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CASE STUDY 7

ORISSA, INDIA

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BACKGROUND

The Indian state of Orissa is situated on the north eastern coast of the country, neighbouring the states of Bihar and West Bengal to the north, Madhya Pradesh to the east and Andhra Pradesh to the south. One of the poorest states in the country, Orissa occupies a land area approximately the size of the United Kingdom and contains a population of 34 million people. The largest urban centres are the state capital of Bhubaneswar and the coastal city of Cuttack. Parts of the interior of the state are mountainous, thinly populated and very difficult to access. In October 1999, Orissa suffered massive damage to its infrastructure and considerable loss of life as a result of being hit by a super-cyclone.

In administrative terms, the Government of Orissa (GoO) is divided into 30 districts. There are 34 state government departments. Apart from teachers, the staffing of the Orissa civil service is divided into four categories:

- Class I and II comprises officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Orissa Administrative Service (OAS), and the Orissa Financial Service (OFS)
- Class III consists of clerical grades
- Class IV consists of semi-skilled and unskilled employees, such as peons, drivers, etc.

The total number of employees is approximately as follows:

Classes I ad II	15,000
Class III	200,000
Teachers	230,000
Class IV	150,000
Total	595,000

Additionally, there are an estimated 50,000 vacancies.

The majority of staff are full time and permanent, but there are also a large number of daily-rated temporary employees engaged on specific projects, (e.g.: road and bridge-building), and teaching staff in grant-aided institutions such as colleges and schools. Many of these employees have been continuously employed for 10-20 years, and therefore their actual status is questionable.

In organisational terms, the state government's administration is highly decentralised. Individual Departments are responsible for the deployment and administration of their own staff. Within overall budgetary constraints set by GoO's Finance Department, they are relatively free to deploy their resources at will. Additionally, operational units within each Department also enjoy a high degree of autonomy. So, for example, the

headquarters unit of each Department does not necessarily have detailed, readily-available information on the staffing and establishment of any of its subordinate units in the field. The only document that can be readily produced is a summary list of the number of sanctioned posts, their status and designations, in each salary scale. In other words, there is no Establishment Register in the accepted sense of the term.

The state government does not have a central personnel function. Furthermore, there is no centralised system of payments. Instead, Drawing and Disbursement Officers (DDOs) within each Department manually compile a pay bill listing all the staff to be paid each month. In most cases, these staff are within the same department as the DDO. However, in remote rural areas - where there are comparatively few government employees - a DDO would be responsible for compiling the paybill for all the staff in that area - regardless of department.

DDOs undertake these duties in addition to their normal job responsibilities as, for example, Headmasters or Superintendents of Police. There are estimated to be approximately 7,500 DDOs and, purely in terms of their paybill duties, they are the responsibility of 31 Treasuries - each of which is located in a District, together with four Special Treasuries for the main centres of employment. The DDOs submit their monthly paybills to the relevant Treasury and draw the total amount of payment accordingly. Ninety-nine per cent of staff are paid their salaries in cash.

Staff data is contained in personal files and Service Books. These latter documents are manually maintained to a reasonably uniform standard and provide basic personal data such as date of birth, date of joining service, education and qualifications, etc. However, these files and books are not kept at a central location or registry. Instead, they are the responsibility of individual officers or establishment sections, (not necessarily DDOs), the majority of which are located physically close to the individuals concerned. This has resulted in a very wide distribution of storage points. The exact number of these is not known, but it is estimated to be somewhere between 7,000 - 10,000. No duplicates of personal files or Service Book are kept by the government, although individual employees are supposed to keep a copy of their Service Books.

The state government's Directorate of Statistics conducts a rolling 5-year study of the establishment. This study ascertains the numbers of staff and posts in each department, together with other relevant information such as age, sex, salary, job designation, etc. However, the 1996 census has not yet been completed. The latest available data is therefore contained in the published 1991 census and cannot, therefore, be regarded as reliable or accurate.

Additionally, the Accountant-General's office, (part of the federal government, but located in Orissa), conducts an annual computerisation of the March paybills - mainly to determine the total number of employees at a given date and their total salary costs. This information is then passed to the state government and is used primarily for budgeting and other financial purposes. There have been no plans to incorporate this data into a computerised Human Resources or Payroll database.

Census Requirement

The requirement to conduct a census arose from a joint World Bank/DFID mission to Orissa in June 2000. In fact, there was a requirement to undertake two censuses. The first was intended as a quick review of employees by department, job category and employment status - to be completed by August 2000 - to provide basic data. The second exercise, initially scheduled for completion by March 2001, was intended to be much more comprehensive. It was proposed that data should be collected on name, sex, marital status, job designation, contractual status, basic pay, allowances, tribal status, date of joining government service, educational qualifications and training. Additionally, it was proposed that data should be collected on the total number of posts in each department, broken down by category and status, (i.e.: whether vacant or occupied).

Leaving aside the substantial data collection issues inherent in this latter exercise, the key issue to consider was the computerisation of the data and any subsequent uses to which it might be put. Clearly, it would have been a waste of resources to undertake such a large exercise purely as a 'one-off' for census purposes. The successful completion of this census offered the opportunity to computerise the data collected and thereby introduce a computerised, GoO-wide manpower information system - containing both post and staff data.

While these issues were being discussed, the state government went ahead with the first, 'quick' census. Each department was therefore asked by the Finance Department to submit a return listing their total number of employees and posts. The returns were duly compiled and provided the basis of the figures given above.

The objectives for the second, more comprehensive, census and the computerised database derived from it can be summarised as follows:

- to determine the total number of employees and conduct basic analyses of their age, salary, education, gender, distribution across departments and employment status
- to identify, where possible, 'ghost' workers
- to examine alternative scenarios for the future total size of the service, including the cost of compensating employees whose employment might be terminated as part of any downsizing exercise
- to calculate the actual compensation payments due to individual employees
- to support procedures for exercising improved monitoring and control of manpower, (i.e.: recruitment, promotions, transfers, retirements and resignations)

- to provide, both routinely and in response to ad hoc requests, manpower information for a wide range of management purposes.

Possible Census Methodologies

A number of options were considered, as follows:

- Use the data already collected by the Accountant-General.
- Require each department to submit a detailed return.
- Employ census enumerators to visit each department and/or district to gather the necessary data.
- Require DDOs to provide the data.

In considering these options, a number of factors had to be borne in mind. Firstly, the difficulties of travelling to and within the interior of the state are considerable. Roads can be poor, especially in the rainy season, and there is no aviation infrastructure at all. Secondly, there is no telephone or telegraph communication with many government offices. The only consistent method of transmitting or receiving documents is the postal service - which itself relies on a variety of methods such as once-weekly private buses or trucks to carry mail. Thirdly, there is no computerisation within most government offices. Therefore, data is not held in a readily-retrievable form.

After some consideration, it was decided to reject the first option, i.e.: the data collected by the Accountant-General. Though computerised, it was done to a very poor standard and would not anyway have provided sufficient post and personal data. The second option, requiring departments themselves to provide the necessary data, was also rejected. Due to the highly decentralised nature of their structures, as described above, they are generally not able to provide accurate and timely returns. (Indeed, the main cause of the delay in producing the Directorate of Statistics' 5-year study has been the reluctance of the Departments to provide the necessary returns).

The option of employing census enumerators initially looked promising. It was envisaged that they would visit every location in which personal files/service books were held and extract the necessary data directly from source. Using the Accountant-General's computerised data as a basic control check, they would then compile returns for each office, district, etc. to a uniform format and standard of accuracy.

However, in calculating the number of enumerators required, it became clear that there would be a need for approximately 200. Recruiting and training such numbers would have become an unavoidably major exercise in itself. Their deployment across the state, virtually simultaneously, would have required a major logistical, administrative and management structure; and the costs of such an exercise would have been considerable -

much more than the state government could have afforded. The only alternative to the employment of such enumerators would have been the use of government employees in the role; but the state government made it clear that it was unwilling to sanction the release of 200 of its staff for such purposes.

Therefore, the only realistic option left was to require the DDOs to provide the necessary data. This option also was not without difficulties. Given the complete absence of any centrally-held information on the exact number and location of DDOs, it was obvious from the outset that it would not be possible to compile a mailing list. Therefore, there would be no direct means of communicating with each DDO and, in turn, no means of checking that each DDO had submitted a return. However, this option was by far the cheapest and therefore the state government selected it.

Census Execution

Late in July 2000, the Finance Department issued instructions to each Treasury to, in turn, instruct their DDOs to provide the necessary information. These instructions were contained in a detailed memorandum - one which provided specimen copies of the format to be used for the data returns. The memorandum indicated that failure to provide the staff returns by the end of the following month would result in the paybill for defaulting establishments not being honoured. This was considered to be the most effective sanction possible and was intended to ensure maximum compliance.

Within a month, the returns began arriving in Finance Department. They were stored in no particular order and not checked so as to ascertain which DDOs had forwarded returns and which had not. It was acknowledged that some returns might be as late as 6 months - due to the extreme inaccessibility of some areas, and it was presumed that each Treasury would take the responsibility of chasing up any defaulters.

Of much greater concern was the physical state of the returns themselves. DDOs had used whatever paper they possessed or felt was appropriate. Some returns were set out on standard A3-sized paper. Other returns comprised A4-sized paper stapled or taped together to form larger sheets. There was no standard size used. Nor was there any standard method of completion. Some DDOs had typed their returns, others were handwritten. These latter returns were, in some cases, virtually illegible.

There was a further problem. The DDOs had not uniformly complied with their instructions. In many cases, the establishment data had not been provided. In those instances where it had been, there was no obvious correlation between establishment and staff data. So, for example, vacant posts were not indicated and it was not possible to determine whether departments were under- or over-establishment in particular Classes. Also, some DDOs had transposed columns, others had omitted certain ones altogether. Some had been deliberately facetious. (In the column 'Marital Status', one DDO had written 'so-so' against one name, 'getting worse' against another, and so on).

However, as it would have been very difficult to return questionable forms to DDOs, it was decided to proceed with what was available at the time. Accordingly, all the returns were sent to several local data-entry agencies for processing. A specially-compiled data entry program was used to cut down the number of potential errors in the entry process, (e.g. misspelling of department names or inconsistent use of abbreviations). Despite these and other precautions, the agencies themselves made some key errors of judgement. The most notable of these was separating the various sheets compiled by individual DDOs and giving them to different data entry operators. This meant that the operators did not know which department or DDO a particular sheet of staff names referred to.

After approximately four months, a total of 490,000 staff had been entered. This figure represented all the returns so far received. The total fell well short of the estimated 650,000 posts in the establishment and, allowing for the non-recording of approximately 50,000 vacancies, it meant that potentially 100,000 staff had not been accounted for. Moreover, there were large 'gaps' in the data - which meant that the state government was committed to a substantial verification exercise if the data was to be cleaned up to an acceptable standard.

Summary and Conclusions

It is difficult to assess the overall strengths and weaknesses of the exercise. It was clearly inadequate in many respects - most notably in its failure to specify and control the returns submitted by the DDOs. Yet the exercise was conducted without any significant costs being incurred and it did yield a substantial amount of previously-unavailable information. The alternative option would have taken significantly longer but, crucially, would have cost far more than the state government could possibly have afforded.

Also, it has to be borne in mind that the numbers involved are so large that any exercise of this type will involve substantial margins of error. The key issue is not so much gathering the data at first pass, but how effectively the data gathered is then maintained and updated. Over a period of approximately one year, it should be possible to develop realistic reporting a control procedures which will, in turn, be informed by an ever-improving database.