

A Governance Innovation Case Study of 2010: Video Counselling: A Governance Innovation in Degree College Lecturers' Placement

Adhar Sinha IAS (Retd)

Former Special Chief Secretary, GAD (Political & Services); AH DD & F
Departments; Former DG, EPTRI, Govt of Telangana, Hyderabad

Email: adharsinha@outlook.com

In 2010, the Commissionerate of Collegiate Education, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, introduced a state-wide video counselling system for the placement of newly promoted lecturers. The initiative replaced the traditional regional counselling process, which required candidates to travel long distances to four regional centres, a tedious process often marked by delays, discretion, and procedural complexity. Through simultaneous connectivity of 23 district centres, 353 newly promoted candidates were able to participate in a transparent and efficient counselling process from their home districts. The initiative showcased how information technology could enhance transparency, reduce transaction costs, and improve citizens' convenience while preserving administrative fairness and utmost transparency.

This paper describes the conception, implementation, challenges, outcomes, and lessons from this innovation... and even more importantly, the way forward for today's public administrators.

Case Snapshot

- *Year: 2010*
- *Department: Commissionerate of Collegiate Education, Andhra Pradesh*
- *Beneficiaries: 353 newly promoted lecturers of degree colleges*
- *Coverage: 23 district centres*
- *Technology Used: State-wide video conferencing*
- *Outcome: Same-day transparent counselling and issue of posting orders*

Keywords: *e-governance; placement; personnel management; transparency; administrative innovation; video counselling*

1. Introduction: The governance challenge:

Public administration officials often face the challenge of balancing procedural fairness with citizens' convenience. Personnel management processes are particularly vulnerable to delays, discretion, and logistical difficulties, especially since the personal interests of candidates override all other considerations.

In 2010, the Department of Collegiate Education, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, sought to address these challenges through an innovative video counselling system for the placement of 353 newly promoted lecturers across 23 districts of undivided Andhra Pradesh, replacing the manual system of physical attendance of candidates at four regional centres.

2. The Existing System

- Four regional counselling centres – Warangal, Cuddapah, Guntur, Rajahmundry
- Physical travel from remote areas to the regional centres
- Long queues of candidates at the counselling centres, averaging nearly hundred at each centre
- Multiple registers and rosters.
- Sequential processing of candidates as per seniority
- Delays and uncertainty.

<i>Earlier System</i>	<i>Video Counselling System 2010</i>
Four regional centres	23 district centres
Physical presence at regional HQ	Participation from home district HQ
Manual records	Digitised records
Sequential processing	State-wide synchronised processing
Significant travel cost	Minimal travel cost
Scope for discretion	Greater transparency

There were 353 Junior Lecturers from Government Junior Colleges newly promoted as Lecturers of Government Degree Colleges. Having crossed the first hurdle, they were now anxiously awaiting to be posted to the college of their choice.

However, there was a twist. Getting promoted was not complicated. It was based on seniority and percentage of marks in qualifying examinations, coupled with reservation quotas for SC, ST, and Disabled categories. A three-member officials' committee scrutinised records and ticked the eligible candidates, recommending them for promotion. Based on that, they would go to the next round, depending on vacancies in their subject in their zone. There were six zones into which 23 districts were divided, and the 23rd one, Hyderabad, was called the City Cadre, like a sub-zone.

The earlier practice had been to go to the four regional offices, where the process would be conducted manually by a group of officials headed by an official called the Regional Joint Director. He had before him a lengthy list of names, another subject-wise list of vacant places and yet another one showing the 100-point roster cycle. His job, like a dice-thrower, was to see that all three got correlated for each of the candidates, averaging about 90–100 at each centre. This process had to be repeated for each subject. If at any point this got held up due to any reason, such as an absent candidate or a candidate being unwilling to choose 'x' place over 'y' place, the whole queue got stuck. There was no other way but to go through this linear movement like ants moving in single file.

The Association of Lecturers was feeling marginalised. Their central and regional leaders used to be present at all the counselling centres on the given date and time. In the earlier system, regions held their counselling on different dates. There was neither uniformity in place or time nor method—a region devised its best procedure keeping in view local factors. All this gave room for a lot of discretion to the officials, which was an opportunity to wield their power in the way they wanted. The Associations played a key role in negotiating with the officials what they thought was in the best interest of their members.

3. Genesis of the Reform

As the Commissioner of Collegiate Education, the challenges of organising this counselling programme at regional centres were highlighted during meetings by various interest groups, including representative teachers' unions. The attendant problems of pressure from various quarters, political as well as others, were also brought to notice. In some cases, influential candidates using the legal route to approach courts to challenge the entire process were also flagged. Media stories on 'behind the scenes' management added yet another layer of complexity to the entire process. Overall, the situation was getting ripe for some surgical

intervention to strike at all the targets at one go, not only to silence all critics but, even more importantly, to conduct the counselling process smoothly.

It was in this context that change was considered not only necessary but inevitable.

Why Video Conferencing:

The idea of using video conferencing came up in one of the numerous rounds of meetings conducted to discuss possible alternatives. The availability of district video-conference facilities at all 23 district headquarters, with a dedicated communication channel maintained by the Government IT Department, was a strong advantage since it was being used extensively by the Chief Minister, Ministers and senior officials to interact with field-level officials regularly. In short, it was a tried-and-tested, robust and reliable system working within the government domain and hence not subject to any doubts about its functioning or transparency. Both trust and transparency were key elements in designing an appropriate solution.

The reform sought to achieve four objectives simultaneously: transparency, uniformity, speed, and participants' convenience.

Video conferencing emerged as the preferred solution because it allowed central oversight while enabling candidates to participate from their home districts. At the same time, various stakeholders could continue to play their role in a proactive manner, without fear or favour.

Once all the dynamics had been worked out with the core team of officials, all the officials and participants were informed to attend a district-wise decentralised system of participation by video counselling with a system of centralised monitoring by the Commissioner's office.

Thus originated the system of video counselling for lecturers' placement across undivided Andhra Pradesh in 2010.

4. Stakeholders' Concerns

Officials' concerns

- Fear of technical failure- connectivity issues mainly.
 - Departure from established procedures – 'comfort zone'
 - Doubting Thomases in head office and even more so in districts
- Associations' concerns
- Loss of familiar oversight mechanisms.

- Simultaneous conduct across districts diluting their presence
- Feeling marginalised

Candidates' concerns

- Unfamiliar process.
- Fear of errors.

Resistance was in the air because reform is rarely a smooth process.

5. Design and Implementation

Key Innovative Features:

- ✓ Simultaneous state-wide counselling.
- ✓ Centralised monitoring with decentralised participation.
- ✓ Real-time vacancy display.
- ✓ Same day issue of posting orders.
- ✓ Uniform procedure across all districts.
- 23 district centres connected online seamlessly through video conferencing
- Regional centres as hub and 5-6 districts as their spoke functioning online from 4 regional centres
- 353 candidates spread across 23 centres @ average 15-20 per district
- Data preparation done by Head office and shared with all regions and district offices.
- Vacancy mapping done from districts to head office
- Video conference arrangements through IT department
- Role of district officials to ensure presence of all candidates and coordinate the process.
- Display of vacancy lists online on the video screen to enable candidates to make their informed choice.
- Real-time allocation by the RJD after each candidate's turn got completed.

On the D-day, 3rd November 2010, the Commissioner initiated the process from the state video conference centre by announcing that first language subjects would be taken up in serial order, that is, first and second languages and that too from first zone onwards up to sixth zone. Unknown to many, the whole data of names and vacant places had been loaded in the laptop and in the net. All centres were asked to download and keep print-outs ready.

An assistant at the state video conference centre opened the laptop and put its screen in front of the video camera.

Presto! The lists were visible across the State not only in first zone's six centres but all 23 districts. Thus, with one click of the mouse, the first objective of utmost transparency was achieved!

Every candidate in every district was viewing the same vacancy position in real time. The possibility of differential information, selective disclosure, or local interpretation was successfully eliminated. Transparency became embedded in the process itself rather than depending solely on supervision.

The first subject, first zone, first candidate's name was called out—not by the Commissioner but by the RJD of that region, who had been instructed separately on the modalities. The candidate replied from another centre where he was present. His choice was asked, noted and allotted the college of his choice in his zone; the full process for the first candidate was over in a jiffy. Before others could grasp the sequence, the second candidate had come online, given his choice and gone.

It was going on with clockwork precision from the first zone to the second, third and so forth, to the sixth and finally the city cadre for the first subject. There was a sign of relief and a smile on the Commissioner's face. Everything was going as per plan.

Before others could realise, as the completed candidates started leaving, the halls started becoming less crowded. Lunch break was announced and everyone was back much earlier than the hour announced. It seemed everyone was now enjoying the whole sequence. Each candidate's name seemed to send a wave of positive vibrations down the halls.

There were some comic moments when names were mispronounced, gender was confused, candidates fumbled while replying, and such small things occurred. All the initial tension, worries and doubts had vanished into thin air. It was as if a magician had waved their wand and everything had disappeared. Relief was raining all around and there seemed to be a calm after the storm.

The best part was yet to come. All the names and selected places were printed at each centre and were given to the candidates in the form of an order to report to their new place of posting. This used to be another big queue in the earlier manual system.

The whole process was completed by the end of the day. The halls in each centre looked vacant, like marriage halls after the feast was over.

6. Outcomes

The best comment was overheard from a candidate who said that he had to spend only ₹10 for this lifetime opportunity. Queried how, he said it was the auto charge for coming to the centre, unlike earlier times when thousands had to be spent on travel, board and lodging by each candidate. Women candidates with children used to find it tougher, coming with spouse or mother to attend the counselling. For disabled candidates it was even more challenging.

The commenter forgot in his happiness to calculate the return fare. That was like a gift to the auto driver, not a charge, perhaps!

Transparency: Everyone saw the same process.

Efficiency: Completed within a day throughout the state.

Reduced Costs: Candidates avoided long distance travel and lodging expenses. Family members did not have to accompany the candidates.

Inclusiveness: Women candidates and persons with disabilities benefited substantially.

Administrative Confidence: Initial fears proved unfounded.

Some data on outcomes:

- Number of candidates: 353
- Number of districts: 23
- Duration of process: 1 day
- Approximate travel savings for candidates was substantial considering that long distance travels involve expenditure on fares, stay, meals and sundry expenses, sometimes for not only the candidate but at least one family member.

7. Lessons for Public Administration

Lesson 1: Technology should simplify procedures, not merely digitise complexity.

Lesson 2: Transparency reduces suspicion, resistance and generates Trust.

Lesson 3: Administrative innovation often encounters initial skepticism; however, post-truth the success of implementation can transform resistance into acceptance, including among the most skeptical stakeholders.

Lesson 4: Citizen convenience should be a core design principle, not only within organisational functioning but also in external situations of intersections with public.

Lesson 5: Leadership is critical in driving change but carrying the team and hundreds of employees along the path is even more important.

Replicability: A similar exercise was undertaken in 2014 by the author, while serving as Commissioner of Intermediate Education, to conduct counselling for the transfers of Junior College Lecturers. In fact, this time the whole process was welcomed by all stakeholders including the Association.

Thus, the model showed that existing government communication infrastructure could be repurposed for personnel management processes.

Similar approaches could be applied to transfers, admissions, recruitment counselling, training programmes, and other large-scale administrative exercises requiring transparency and simultaneous participation on a large scale across wide geographical distances.

8. Conclusion

The experience demonstrated that regulation and reform are not opposing concepts. A regulator can be an agent of innovation when technology is used to improve transparency, efficiency, and public convenience. The video counselling initiative showed how a relatively simple technological intervention could transform an administrative process and create value for all stakeholders.

Most of present-day debate posits any regulator in the stereotypical image of an inspector, more as an antonym of a reformer.

The author's experience in governance from village to secretariat level has been contrary to this popular perception and submits for consideration that the regulator is indeed a reformer, not its anti-thesis.

In fact, Governments today are playing the role of not only a regulator but more of a reformer- we may call it a reformist regulator.

Some 'out of the box' thinking coupled with the power of IT can really do wonders in producing remarkable administrative outcomes! That was the mantra learnt that day by the officials and lecturers of Collegiate Education department in Andhra Pradesh in 2010.

9. Post-script:

Reading this in mid-2026 may look quite commonplace but think of 2010 when many readers today would have been toddlers then while senior citizens today would have been in their youth.

Also think that NOKIA keypad phones were ruling the roost and iPhone 4 was about to be launched. WiFi was meant for labs or big enterprises while ‘apps’ was not found in common language. 3G, 4G, 5G were all in the future and staying connected meant a phone call or email. In short, 2010 now feels like another technological era!

Therefore, this initiative anticipated many principles that later became commonplace in digital governance—remote participation, transparency by design, decentralised access, and citizen convenience.

Today’s readers can appreciate how forward-looking the intervention was at that time. If as the saying goes, it was the right thing at the right time at the right place, can today’s leaders in public administration think of video counselling from mobile phones with authenticated login credentials to avoid physical displacement from place of work and reduce transaction costs? Or perhaps something even more innovative?

Perhaps the next generation of governance innovations is already waiting to be imagined and implemented in citizen-centric solutions in public administration! The search for better governance solutions is after all an ongoing journey... till it reaches the last man in the line!