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 soul to an e-governance system. Inputting initial data into the system, verify 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 eservice book and all other HR modules as listed above. By the introduction of e-Service book entire data flow among various salutatory 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.
SPARK Data integration with other e-Governance Projects

Government of Kerala is one of the pioneers among the Indian states, who have effectively implemented data integration method in e-governance to manage service and pay roll 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 these digitalized data to other projects, which need this information for their processing procedures will help those projects to save lot of time, effort and manpower. Moreover, working in conjunction with other projects will improve efficiency and accuracy of all the connected systems, as data feeding and verification will be done at multiple points.

As SPARK being the single and comprehensive employee management information system for the state government with the HR and pay roll details of all the government employees, it also acts as the mainstay of state financial disbursement system. At the time of joining in service, the employee details get 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 Accountant General Office General Office to facilitate financial transactions through SPARK. This Interoperability of the systems will help to standardize the data and will ensure better performance results. Recently attendance punching data integration has been carried out in SPARK for Secretariat employees. Moreover the digitization of employee data in SPARK enables 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 done in such a manner that specific data from SPARK in approved format flow into the connected application through secured web services and in return processed and authenticated data from each connected e-governance project, that are relevant to SPARK, are fed back automatically in SPARK system. As data checking being done at each level the data stored and updated in SPARK and connected systems will be highly accurate.

In the integrated environment data flow and mapping procedures are done in automatic manner, so that, much time and effort can be saved in data capturing. It helps to ensure uniform application of rules and regulations to all employees, thereby avoiding complaints and achieving better employee -employer relations. Being a well-integrated system therein, the changes made through one system reflect in all related systems, hence the procedures being followed will be always up to date.
Recent Software updates/Improvements
Always with the stakeholders

SPARK PMU is continuously updating the system, based on new Govt policies and also by considering the needs of employees, as they are the main stakeholders of the system. As part of our regular efforts to make the system more user-friendly and error-free, this month also SPARK PMU has done some software updates on the system. The below mentioned changes have been made in SPARK during March 2018:

- **PF number with special character ‘&’**: Previously SPARK cannot handle the cases of PF number including Special character ‘&’. Recently our software team has modified the program and equipped the system to accept the Special character ‘&’ included in PF number details.

- **Leave editing/Deleting option activated for DDO’s**: Previously DDOs had the privilege to edit/delete the leave details of the employee if salary not processed based on that entry. When the new Leave module implemented, SPARK PMU has suspended this leaving editing/deleting privileges for a while. As per the demand of SPARK users, PMU has reinstated this facility for DDO’s, now DDO’s can edit/enter the leave details, if salary for the employee not worked out based on this leave entry.

- **Punching data**: SPARK in association with KELTRON, tracks punching data of employees. Facilities have been activated in SPARK system to record the punching details. Also each employee’s daily punching details will be sent to them as SMS, the SMS messages will be passed to employee’s contact number that has been updated in SPARK DB.

- **E – TSB**: As E TSB made compulsory for the financial transactions in certain departments like Treasury and Secretariat Finance Department, SPARK PMU has made necessary updations on the system to restrict the salary processing of those employees whose E TSB details are not updated in SPARK DB. Also system will display alerts to update E TSB details.

SPARK team is involved in continuous research to identify the minutest of the shot falls in the system and to make the system a perfect one. For this, SPRARK PMU has conscripted a group of trained employees to study the current trends in technology and analyze how these methodologies can apply in our system to fine tune each and every module so as to ensure the smooth processing of the HR and payroll management procedures through SPRAK system, working in the below described areas to implement/improve those modules for the smooth functioning of the state’s financial disbursement system.
Pay Revision Arrear

Pay revision 3rd instalment: Facility for processing pay revision arrear third instalment will be activated in SPARK shortly.
Pay revision 2nd instalment: 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. There are a few such cases. Our software team is working on this issue and a software update is expected soon.

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 CDs (HoDs) should allocate heads to DDOs in BAMS. If any required head is found missing in BAMS, DDOs may contact CDs (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 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.

Please avoid printing of this document to protect environment.
SPARK PMU has been conducting trainings regularly based on user requests, and the trainings will be scheduled as first come first serve bases of the training requests receive in SPARK PMU office from concerned Departments/offices. Expert Master Trainers and officials well versed in government rules and procedures are handling SPARK training sessions. SPARK organizes these sequential trainings with the aim to make the employees/SPARK users endow with SPARK working skills and to make them well acquainted with all the jargons of the software. So far SPARK PMU has conducted more than 13,000 trainings, covering all the government departments. SPARK trainings conducted during the last month are listed below.

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

SPARK PMU has arranged a Training session for the employees in General education Department on 21-02-2018, at ASAP. Mr. Sunil T.K (Master Trainer), handled the session, discussed SPARK menus and explained all the options in detail. A hands-on training was also given for the attendees to make them well equipped with SPARK system. 35 Employees from various offices under Generation Education Department, attended this training.

**SPARK PMU has arranged training on Attendance Management System for e-office supporting staff on 07/03/2018**

In association with GAD department, SPARK PMU has implemented attendance management system in Govt. Secretariat. The module has devised in such a way that, the punching details of each and every employee will be recorded in SPARK system and details of their punching date will be sent to them as SMS. To familiarize the system among employees and to give a clear awareness on this module, also to make them know how this punching data has integrated with SPARK system, SPARK has given a training to e-office supporting Staffs including 22 e-office supporting staffs and 4 GAD (Coordination) officials on 07/03/2018 at Training Hall, GAD IT Cell. 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 on the 1st of March 2018 and 3rd of March 2018 at Centre for Training in Financial Management. P. Anil Prasad, Chief Project Manager (SPARK) handled the first session and gave an introductory talk on SPARK software. Followed by the introductory talk, training sessions was handled by Mr. Sunil Kumar, Master Trainer, SPARK PMU. Nine newly recruited Master Trainers attended the training programme.
Latest Events

**Training on SPARK at Kannur, Thaliparambu on 08/03/2018 & 09/03/2018**

As part of arranging trainings in northern Kerala, SPARK has conducted two SPARK training sessions in Kannur district on February 2018. The first training session for the month of February was held on 08/03/2018 to 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 Kannur, Thalassery on 19/03/18 & 20/03/2018**

The second training on SPARK software for the employees at the northern districts of Kerala was conducted at Kannur district on 19/03/18 & 20/03/2018, the venue for the same was KELTRON Knowledge Centre, AVK Nair Road, Thalassery. The session was handled by Mr. Anoop N, Master Trainer, SPARK office, Kannur.

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**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.

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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 person at the help desk unit. The number of cases handled by SPARK PMU for the month of February is shown here.
I have been working with SPARK PMU since 2008, as SPARK Master Trainer. Over these years, I have given more than 500 trainings covering almost all the officers/departments across the state. Interacting with people from different cultures and the experiences I gained from those trainings during the past ten years helped me to reinvent myself and helped to improve myself both personally and professionally.

In training sessions, we will discuss the menus in SPARK software, also give a hands on training for the attendees to make them aquitained with the software. When taking classes I prefer interactive sessions rather than following strict class room like pattern of training.

As the attendees of the trainings are DDO’s, head of the office or employees who are well versed in govt rules, these training are the opportunity to get connected with many officials. Also these training sessions help us to keep ourselves updated with the KSR rules and regulation, participants discuss rules and regulations while detailing the menu in the training sessions.

As I have been with SPARK team since its launching and pilot implementation period, I have witnessed the step by step growth of the SPARK and it gives me immense pleasure that now SPARK has become a key player in state’s financial disbursement system and this software has overgrown to a full-fledged platform for handling Govt employee’s service and payroll and management system. 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

Empanelment of Department Master Trainers for SPARK

As per G.O. (P) No. 3/2017/Fn dated 05/01/2017 SPARK PMU invites application for Department Mater Trainers from Govt officials who have expertise in Govt rules as well as SPARK software. The Application Form is available in our site. The filled applications may send to our email id: info@spark.gov.in. This project has been developed and implemented with a view to cater to the Administration, Payroll and other Accounts activities of all the Government Establishments across every nook and corner of the State. It is noted that in some departments there are officers/Department Management Users (DMU) who have both expertise in using SPARK and' imbibed experience out of working in the establishment and accounts section of their offices. Such personnel who could impart necessary training to the establishment and accounts personnel of other departments to make them well versed in the SPARK application is to be identified and their service is to be spared for the speedy implementation of SPARK in all Government Offices. Such personnel will be designated as Department Master Trainers (DMT).

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/report, 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.
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 ambiance 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 Mahijhi, 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 were 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