articles 315 to 323 of the Constitution elaborately discuss the composition, appointment, and removal of members, the power and functions of a Public Service Commission, and its independent status. Recruitment of civil servants must be neutral, unbiased, and free from prejudices. Several measures have been taken in the constitution to ensure objectivity and impartiality to keep the recruitment agencies more independent. The executive branch has been vested in the power of recruitment to all levels of civil services. The agency thus created is an extra-departmental body with special constitutional status conferred on this agency to ensure autonomous functioning, which functions outside the typical government machinery. The PSC tests the suitability of the candidates and selects people, and after due process, the Commission sends its recommendations to the government.

The constitution provided a commission distinct from the customary departmental type for undertaking the task of recruitment of civil servants. The fathers of the body, including the Chairman of the drafting committee, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, strongly advocated for the independent and autonomous status of the PSCs during the Constituent Assembly Debates (1949). They strongly felt that if the commission functions outside the standard governmental machinery, greater flexibility and innovativeness of approach are possible. Moreover, the constitution status ensures the Commission functions without fear or favor and can function without being influenced by political or other extraneous considerations. As described in Indian Constitution (1950), the primary objective of a PSC is to advise the government on all matters relating to the recruitment and selection of civil servants, either directly or by

promotion. For this purpose, the Commission has powers to conduct examinations, interviews, and other selection methods to test the suitability for appointments apart from other matters such as disciplinary cases that affect the government servants.

TELANGANA STATE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION (TSPSC)

India's southern state, Andhra Pradesh, has formally split in two, with its northern area carved out to create a newly formed state called Telangana, followed by prolonged people's movement. On June 2, 2014, Telangana officially became the country's 29th state. The State level recruitment body, Telangana State Public Service Commission (TSPSC), originated as an embodiment of aspirations for fair and just employment opportunities for the unemployed youth of Telangana on December 18, 2014. After setting up its office and rules, regulations, and procedures, the Commission issued its first job notification on August 20, 2015, and completed the three-stage selection process in 90 days, which is a record time in the history of such recruitments by using digital technologies. The Commission metamorphosized an incipient PSC into a brave and experimental institution that embraced ideas, reforms, and innovations as a solution to all challenges. Accordingly, adopted innovative digital technologies to overcome problems. Within six years, by December 2020, 36,758 posts were notified through 108 notifications, the Commission received 49.04 lakh applications, and recruitment to 35,724 posts has been completed (TSPSC 2020).

IT initiatives of TSPSC

The TSPSC thoroughly used information technology and designed a candidate-friendly interactive website. The Commission placed all the details, procedures, rules, and recruitment regulations on its website. The website was designed to identify the notifications and help the candidates from application to results. Generally, the recruitment process includes information, applications, exams, interview and personality tests, job options, and selection lists. Without visiting the Commission's office, one can complete the entire process till selection. The website also contains the details of dedicated Call Center/Help Line numbers to enable the candidates to obtain information through the phone line, and the Commission used social media extensively.

Before the job notifications, TSPSC has taken a historical initiative to register job seekers. The digital application system is known as One Time Registration (OTR), where all the unemployed job aspirants furnish their complete details before the notifications. The system will generate a Unique Identification Number for each jobseeker and link to their details. Earlier Public Service Commissions in the country used to issue physical applications to job aspirants. The filled-in application forms submitted in person or by posts by the aspirants had to be processed manually, which used to be an arduous task for the officials and consumed much time. With the OTR in place, the application process and generation of the hall tickets have been made easy for both the TSPSC and job aspirants. Over a period, about 25 lakh candidates have registered online with the Commission. The OTR makes the job of the aspirants to apply for multiple recruitment notifications easy. Once the candidates register with the TSPSC's OTR and obtain an ID, all details will be fetched automatically to the application whenever they apply for notification, thereby saving time and effort.

Apart from one-time digital registration, the TSPSC introduced the digital payment of fees through more than one payment gateway.

It contributed enormously to the government's objective of Digital Transactions and facilitated an easy, instant financial transaction method for the candidates. At TSPSC, online application is mandatory for accepting applications for all types of examinations through which the old system of paper-based printed applications is dispensed with. This will help the applicant enter only notification-specific details when applying for various recruitment notifications announced by TSPSC rather than entering all the data every time. The corrections in the Online Application are allowed through the online Edit option. Candidates can download hall tickets from the website; view their OMR sheets, keys, and results. There are practically zero personal interfaces required with TSPSC. The candidates could use the same web platform for uploading their required certificates and web options/post preferences. Before this system, the applicant had to fill out each application.

The Computer Based Recruitment Test (CBRT) is another revolutionary innovation introduced by TSPSC. For the first time in the country, this tiny state commission conducted massive recruitment online using Computer Based Recruitment Test (CBRT) in 2015. It ensured secured, transparent, hassle-free, and user-friendly examinations by utilizing digital technology. Under CBRT, each candidate's photo image and signature are captured through the biometric system to verify during the interview and avoid impersonation.

The CBRT system saved the expenses of logistical issues related to publication and supply of question papers etc. To its credit, the conduct of the CBRT exam in 4 regional languages has added another feather to the glorious hat of innovations adopted by TSPSC. Ninety-nine exams were conducted in CBRT mode for 4.42 lakh candidates in six years. As with most job recruitments, earlier TSPSC gave carbonless Copy of OMR Sheet (Candidate's Copy) as a measure of transparency, but the duplicate, carbonless copies are often not vivid or precise. Hence, for a clear image, the Commission is providing digital copies of the OMR answer sheets to the candidates within 48 hours of the exam being conducted. After computer-based optical capturing evaluation of answer scripts, preliminary answer keys are published, and candidates are provided an opportunity to submit objections, if any, to the primary answer key. The Final Key is prepared by an Expert Committee comprising academicians considering the objections raised by the candidates and is also published online. This practice ensured an optimum level of transparency, which was well-appreciated by the candidates.

The web publication generates the General Ranking List (GRL), which is known as the merit list for all candidates who appeared for the examination by sorting the ranks in descending order. The index considers the Total Marks, Gender, Community, Date of birth, Local/ Non-local, PWD, Agency Area, Ex-Servicemen, etc., which will enable the candidates to know their position in the ranking list. A pick-up list prepared and published from the General Ranking List (GRL) helps the candidate's awareness of the probability of their selection. Web publication of answer keys, General ranking, and Pick-up lists gave access to all applicants and enhanced applicants' trust and credibility in the system. Exercise web options/post priorities by candidates for the post applied is mandatory.

The outcome of IT-enabled recruitment

For any public recruitment system, objectivity in selection is essential. Technology certainly brings objectivity with its transparency; when properly designed, it can work to reduce bias and unfair practices. The first and foremost outcome of the TSPSC recruitment system is transparency in recruitment. From application to selection at every stage, the candidates can see their performance throughout the process. The user-friendliness of the recruitment portal created a positive impression of the organization's professionalism. It is essential to build a positive image before the procedure, where the TSPSC overwhelmingly succeeded.

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