Digital Relevance in Staff Recruitment in Education

Acknowledgment

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Background

In Uganda, the Education Service Commission (ESC) was established under article 167 and 168 of the constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995. The ESC is responsible for approximately 68% of the public service of Uganda. The commission handles most of its activities of recruiting, confirming, promoting, and disciplining personnel manually.

These activities are labor intensive, tiresome, and costly. One application alone can attract over three thousand applicants. A lot of data is scattered in several manual files making data collection and processing a hassle. Spreadsheets are one way the commission tracks data but they require manual work and are prone to human error. This makes it hard to track data and trends accurately. Sometimes, data and information are misplaced or get lost because of huge volumes of applications received and lack of sufficient storage space within the commission.

By digitalizing processes and making organizational changes, the commission can enhance services, save money, and improve both the users' and applicants' experience. Tight budgets mean that digitization hasn't always been a priority at the commission. But, having seen the gains in efficiency and accuracy that other institutions have made by going digital, the commission is lobbying effortlessly to see a digitalized recruitment system and processes.

The commission has partnered with UNCDF and its implementing partner Cremotin to digitalize the government recruitment system which will support them to manage the recruitment of the education personnel effectively and efficiently in Uganda. The objective of this exercise is to ease the recruitment process. Embracing digital technologies can solve many of the issues the ESC faces because of paper-based processes, and offers significant benefits not only to staff, but the applicants the commission supports as well as the education system in general. UNCDF support to this project is part of its global strategy of 'leaving no one behind in the digital era', funded by SIDA, Sweden's government agency for development cooperation. The strategy is envisioned to promote inclusive digital economies, specifically in developing economies, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recruitment and Digitalization in Education

Traditionally, applicants seeking government jobs expressed their interest using paper applications. However, as the ESC seeks to digitalize its recruitment system, applicants express their interest through the commission's website. Ordinarily, applicants would have to travel to the commission's offices in Kampala to file their job applications. Digitalization of the recruitment system allows for an automated process where the applicant will file their application at any place in Uganda that has access to the Internet.

Digital recruitment is a process that uses the Internet to advertise or post vacancies, provide information about the jobs, the organization and enable e-mail communication between employers and candidates, so that recruitment can be implemented effectively and efficiently to get the workforce according to the need of the organization.

It is an integration and use of technology to improve competence of recruitment processes.

The Electronic Recruitment System will be accessed through the ESC's web portal where applicants create profiles and upload their academic documents. The applicants will be able to view and apply for available jobs after which they shall be regularly notified by e-mail and SMS about the status and progress of their applications.

> Effective and consistent recruitment practices are essential to ensure that all applicants are treated fairly with diversity and equality of opportunity. The recruitment process must result in the selection of the most suitable candidate for the job in respect of skills, experience, and qualifications.

The key benefits of digitalization are explained below:

- Structures and systematically organizes the entire recruitment process.

- Facilitates faster, unbiased, accurate and reliable processing of applications from several applicants.

- Reduces the time-per-hire and cost-per-hire. On average, the manual recruitment process takes about six months to be fully completed. Digitalization of the recruitment system will significantly reduce the time taken to hire, and hence the cost.

- Digitalization will incorporate and integrate various links like the application system on the official website of the ESC, the unsolicited applications, and the final decision making to the main recruitment process.

- It maintains an automated active database of the applicants facilitating talent management and increases the efficiency of the recruitment processes.

- Provides a flexible, automated, and interactive interface between the online application system, the recruitment department, and the job seeker.

- Helpful in tracking the status of a candidate with respect to the jobs applied for.

- It gives a 24-hour access to an online collection of resumes.

- It helps to weed out the unqualified candidates in an automated way.

Digitalization of the recruitment process has proved to be a very convenient mode for both the organization and job seekers as both can upload the necessary details required and can find a suitable opportunity there.

Digital Recruitment Process

Understanding the government teaching and non-teaching staff recruitment in education

Digital recruitment is designed to automate and facilitate the processes involved in finding, attracting, assessing, interviewing, and hiring of teaching and non-teaching staff at the ESC. The current system of staff recruitment relies on print publications, such as newspapers, to post jobs and get prospects for open positions. Other methods such as networking/referrals are also used, however, these limit the organization's ability to post a job in one or more locations and have millions of people see it all at once. The entire process of digitalization involves automation of the recruitment efforts from the beginning to the end and it is summarized as follows:

POSTING A JOB ADVERT
The draft job advert will be published on the ESC web portal by the Commissioner, if it does not call for any amendment by Ministry of Education and Sports, Kampala Capital City Authority and Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries.

JOB APPLICATION
Applicants log onto the commission's website, search through available jobs and select the job of their choice. If they meet the job requirements they apply for the job online, otherwise view other jobs. The system will automatically reject any application past the deadline.

SHORTLISTING
Selection of suitable candidates is by the Interview Board and is based on who meets the job requirements as detailed in the advert. The successful candidate's profile will be updated with the proposed interview date.

INTERVIEWS
Examination incharge sets an online aptitude test which will be digitally completed by the candidate and marked online. Test results will be instant. Based on the pass mark, the candidates' profiles will be updated with either a pass or fail.

NOTIFICATION
Human Resource Officers will notify successful candidates via SMS/email and advise them on when to pick their notification letters.

ESC Navigation Page

The key features on the ESC home page that aid the user with navigating the system are identified with pointers in the screenshot below.

The user is expected to select the 'Login' icon to be able to log onto the system with a username and password. A new user will create an account on the portal through the 'Sign Up' link. The 'Employer' drop-down provides a list of institutions with job postings and information about the ESC. 'Applicants' drop-down menu provides links for browsing jobs by categories. To get back to the home page, the user will have to click the 'Home' button.
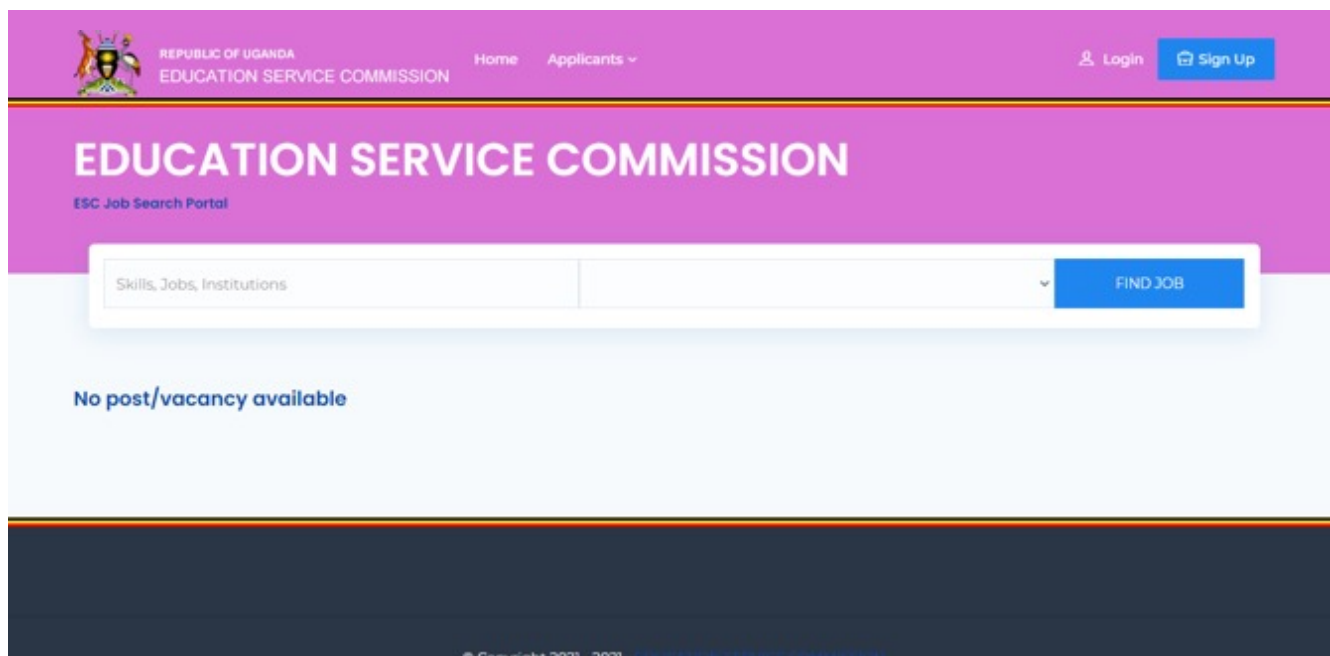
The ESC digital recruitment system will be a web based modular system accessible to ESC staff and education institutions according to their duties and permissions and with an interface for the public. The available positions will be published on the ESC website. Interested applicants will access the information and be able to express their interest in any of the vacancies in line with the job advert(s). The application will be completed online by the applicants and relevant documentation for each job uploaded.

THE DIGITAL RECRUITMENT LANDSCAPE
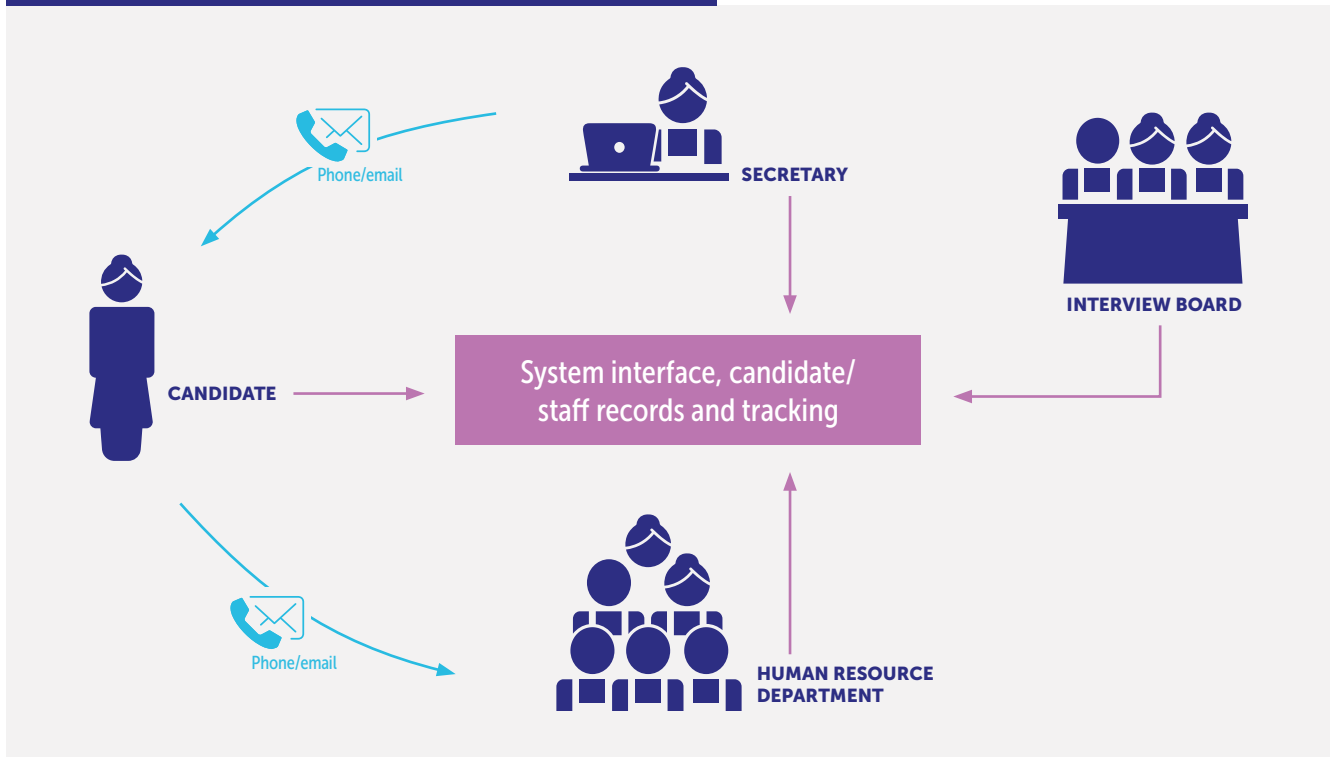
ESC officials using the e-recruitment system

Key Constraints and Threats to Digital Recruitment

Fear of the unknown and need for mindset change

Will staff be able to keep pace with the changes? The tactical workforce does not seem to have confidence in the digitalization race and there are fears over job security. There is reason for this underlying fear, considering that skills automation is an important aspect of the digitalization. Fears of job security in the wake of digitalization affects employee morale, thereby negatively impacting productivity and leading to loss of talent.

The key to managing such changes is treating digitalization as not merely a technology adaptation, but a pan-organization change management exercise. A key management personnel should drive the change and provide opportunities for skills enhancement. This will keep employees happy by maintaining their sense of security—a basic need for every human being.

Staff are trapped in a 'fixed' mindset which may slow down or, worse, derail the digital recruitment initiatives of the commission. Management should build and foster a team with a compelling vision, effectively communicate an agenda for digital change, encourage and expand a digital culture throughout the organization, and inspire an innovative environment where staff embrace change and look toward the future.

Infrastructure and device ownership

The commission has not established any digital hubs. Set up of these hubs in the four regions where recruitment takes place is required. These hubs need to be well equipped with ICT tools such as computers, servers, projector, and a functioning Local Area Network (LAN). Following our various studies at the ESC, we learned that the commission has 63 functioning computers (44 desktops and 19 laptops). However, digitalization of the recruitment processes for teaching and non-teaching staff in the education sector is a priority discussion within the Digital Education Technical Working Group and members are interested in supporting improvement of infrastructure and device ownership.

Affordability of devices is the primary challenge for digital recruitment, with even relatively low-cost devices being beyond the financial means of large numbers of Ugandans. Lack of electricity and underdeveloped ICT infrastructure in most parts of Uganda are the primary causes of huge inconsistencies in ICT device penetration rates in Uganda. Further, the price of data, even though relatively low, is simply beyond the means of many targeted applicants. Partnerships are being made with non-profits and private parties that see a need in making digital devices accessible to teachers.

Unreliability of Internet connectivity

In case of absence of internet connection both the job applicants and ESC staff cannot access the digital recruitment platform. In addition, there is low internet penetration, limited access, and awareness of internet up-country where most of the applicants are situated.

Network performance at the ESC will significantly be influenced by the volume of bandwidth available. Given that with digitalization, internet usage is envisaged to increase, management should consider increasing the amount of bandwidth. As the bandwidth increases so does the amount of data that can flow through in a given amount of time. This will allow for upload and download of files without interruptions. Aside from the bandwidth volume, there are some other elements such as old hardware, viruses, and a weak Wi-Fi connection that can lead to sluggish internet. Management needs to check that all computers are in good working condition with a functioning anti-virus and that the Wi-Fi connection is reliable.

However, the regulator (NITA-Uganda) is investing in improvement of connectivity across the country with vulnerable communities as the priority. Supporting this investment is on the radar of many development partners.

Data privacy and information security

Stakeholders are afraid that information sent to the system might not be received by the rightful persons. They envisage a possibility of being blocked by private secretaries or assistant officers which is a common case in the public offices in Uganda. Furthermore, recruiting through the internet has raised concerns among potential applicants about keeping their personal information secure and confidential. Allaying the fears of the users by sharing information about the existing security measures to mitigate this will build trust in the system.

ICT literacy

Through our various studies, we learned that some staff and majority of the job applicants had very limited knowledge of ICT in particular the proper usage of internet and computers. Furthermore, the digital skill set of the technical team is low, and may not therefore provide the required technical support to the targeted users. The ICT department is not well equipped internally to support and nurture the effective exploitation of digital recruitment. The department staff have limited knowledge, expertise and organizational capacity needed to support the digitalization journey. The commission is in the process of developing and rolling out a digital strategy to promote ICT literacy.

Expected Outcomes

With digitalization, the ESC expects to realize efficiency gains in the recruitment process. Candidates will be able to access a richer source of ESC information via the Internet. They will be able to view the status of their applications, edit and update their profiles as they deem necessary and do realistic job previews. Most paperwork will be eliminated, and the time needed to perform administrative/recruitment duties such as scheduling appointments, shortlisting candidates and maintaining records significantly shortened. Candidates will not be required to physically submit applications, thereby enhancing the ease of the application process while at the same time eliminating undue costs and physical contact with the respective offices.

Accuracy is part of the sense of reliability – the system checks, and reports will be more accurate than those manually generated including ranking candidates. The system is expected to be reliable given its anticipated ability to interact with other systems like NIRA and MoES which will reduce the possibility of receipt of fraudulent applications, hence recruiting the right candidates. There is expected to be a full permissions system, allowing each user's access to functions to be controlled, and maintenance of a user log allowing an audit of which user performed which actions, hence reducing the risk of misappropriating personnel information. In turn, the system will improve transparency, data management and sharing as well as ensuring that talented applicants do not miss out due to corruption.

ESC Staff testing the e-recruitment system

Conclusion

As indicated, digital recruitment offers several advantages to the ESC. The adoption of digital recruitment is about more than just technology. It is about the recruitment system being able to attract the right candidate, the selection process being based on sound and credible criteria, and the tracking process being able to integrate with existing systems.

Perhaps most significantly, digital recruitment is about mindset change, cultural and behavioural change, both within HR and at line management level. Digitalization has proved to be an important part of the recruitment strategy. It can be used to keep track and maintain candidates' applications, mostly among larger organizations.

Challenges that might impact the smooth transitioning to digital recruitment include: low digital literacy levels of staff and job applicants, no established digital hubs in the recruitment centres, unreliable internet connectivity especially up-country where most applicants are located and insecurity threats that come along with technology.

Continuous improvement in considering the challenges related to digitalization is highly recommended.

Recommendations

- Establishment of digital hubs in the four regions where recruitment takes place is required. These hubs should be well equipped private telecentres with the right ICT tools such as computers, servers, projector, and a functioning LAN.

- The ESC should partner with local providers of ICT in schools and training institutions in the respective regions to provide introductory courses in ICT in particular the proper usage of the Internet and computers to foster development.

- In addition to building the technical security measures of the system, the commission should implement a mechanism of modulation. While the introduction of robotics is fast becoming acceptable as a modern and more efficient approach, prearranged discussion forums can be moderated by people.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND IN THE DIGITAL ERA

The UNCDF strategy 'Leaving no one behind in the digital era' is based on over a decade of experience in digital financial inclusion in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. UNCDF leverages digital finance in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve the vision of promoting digital economies that leave no one behind. The goal of UNCDF is to empower millions of people by 2024 to use services daily that leverage innovation and technology and contribute to the SDGs. To achieve this vision, UNCDF uses a market development approach and continuously seeks to address underlying market dysfunctions that exclude people living in the last mile.

ABOUT THE UN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

The UN Capital Development Fund makes public and private finance work for the poor in the world's 46 least developed countries (LDCs). UNCDF offers "last mile" finance models that unlock public and private resources, especially at the domestic level, to reduce poverty and support local economic development.

UNCDF's financing models work through three channels: (1) inclusive digital economies, which connects individuals, households, and small businesses with financial eco-systems that catalyze participation in the local economy, and provide tools to climb out of poverty and manage financial lives; (2) local development finance, which capacitates localities through fiscal decentralization, innovative municipal finance, and structured project finance to drive local economic expansion and sustainable development; and (3) investment finance, which provides catalytic financial structuring, de-risking, and capital deployment to drive SDG impact and domestic resource mobilization.