Every successful e-governance system is a collaborative effort of implementers, developers, users and other stakeholders. After initial implementation, systems attain excellence by maximum use, feedback and reshaping. SPARK project is fortunate enough to enjoy the support and confidence of all the stakeholders. The SPARK PMU receives overwhelming ideas for further development from individual users as well as user departments on a daily basis and we are working on it very seriously. Still there are some existing features that user departments are yet to explore the maximum extent and provide feedback for further strengthening.

In this article let us discuss ‘strengthening database’, which is the most important item in the list as said above.

Data is the soul of an e-governance system. Inputting initial data into the system, verifying it, and lock the data from further manual editing etc are vital basic steps to build and nourish that soul. Data comes to SPARK through three sources. In the first place, it is through bulk data entry by the departments when they become part of SPARK. Second major source is the data being generated by SPARK when the users run processes available in the system. Third is manual updating of data by authorized users in areas where automated processes are yet to come. Since payroll activities were commissioned first in SPARK, with speedy implementation in mind, user departments verified the data that are vital for payroll processing and started to use SPARK. But now a lot of human resource management related modules have been added to SPARK and the system is taking the shape of a comprehensive and single Employee Management Information System for the state government as envisaged originally. These modules include attendance management, leave management, outstation duty management, general transfer and posting, property returns management etc. To supplement all these, e-Service Book also has been developed. Now the crucial time has come for us to verify the remaining data and lock it from direct manual editing. Thereafter, all changes in the data shall be process driven. In any case, it has to be done mandatorily before implementing e-service book and all other HR modules as listed above. By the introduction of e-Service book entire data flow among various institutions like line departments, administrative departments in the secretariat, treasury, office of the accountant general etc shall be digital. It will make HR procedures more effective, efficient and transparent.

This data strengthening exercise would make other departmental functions also very easy by providing various employee and accounts related reports in a button click. Therefore let us start this database strengthening activity right now. For clearing your queries and getting further guidance please contact SPARK PMU.
Government of Kerala is one of the pioneers among the Indian states, which have effectively implemented data integration method in e-governance to manage service and payroll management system. As part of e-governance move in the state, all the major projects of the state have been brought under digitalized work flow. Sharing of the digitalized data among projects that need such information will help Government to save lot of time, effort, manpower and other resources. Moreover, working in conjunction with other projects will improve efficiency and standards of all the connected systems, as data feeding and verification will be done at multiple points.

SPARK, being the single and comprehensive employee management information system for the state government with the HR and payroll details of all the government employees, acts as the mainstay of state financial disbursement system. At the time of joining in service, the employee details are got registered in SPARK database. Subsequently entire data in respect of service and salary related matters of the employee are captured in the system. As a result, HR and pay roll related information of any employee can be retrieved from the system in no time. SPARK shares HR related data with other ICT systems like VISWAS, AMS - Attendance Management System, e-office, GPF system etc. In addition to that, the SPARK software is integrated with Treasury and the office of the Accountant General to facilitate digital transaction and accounting. This interoperability of the systems will help to standardize the data and to ensure better performance results. Recently attendance punching data integration has been carried out in SPARK for Secretariat employees.

Apart from all the above, digitization of employee data and the availability of custom reports help the decision makers in formulating various policies relating to human resource management in government sector. The prime example of utilizing SPARK data for decision making was seen during finalization and approval of 2014 Pay Revision Order. The financial implication of PR 2014 was calculated based on the SPARK data.

SPARK data’s Government to Government (G2G) level relevance also extends to areas like providing employee data for conduction of elections, generating data reports for specific requirements of individual departments etc.

SPARK Data integration with other e-governance projects has been carried out in such a manner that required data from SPARK, in approved format, flows into the connected application through secured web services. In return, processed and authenticated data from each connected system is fed back automatically into SPARK. Since authenticity checking is being done at all the points of data capture, the data stored and updated in SPARK and connected systems will remain accurate.

In the integrated environment data generation, flow and mapping procedures are done in an automatic manner so that much time and efforts are saved.

The integration and data sharing also help to ensure uniform application of rules and regulations to all employees. It reduces complaints and ensures that better employee -employer relation is established.
Attendance punching data integration: Government decided to pilot the Attendance Management Module in SPARK in Government Secretariat. It was also decided that data from attendance punching machines should flow automatically to SPARK. Accordingly, SPARK PMU and NIC, in association with KELTRON that installed attendance punching machines, have established a web-service for capturing punching data from the machines and update the same in SPARK. Each employee’s daily punching details will be sent to them as SMS to their mobile number registered in SPARK.

PF number with special character ‘&’: Previously, SPARK did not accept PF numbers that include the special character ‘&’ in the number string. Now the software has been modified to accept the special character ‘&’ included in PF number string.

Leave editing/deleting option activated for DDO’s: Previously, DDOs had the privilege to edit/delete the leave details of employees in their payroll if salary is not processed based on such entries. When the new Leave Management Module was implemented, SPARK PMU suspended the above privilege. Then a lot of DDOs intimated that they have not completely verified and locked the data and therefore they need editing privilege for some more time. Accordingly, it has been reinstated.

e-TSB: Salary disbursement through Electronic Treasury Savings Bank Account (e-TSB) has been testing in Finance Secretariat. Now it has been extended to General Administration Secretariat also. Now to manage the system, software facility has been provided to DDOs to get e-TSB for new employees from Treasury through SPARK.

Integration of SPARK and GAIN PF
Gain PF is an online software introduced by Finance Department with the Technical Support of NIC (Kerala) for automating the Provident Fund management of employees in the Government aided academic institutions in the state. It has all the required features like PF admission, PF advance processing, PF Closure etc. Each aided institution has login to enter and view transaction details. Now for a complete automation, Gain PF has been integrated with SPARK.

Recent Software updates/Improvements
Always with the stakeholders

SPARK PMU, with the technical services of NIC (Kerala), ensures that SPARK software is always up-to-date with respect to new policies, rules and other procedures issued by Government. Considering the needs of employees, as they are the main stakeholders of the system, new services and improvements also brought in frequently. Following are some important improvements and additions made in March, 2018.
Pay Revision Arrear

Pay Revision Arrear 3rd instalment option has been updated in SPARK based on Circular No 34/2018/Fin dated 23.04/2018. In case of irregular of drawal of first or second instalment (either excess drawl or short drawal), SPARK PMU is in a process of making a provision for Pay revision Arrear reprocessing module. Another software update on pay revision arrear processing module would be to handle the 2nd instalment pay revision arrear processing for the employees whose previous office got abolished after processing the 1st instalment from the abolished office.

GPF Module

As SPARK is envisaged as a comprehensive Employee Management Information System, all the activities relating to the service and payroll management of state government employees have to be automated in the system. Similarly integrating SPARK with other e-governance systems also vital. It is being done on an incremental basis. As part of the above, automating all the activities in respect of GPF management has been taken up now for top priority implementation.

At this stage SPARK is also needed to be integrated with the software being used by the office of the Accountant General (Kerala). Planning and development process of GPF module in SPARK is in progress. Currently SPARK has provision to add PF number, subscription amount, PF advance entry for deduction etc. The currently planned module will include all the life-cycle activities of GPF management starting from online submission of PF admission application to PF closure. The office of the Accountant General also developing necessary modifications to their software for integrating it with SPARK. By the introduction of this module PM management would become more effective and efficient.

Manual Bill Submission

Manual Bill submission option for processing the claims belonging to periods prior to 02/2011 in the case of employees who do not have PEN. Recently SPARK has implemented Manual Bill Submission Module for generating SPARK bills for the period prior to 02/2011 in respect of employees having PEN. This module is being further developed to facilitate the processing of bills prior to 02/2011 in respect of employees who do not have PEN also as part of Finance Department’s continued efforts to simplify procedures and remove processing bottle necks. Currently for recommending such cases for clearing as NON SPARK bill at Treasuries, the DDOs have to submit all the documents to SPARK PMU. After verifying the details submitted, Finance department issues direction to the Treasury concerned for accepting the NON SPARK bill. By the introduction of the module under development, the existing time consuming manual verification procedure through SPARK PMU will be stopped. The updated module is under testing now and it will be launched soon.

Head of accounts in SPARK:

From 2018-2019 onward SPARK accepts head of accounts from treasury software only. For DDOs to get heads of accounts in SPARK, the CCs (HoDs) should allocate heads to DDOs in BAMs. If any required head is found missing in BAMs, DDOs may contact CCs (HoDs) concerned for getting the head allocated to them. The heads available in BAMs shall be listed under accounts menu in SPARK. If any head is found missing in SPARK even after the above verification process, please intimate SPARK PMU. While sending e-mail requests to SPARK PMU, all tiers of head of account should be shown exactly as in the budget document.
SPARK PMU has been conducting regular training programmes based on user requests. Training batches are scheduled on a first come first serve basis, based on the training requests being received in SPARK PMU from various departments. The training sessions are handled by Expert Master Trainers and officials well versed in government rules and procedures. The objective of these training programmes is to develop deep understanding on the functions of the software modules and to provide hands on experience in working with such functions. So far SPARK PMU has conducted more than 13,000 training sessions, covering all the government departments. A brief report on the batches conducted during the last month is given below.

**SPARK Training arranged for General education Department on 21-02-2018**

SPARK PMU has arranged a Training session for the employees of General education Department on 21-02-2018 at the Skill Development Centre of ASAP in the Govt. Model HSS, Thiruvananthapuram. Mr. Sunil T.K (Master Trainer) led the training. Thirty five employees from various offices under General Education Department attended this training.

**Training on Attendance Management System for e-office supporting staff**

In association with General Administration Department, SPARK PMU has implemented attendance management system in Govt. Secretariat. It was decided to facilitate help to the Secretariat employees to use the system through the support staff of e-office project. Accordingly a detailed training for the e-Office support staff was organized at the Secretariat Computer Training Centre on 07/03/2018. Twenty two e-office supporting staff members and four officers from General Administration ( Co-ordination) Department were participated. Mr. Girish Parakkat, Manager, SPARK delivered an introductory talk and thereafter Mr. Sunil T.K. and Ms. Devi M.S., Master Trainers from SPARK PMU handled the training sessions.

**Two days Training Programme for the SPARK Master Trainers held on 01.03.2018 and 03.03.2018**

Two days Induction Training Programme for newly recruited SPARK Master trainers was held from 1st to 3rd March 2018 at Centre for Training in Financial Management. The programme started with a briefing of the training framework by Girish Parakkat, Manager (SPARK). First session on Trainer Skills was facilitated by P. Anil Prasad, Chief Project Manager (SPARK). It was followed by SPARK software presentation by Mr. Sunil, Master Trainer, SPARK PMU and hands-on sessions. Nine newly recruited Master Trainers attended the training programme.
Latest Events

Training on SPARK at Thalipparambu, Kannur

As part of arranging training sessions in northern Kerala, SPARK PMU has conducted two training sessions in Kannur district in February 2018. The first training session was held on 08/03/2018 and 09/03/2018 at Keltron Knowledge Centre, KELTRON Animation Campus, 2nd floor, Municipal Bus Stand Building, Thalipparamba, Kannur. The training session was led by Mr. Anoop N, Master Trainer, SPARK office, Kannur.

Training on SPARK at Thalassery, Kannur

The second training on SPARK software for the employees from the northern districts was conducted in Kannur at KELTRON Knowledge Centre, AVK Nair Road, Thalassery on 19/03/18 and 20/03/2018. The sessions were handled by Mr. Anoop N, Master Trainer, SPARK office, Kannur.

FEEDBACK via Telephone

To identify user level issues and to get details on such issues, SPARK PMU has been taking feedbacks from users through telephonic communication. An expert master trainer is assigned with the task. This interaction is guided by a feedback questionnaire prepared based on systematic research and analysis. During the brief telephonic conversation, the Master Trainer would collect replies of the users on the queries in the feedback questionnaire. SPARK PMU consolidates replies/suggestions/Complaints from the users, group them based on SPARK modules and further analyse it for developing solutions.
Statistics of volume of transactions of bills through SPARK during the last month is as follows:

As per SPARK database records, 484593 salary bills, 86476 arrear bills (including DA arrear, Salary arrears and Pay revision arrear), 1988 other allowances bill and 45130 claim bills were processed through SPARK during the last month.

Work Report from SPARK PMU

SPARK PMU’s in-house helpdesk software, QUEST monitors the number of issues handled by SPARK PMU’s help desk unit. This software records the number of queries answered by mail, chat and phone by each Master Trainer deployed at the help desk. Daily and monthly totals of the number of cases handled by SPARK PMU in the last month is given in the table below:
Empanelment of Department Master Trainers for SPARK

As per G.O. (P) No. 3/2017/Fin dated 05/01/2017 SPARK PMU invites application for empanelment of Department Mater Trainers from Government officials who have expertise in dealing with establishment matters as well as SPARK software operations. Application form is available on the website www.info.spark.gov.in The filled applications have to be sent to the email id: info@spark.gov.in with DMT Application as subject. DMT empanelment system was developed with a view to cater to the SPARK training and onsite support requirements of Government establishments across the state. It is noted that in some departments there are officers/Department Management Users (DMU) who have expertise in both establishment matters and along with aptitude for imparting training. DMTs will be assigned with the tasks of providing training or on-site support in their parent department and neighbouring offices. It will be a function in addition to their normal functions in the parent department. Interested officers may send application at any time. The receipt of DMT application is open throughout the year.

Sharing Carrier Experiences of SPARK Master Trainer

Sunil. T K, Master Trainer

I have been working with SPARK PMU since 2008, as SPARK Master Trainer. Over these years, I facilitated more than 500 training sessions covering almost all the departments in the state. The invaluable interactions with people from different walks of life and the experiences I gained from such trainings during the past ten years helped me a lot to reinvent myself and helped to improve myself both personally and professionally.

In training sessions, we usually discuss all the menus in SPARK software and also give hands on training to make the participants well familiarized with the software. While facilitating sessions I prefer interactive mode rather than following strict class room like pattern of training.

As the participants will be experienced DDO’s, head of the office or employees who are well versed in Government rules, the information exchange would be very interesting and creative. Also these training sessions help Master Trainers to keep themselves updated with the KSR rules and regulations. Participants trigger detailed discussions on rules and regulations while detailing the menu wise functions of the SPARK software.

Regular training programmes are quite essential for the effective, efficient and successful implementation of a massive e-governance initiative like SPARK, in which changes by way of additions and modifications are happening on regular basis. Moreover training venues are also a very good platform to collect feedback and suggestions for further improvement of SPARK.

As I have been with the SPARK team since its roll-out time, I have witnessed the step by step growth of SPARK and it gives me immense pleasure to see that now SPARK has become a premier software in state’s financial disbursement system. The software has been developed amazingly to a full-fledged platform for handling Government employee’s service and payroll operations. I feel very proud and happy being a part of this great project.

Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of minds to think
Albert Einstein
Circular No 21/2018/Fin dated 27/03/2018

Through this circular Finance department strictly alerts all HoDs and DDOs to follow the instructions detailed in the circular as part of strengthening various security aspects and also to review existing security measures in SPARK Software.

**Instructions are as follows**

- If the offices of the DDOs do not have internet and other hardware/infrastructure facilities to access SPARK and download/take print out of reports in connection with their duly delegated functions, facility for the same should be provided at the nearest higher office of that department. HoDs shall make necessary arrangements for the same.

- DDOs and other officers having processing rights in SPARK should not access SPARK from net cafes and other private centres.

- HoDs shall ensure that officers having processing rights in SPARK have updated their personal information page with their own valid mobile number and email address.

- HoDs shall also ensure that officers having processing right in SPARK do not share their user credentials with any other officers or agencies.

- Internal audit teams of the departments, Finance (Internal Audit) Department and Finance (Inspection NT) Department should also ensure the compliance of above instructions during office audit/inspections.

- HoDs should issue necessary repeated instructions to all officers under them on the above.

- HoDs should take stringent actions against violations of the above instructions, if any, come to notice and report the Action Taken Report to Government in Finance (SPARK PMU) Department immediately.

G.O (P) No.40/2018/Fin dated 16/03/2018

In G.O (P) No.40/2018/Fin dated 16/03/2018, Finance Department has issued orders on how permanent address of Government employees should be captured in the Service Book and how it can be changed subsequently. As per the order the permanent address as given by the employee while entering into service shall be treated as the first entry. It can be subsequently changed by filing a request before the Head of Department. The Heads of Departments shall file their own change requests to the respective Administrative Department in the Secretariat.
Recently issued important circulars & government orders

- Please avoid printing of this document to protect environment.
Refresher Training Workshop; a unique experience

Article by Smt. Akhila Laji and Smt. Chithra K S (Master Trainers, SPARK)

SPARK is a massive e-governance initiative of Government of Kerala that handles service and payroll related matters of around five lakhs regular and two lakhs temporary employees in the service of the state. The Project Management Unit of SPARK (SPARK PMU) with its experienced Master Trainers plays a pivotal role in facilitating the smooth implementation of the project in all the departments. Apart from functioning as Master Trainers to train the departmental trainers, the Master Trainers of SPARK PMU and the Regional Help Desk also function as Help Desk Support Personnel. At the help desk, they receive visitors, attend calls, e-mails and online chat. The PMU handles around thousand queries on a daily basis that come through the channels as given above. These multiple roles make refresher trainings quite essentials to ensure sustainable improvement in the performance of Master Trainers. Accordingly, a one day refresher training workshop was arranged at Centre for Training in Financial Management (CTFM) on 09/12/2017. The workshop was facilitated by Mr. Naveen Kumar (Lead Master Facilitator) and Ms. Thara Nair (Master Facilitator), Additional Skill Acquisition Programme (ASAP).

Mr. Naveen Kumar, an experienced motivational trainer, handled the motivational, time management, team work, public relations and continuous learning aspects for a successful professional life. Whereas, Ms. Thara handled the communication segment. The programme started with a welcome speech by Mr. Girish Parakkat, Project Manager, SPARK. He also introduced the facilitators to the participants.

Mr. Naveen Kumar opened the session on Employee Motivation with a wonderful team work ice-breaking activity. It set a vibrant atmosphere for the remaining part of the training workshop. The motivation session was rich with demonstrations on many real-life stories and other examples with the help of presentation tools and group activities. The session was a revelation to the participants on how positive approach and team work solves complex issues very easily. The motivational story of Dashrath Manjhi, the “Mountain man of India”, who dedicated his 22 years of life for carving a path through mountain all alone with his hammer and chisel. His determination was the only thing, which made it possible.

The motivational session was followed by “Hai English” session by Ms. Thara. Ms. Thara’s activity oriented presentation on English communication, email drafting skills, basic grammar and its usage in SPARK related contexts was very interesting. Her detailing of the issues with the support of simple examples formed real work situations very convincing. The group activity in which common queries being received in the PMU were listed and drafted suitable answers to such queries was very interesting hands-on experience. Ms. Thara also presented to the participants the common mistakes people make in official communications and the ways to avoid such mistakes. Her sessions were also highly interactive.

The feedback received from the participants at the end of the workshop was very much encouraging. Both the trainers together made the workshop a unique experience for the participants. In short, the workshop achieved its objectives successfully.

"The only way to do great work is to love what you do" – Steve Jobs