File Office Documents

3.2.5.1. Introduction to the learning outcome

This outcome describes the competencies required to file office documents in an organization. It involves understanding the meaning of filing, essentials of good filing systems (centralized and decentralized), identification of office filing equipment, identification and matching files with documents, filing documents and assigning document folio in an organization.

3.2.5.2 Performance Standard

3.2.5.2.1 Filing equipment is identified as per the work place procedures.

3.2.5.2.2 File is identified and matched with the documents.

3.2.5.2.3 Documents are filed.

3.2.5.2.4 Documents are assigned folio.

3.2.5.3 Information Sheet

Definition of terms

Filing: It is the practice of keeping documents in a safe place and being able to find them easily and quickly. Documents that are cared for will not easily tear, get lost or dirty.

Folio: A number allotted within a contained record.

Essentials of good filing system

An efficient filing system should have the following essentials:

Simplicity: It must be simple in operations, so that every staff of the office can easily understand the filing system. The filing system should not be overelaborated or complicated.

The filed documents must be available to the person, who needs them. They are easily available when they are filed properly and securely.

Suitability: The filing system should be applicable to the firm concerned, and suit the nature and requirements of the business for which it is introduced.

Adaptability: The system must be adaptable to the changes that occur in business. The system must have room for expansion.

Economy: The cost incurred to set up the system must be proportionate to the results obtained.

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The desired result must be obtained by using minimum finance, time, clerks and other related costs.

Safety: Documents should not be damaged by dust, insects, theft, mishandling, fire, rain and other causes. Certain documents have to be kept for a longer time or for the life-time of the concern. They must be housed by use of suitable equipment.

Less Space: Economy of space is necessary to see that the system requires minimum floor space.

For this, dead papers can be removed; older files which are not needed should also be removed.

Regular removal of such documents and files can save space.

Accessibility: The files should be so arranged so that the required document for reference can be picked up without loss of time. This is made possible through a good index system.

Cross Reference: When the same document is to be kept in more than one file, a cross reference should be filed in other file. It enables the filing clerk to know that the cross reference document is in a certain file. That is the most relevant file housing the document and a cross reference in sheet or card is placed in the appropriate place in others files.

Co-ordination and Control: Different departments may be there under an organization. A good system of filing must permit constant co-ordination among all departments and to have an effective control over the organization.

The Guide: Whenever a file or document is taken out, an indicator should be placed at the same place, if possible with the signature of the recipient, to show the file or document has been removed. When it is returned, the indicator will be removed.

Flexibility: If there is any expansion of work in the business concern, then the filing system can also be expanded. So it must be flexible.

Filing equipment

If suitable equipment is provided for an efficient filing system, there is a possibility of increasing overall operational efficiency of the organization. The office manager can select any of the office equipment by considering the purpose it serves.

Reasons for Selecting Filing Equipment

- It protects the document against careless handling.

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- It prevents theft or unauthorized references.
- It protects the documents against deterioration through dust.
- It reduces the physical efforts in inserting, locating and extracting documents.
- It protects the documents against the loss made by fire.

Factors Affecting the Selection of Filing Equipment

1. The number and the size of records to be maintained.
2. The frequency of reference of files.
3. The speed with which the documents is required.
4. The physical appearance of the equipment as a piece of furniture.
5. The life of filing equipment and the duration required for maintenance.

The most common filing equipment are:

Vertical drawer cabinets: It is the most costly of all filing equipment. Vertical drawer cabinets require more floor space and more physical effort and time to access folders than other types of equipment.

Lateral cabinets: They are used in some offices as an alternative to vertical drawer cabinets.

They have the same limitations as vertical cabinets, although they can provide some space savings as well as retrieval efficiency.

Open shelves: Open shelving provides high density access to file folders while occupying significantly less floor space than a vertical or lateral cabinet. They are often the fastest and most convenient filing equipment to use. Open shelves are readily adaptable to the storage and management of paper records, magnetic media, microforms, and all other records formats.

Mechanical files (rotary equipment): Folders are stored in open shelf carriers that provide high-density storage. The mechanical carriers rotate in a carrousel format to bring the desired record closer to the user. Other than moveable shelving, mechanical files use the least amount of floor space.

Mechanical files, however, are expensive, allow only one person to access records at one time, and can be the victim of power or equipment failures. Also note that mechanical files, due to weight, require a high structural floor load capacity.

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Moveable shelves (high density files): Mobile files are open shelf files constructed on tracks which enable them to move. As only one aisle is necessary per several rows of shelving, moveable shelves provide great space savings.

Moveable shelves, however, are expensive and allow only one row of folders to be accessed at a time. Like mechanical files, due to their weight, moveable shelves require a high structural floor load capacity.

The following link provides information on types of files used in offices.
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiUiZShsv3uAhVKJhoKHXi9CwkQFjALegQILhAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.yourarticlelibrary.com%2Foffice-management%2Foffice-record%2F4-maintypes-of-file-maintained-in-an-office-office-records%2F69036&usg=AOvVaw0ZI2s0-xYPJCs6lKwiJstl

Centralized and decentralized filing

One of the most crucial decisions records managers have to make is whether their organization's records center should be centralized or decentralized. The consideration of merits and demerits of each style should inform the organization which one to adopt.

Centralized Vs. Decentralized Records Centers (Registries)

A centralized records center/registry is one in which all the physical documents are located in one central location. The location is controlled by the records management department staff. The number of people in the records department will depend on the size of the organization.

A decentralized records center is one in which the physical documents are located across the entire office. This means they can be found with the end users' offices, workstations or other workroom space. Unlike a centralized records center, where the files are controlled exclusively by the records department, a decentralized location is controlled by the end user who creates the file.

Advantages of centralized filing

- There is no duplication of filing arrangements. Therefore, cost of filing maintenance is very low.
- There is better utilization of storage space.
- Easy location of documents and records are possible. It saves time and human resources.
- There is full utilization of storage space available.

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- Duplication of filling equipment is avoided at the maximum and required only few filing cabinets.
- It enables uniformity and standardization of the filing system and method.

Disadvantages of centralized filing

- **Records may become more vulnerable** since they are stored in one central location. It may cause
- **delay in bringing records** if most office staff required several documents at a time.
- The **risk of loss** due to fire, theft and the like is more since all the documents are stored in only one place.
- The filing department may enforce rules and procedure rigidly regarding receiving and returning the files. This may **affect the smooth functioning of functional department** operations.
- More human resources and time are spent on the locating and returning the files at precious time.
- Sometimes, the same documents or records are required by more than one department. It **creates strained relationship among staff**.
- It is **very difficult to maintain secret** and confidential documents.
- If specialized staffs are not appointed in the filing department, there may be a **large number of misfiling**.
- The filing department may become a storage place of **unwanted and unnecessary documents**.
- If some papers or pages are missed, it is very difficult to find such papers and **no possibility of fixing responsibility** on anybody.

The centralized filing is not suitable if the organization has its functional department in different geographical areas

Advantages of a decentralized records center

- the physical file is stored at the end users' desks, not in a centralized location for all to access.
- This method does not require a full-time records department staff.
- End users have access to their files at all times and are responsible for maintaining accuracy.

Disadvantages of a decentralized records center

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- If one end user is absent, the rest of the group may have trouble locating the file if the organization does not have chain of custody procedures in place.
- A decentralized records center will have little or no security over the files.
- Sensitive information with end users is vulnerable.

Registry

A registry is a place where official records are kept, or a book or system for keeping an official record of items (documents).

A registry is the **administration** unit for the receipt, control, and maintenance of records in an organization. The essential functions of registry are;

- Receive documents.
- Record office documents.
- Store documents.
- Distribute incoming and internally generated documents of all kinds.
- Maintain records of documents in the organization.

Considerations for selection of a registry

- Quantity of documents to be stored.
- Ease of accessibility.
- Cost in terms of funds to install and personnel to operate them.
- Floor space required to house the equipment/personnel.
- Safety of staff and documents.
- Office aesthetics.

Duties and tasks of registry personnel

- Setting up, maintaining, reviewing, and documenting records systems.
- Classify and label documents and file accordingly.
- Ensure up-to-date databases and systems.
- Fill record requests for customers by retrieving files from databases, systems, and archives.
- Maintain accurate records of document orders and movements.
- Remove or archive repeated documents or irrelevant/out-dated information.
- Respond to customer queries in person, by e-mail, by post, or by phone.
- Ensuring compliance with relevant legislation and regulations.
- Preserving the organization's corporate memory and heritage.

Filing procedure

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Step 1: Receiving the document

If it is a document that came through the mail, you record it in the "mail received" register and write the date received or date stamp it.

Step 2: Action

Forward the document to the person that has to deal with it.

Step 3: Follow up

Check that the document has been dealt with.

Step 4: Collecting Documents to be filed

All documents and two copies of the replies must be collected in a filing tray.

Step 5: Filing

Choose a regular time to file every day so that you are never left with a huge pile of loose documents. Use a sorter to help you file and remember to file by date order.

Maintaining the filing system

One of the reasons why we file is to keep document safe. It is therefore important to make sure that all papers and files are kept in good condition.

Tips for good filing

- Keep documents that are waiting to be filed in trays, do not leave them lying about on desks or shelves.
- File documents away at least once a day, or if your organization is very small you can do it once a week.
- Do not put too much in files or folders.
- Put new covers on old files which get a lot of use and have become worn or torn.
- Box files and lever arch files can hold more than simple folders.
- Never allow filing drawers or shelves to become too full. Acquire new filing cabinets when necessary.

At the end of every day:

- File all the documents you can.
- Put away those you cannot file in filing trays.
- Lock up all confidential documents.
- Place all waste paper in rubbish bins.
- Leave desks tidy

Assigning folio to documents

As part of a manual record keeping system, there may be a need to ensure the veracity and integrity of all the individual items placed within a physical record.

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One method for managing this accountability is to number each of the incorporated items or folios consecutively. For a paper-based file, a folio is a document that is made up of either a single page or multiple pages. For multi-page folios, the contained pages within the folio are called enclosures.

This practice of allotting numbers within a contained record is known as 'folioing'.

By placing a folio number on each item there is the ability to:

- Account for every page included and the order of their receipt within the record.
- Facilitate the establishment of context within which decisions and actions were taken, including the sequence of those actions.
- Identify any gaps or missing items from the record.
- Reference or quote individual items contained in the record by its folio identifier.

Folioing can be both time-consuming and labour intensive; therefore this practice is normally reserved for high risk activity records.

Observe the following when filing

1. Folio numbers should only be placed in the top right-hand corner of each front page. For some files, the top left-hand corner is an area that is hole-punched to facilitate the attachment of items.
2. Each new folio added to the record should have a consecutive number commencing at 1, making the bottom item on the record the first numbered item and the top item with the last assigned folio number.
3. Enclosures are to be given the same number as the item but followed by a sequential letter until the folio is completely numbered (e.g. 5, 5a, 5b, 5c).
4. Folio numbers should generally be recorded in ink, either with a pen or a sequentially numbering stamp.

Although there are instances where folio numbers should NOT be applied in ink and these include important legal documents (e.g. major contracts, items of artistic significance and items which may be returned to the sender).

If it is very necessary, folio numbers can be recorded lightly in pencil and erased if required.

Where there is a need to remove a folio from a file, the action officer should place a folio removal advice on the file indicating what has been removed, when and why. If

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the removal is due to the relocation into another file, the details of the new file should be stated on this advice.

It is good practice to place a folio number sheet within the front cover of paper-based files to indicate the details of all folios as they are added. This is useful if there are folios that cannot be readily attached to the record.

3.2.5.4 Learning Activities

Practical Activities

You will carry out the following tasks in an institutional simulated environment while complying with industry practices and procedures as well as occupational, health and safety practices.

- Identify different filing equipment.
- Identify different types of files/file folders.
- File identified and matched documents.
- Assign folio to documents.

Field Visit

You will visit functional reception offices in the county offices: Complying with industry practices and procedures and with occupational, health and safety practices, you will perform the following tasks:

- Work in an organizational registry.
- Identify and use different filing equipment.
- File identified and matched documents.
- Assign folio to documents.

After the visit you will write a report on the practice of filing office documents, filing systems and equipment, challenges observed, their likely solutions.

NB During your field visit to an established reception office, you will be required to report to the station as an employee and perform duties allocated to you for the day(s). Your supervisor will provide a report on a template to be provided on your performance.

3.2.5.5 Self-Assessment

1. Identify types of registries
2. Explain functions of a registry
3. Which factors would one consider before selecting a registry?
4. Discuss duties of a registry personnel

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5. Analyze the advantages of assigning folio to a document

3.2.5.6. Tools, Equipment, Supplies and Materials

- Computers
- Filing equipment
- Internet connectivity
- Registers
- Stationery
- External storage devices

3.2.5.7. References

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