Index office files

3.2.1.1 Introduction to the learning outcome

This outcome describes the competencies required to index office files in an organization. It involves understanding the meaning of indexing, types of indexing, importance of indexing, contents of a file index and obtaining, labeling and indexing office files as per the work place policy

3.2.1.2 Performance Standard

3.2.1.2.1 Office files are obtained as per workplace policy.

3.2.1.2.2 Office files are labeled as per SOPs.

3.2.1.2.3 Office files are indexed as per workplace policy.

3.2.1.2.4 Office files are is stored as per SOPs.

3.2.1.3 Information Sheet

Definition of terms:

Document: A piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record.

File: A folder or box for holding loose papers together and in order for easy reference.

Filing: Keeping documents in a safe place and being able to find them easily and quickly.

Indexing: The method used for making reference to the records filed. It is the process of pointing out the proper location of files easily and quickly. Indexing informs or to guides a person for the easy and quick location of required files.

For electronic files, an indexed file is a computer file with an index that allows easy random access to any record given its file key. The key must be such that it uniquely identifies a record. If more than one index is present, the other ones are called alternate indexes. The indexes are created with the file and maintained by the system.

Signals: A signal is as a metal clip (Plastic tab or adhesive material which is attached to the exposed edge of the records). The aim of the signals is to draw the attention to certain fact records on the cards. The location of a particular folder or record ledger can be made easier by attaching signals to them.

Importance of indexing

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Indexing helps locate the position of the specific document in files in the shortest period of time. It helps to make a quick decision by providing necessary information stored in files. The following are benefits of indexing:

Easy location: Indexing points out the required records or file and facilitates easy location.

Saves time and efforts: Indexing gives the ready reference to the records and saves the time and efforts of office.

Efficiency: Indexing helps to find out the records easily and quickly which enhances the efficiency of office.

Cross reference: sometimes a particular record can be maintained in two ways. Indexing facilitates to find out such records through cross reference.

Reduce cost: Indexing helps to reduce the cost of office by saving time and efforts.

Essentials of good indexing

Indexing requires the following important qualities:

Simplicity: It should be simple so that any authorizes person can understand and operate it easily.

Economical: The selected indexing system should be economical in installation and operation. Its benefit should exceed its cost.

Flexible: The indexing system should be able to to adjust as per the requirement or increase as per increase in information.

Speed: The system should give rapidity for the location of required files or documents.

Suitable: The system should be suitable according to size and nature of organization and the nature of filing.

Safe: The filing system should be safe enough from being damaged.

Types of indexing

Indexing can be classified into two types as follows:

Invisible indexing: Under this indexing, the files and records are maintained in such a manner that the records related to one file only can be found at a time.

The following are types of invisible indexing methods:

Simple book index: A bound register with many pages is used. The pages of the register are separated into 26 alphabets. Each alphabet carries two or more pages

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and necessary information is recorded in the respective alphabet based on alphabetical order. The edge of each page is successively cut off from right top of the first page to the right bottom of the last page in such a manner that the alphabet that is printed in pages orderly can be seen clearly at a time.

Merits:

a) It is simple to install and operate.

b) It is economical because only a register is used in this indexing.

c) As it is maintained in bound register it is safe.

Demerits:

a) It is inflexible because change cannot be made on it.

b) It is very difficult to make proper alphabetical arrangements.

c) It creates problem in searching required records.

Loose leaf index: In this index pages are not stitched up but they remain loose. Pages are maintained according to the alphabetical order and when a page is filled another page is added there.

It is flexible since necessary pages can be added on it.

Card index: Card index is the modern and advanced form of index. Under this system separate

cards are prepared for every organization, individual and subject matter and information such as name, address and telephone number are written in the cards and the cards are placed in drawers.

The required cards can be taken out from the drawer easily and quickly.

Card index requires some important equipments and materials mentioned below:

Cabinet with drawers: Card index requires the cabinet with deep drawers to keep the cards safely. A long steel rod is fitted in the drawer which helps to hang the cards. The alphabet of the name of organization, person and subject is posted in the drawer.

Name cards: Cards with special side as per the requirement to write name, address, telephone number, etc. are used in card indexing. Cards are made up of thick paper or cardboard.

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Guide cards: Another important instrument used in card index is guide card. Guide cards are used to divide the cards in a drawer in various alphabetical sections. It helps to find out the cards easily and safely.

Merits of card index:

a) Simple to understood and operate.

b) It is flexible because cards can be added or removed easily.

c) It is economical because it can be conducted by an ordinary person.

d) It is also useful to write additional information in the cards.

e) It is useful to the big organization.

Demerits of Card index:

a) It is expensive as well because the equipment used on it carries high cost.

b) It creates problem or difficulty due to the misplacement of cards.

c) It takes some time to operate because only one card is visible at one time.

Visible Index:

Visible indexing method is introduced to avoid the demerits of invisible indexing methods. Methods of visible indexing are as follows:

Visible card index: In card index only one card is seen but in visible card index all the cards are seen at a time. Under this method, cards are placed in a metal tray in an overlapping manner.

The top of each card is visible in which required information is written. Cards can be arranged alphabetically or numerically. A tray is fitted with rolling channels with help to move the tray backward and forward easily

Merits:

a) It saves time because all the cards in a tray are visible at a time.

b) It requires minimum space because cards are placed in an overlapping manner.

c) It is facilitated with over merits such as simple, flexible, quick reference.

Demerits:

a) It is expensive because tools and materials of these indexing are costly.

b) It requires special training and instructions to operate.

c) Other demerits of card index are also available in these indexing such as card damage or card misplacement.

Strip index: A metal holder or board is fitted with stand is used in which stripes of paper are fixed in which name, address, telephone number; of customers are written

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and they are arranged alphabetically in a frame. All the stripes are visible at a time and it does not require the support of guide cards.

Strip indexing facilitates quick reference, is economical, is flexible and occupies minimum space but it is not suitable to write long information. It is only used in small organization.

Rotary card index or wheel index: It gives quick reference than other methods of indexing. In this method, a rotating wheel with many steel rods in a circumference of wheel is fitted to a stand and cards are stored there. Cards are arranged in the circumference of wheel and the wheel is rotated to find out the required cards. Guide cards are used to find out the required cards. It provides easy and quick reference, is prestigious and occupies less space. However, it is cost bearing, and difficult to operate.

Choice of a Suitable Index System

Not all methods are suitable to all organizations. Sophisticated methods like wheel indexing are not suitable to small organizations. Hence, the most a suitable system should be decided upon with reference to the requirements of the individual filing system. The factors to be considered
are:

1. Volume of information wanted on the index.
2. The frequency of withdrawals and insertions.
3. Nature and number of entries made every day.
4. Cost of the equipment.
5. Space requirements and the availability of space.
6. The need for the use of signals.

Naming and Labeling Files

For paper files, identification and labeling allows an office to maintain physical control over current files as well as manage growth of new files. Labeling serves as a *visual aid* by identifying individual record series and by identifying folders within each series.

For electronic files, identification and labeling allows an office to maintain intellectual control over current files as well as to manage growth of new files.

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Labeling serves as an *access tool* which allows individual documents to be retrieved in an efficient manner.

When working with paper files three levels of file identification and labeling help simplify and facilitate filing and retrieval:

- Drawer or shelf labels
- File guide labels (guide cards)
- File folder labels

Drawer or shelf labels

Labels should be typed in uppercase and include:

Primary classification

Secondary classification (record series)

Dates

File guide labels/Tabs

File guides serve as "signposts" leading the searcher to specific portions of the `file. Guides may be used within a drawer to highlight a primary classification, to identify a record series, to highlight a specific year, or may be used within a record series to identify portions of the file as required.

Type labels in uppercase and show:

Primary classification (as appropriate)

Secondary classification (record series)

File folder labels

File folder labels should include:

- file code (if used) or full record series title
- folder title
- date(s), usually inclusive dates, of the file contents

How to organize files in an office

Organizing office files can be a difficult task, especially with large amounts of files and documents. Planning ahead and deciding on a file system can help you organize your files to suit your business and ensure efficient retrieval of important documents. Once you have your files in good order, you then need to stick to a consistent system to maintain your files that way.

Method 1

Developing a System

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a**. Create file categories:** To organize your files, decide what major categories you will use for sorting. Different kinds of offices will have different kinds of categories, but the general system is the same. You need to figure out a system that sorts your files in an efficient way.

b. **Set up subcategories:** Within each category, one may get more specific by developing a list of subcategories. Any individual piece of paper that needs to be filed can be defined by two terms -- the general category and then the subcategory.

c. **Use a color-coding system:** This can be a very effective way to organize files for quick access. Decide how many different categories you will have in your filing system, and then use that many different colored folders.

Instead of using folders that are completely colored, you can use regular manila folders and get colored stickers. You can then affix the stickers on the top tab, on the edge of the folder, or both for more visibility.

d. **Label the files:** Each file has a clear place to be. You should write the label on the tab of each folder clearly and neatly so you will know where it belongs. The label on each individual folder should start with the general category followed by the specific subcategory.

The labels on each file should be printed as neatly and consistently as possible. You can buy software packages that will allow you to format labels, so you can type and print them using your computer.

If you print your labels with your computer, you should use a consistent font size and style. If you are printing by hand, you should try to be consistent and as neat as possible.

e. **Sort the files alphabetically:** When your filing system is established and you have created all your folders, put them in order. You should sort the general folders alphabetically. Within each general folder, the subcategories should all be sorted alphabetically as well.

You may choose to sort some information by date rather than by a topic label. If so, then you will need to decide for yourself if it is more efficient to sort your files with the newest items in front and move to the oldest, or vice versa.

f. **Leave several inches of space in each filing drawer:** When you are establishing your filing system, you need to leave room for the files to grow. As time goes by, you will

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undoubtedly receive more papers to add to each folder. Leave space for your files to expand. Otherwise, you will have to move entire sections or file drawers in order to make room.

Method 2

Sorting Disarranged Files

a. **Gather all the materials that need filing:** If you are beginning with a collection of papers that have not been organized and are in disarray, you will need to begin by pulling the papers together. Find a workplace and collect everything in one pile. You will then be able to work on organizing.

b. **Separate the papers into two groups for "action" and "filing.**" Make a folder or pile for everything that needs immediate action. These papers should not get filed, or you may not remember to do the work that needs to be done. Set this "action" folder aside to be addressed soon. Then proceed with filing the remaining papers.

Organize the "action" file. The papers that need to be dealt with immediately should be sorted into smaller groups based on the work that you need to do.

c. Pick up each paper once: As you sort through the loose papers that you are filing, make decisions about each one as you review it. Pick up the paper, read over it, decide which category and subcategory it belongs to in your filing system, and then put it away. Working this way will help you with consistency in your filing and will help you save time by dealing with each item only once.

As you review each item, you should determine whether you even need to keep it. If the paper is something that has already been dealt with and is not something that you need to keep as a record, then consider discarding it rather than filing it.

d. **Unfold each item:** Most of the papers you have will probably have come in correspondence and are likely to be in envelopes and folded. Remove the papers from their envelopes, open them flat, and then file. Filing each paper in this way helps your folders fit uniformly in the file drawer, without bulging where the folded papers stack up.

Decide whether you need to keep any envelopes. In most cases, the envelopes are unnecessary and can be discarded. However, if you believe you may need proof of delivery or proof of a postmark, then you should staple the envelope to the papers and keep them together.

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Multiple papers should be stapled together. This will prevent things from getting separated or lost. Staples are preferable to paper clips because (a) they fit more uniformly in the files and

(b) they do not have the problem of slipping off.

Method 3

Maintaining Your Files

Use a "To File" basket: When new correspondence enters your office or when new paperwork is created, you may not be able to file it right away. You should place everything that needs to be filed in a single place to be filed when you are able. A basket on your desk, labeled "To File," is a good way to set these papers aside until you are ready.

Designate a consistent time to work on filing: If you can, schedule a consistent time each day or week that you can work on filing new papers. If you make filing a regular part of your routine, you are more likely to keep up with it.

The keys to success are consistency and repetition.

Make sure that others with access to the files understand the system: If you are the only person using your files, then you should easily be able to maintain the order that you have created. However, if other people need to use the papers in your files, you should make sure that they understand and follow the system that you have created. Having a filing system in place is not helpful if papers get misfiled and put into incorrect folders.

Keep vital documents in a safe place: Some special materials may need to be held in separate, special locations. For instance, some papers may need to be kept in a safe or in a fireproof lockbox. You may need to keep some materials off-site, in a bank safety deposit box or at your company's lawyer's office.

Review your files regularly: At least once a year, or more frequently if necessary, you should set aside some time to review your files. The purpose of this review is to decide whether there are papers or entire folders that can be discarded or perhaps moved to an off-site storage facility.

If something is never going to be needed again, then you should discard it. If it is something that you do not expect to use regularly but may need to keep as a record, then you should send it to storage.

Storing office documents/files

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Storing physical documents may seem like an uphill task. However, when you follow the tips highlighted below, you'll be able to use natural anchor storage, document storage for office.

1. **Organize your workspace**

A person should go through their documents and find which documents need filing and which ones need shredding. Any duplicate documents should be thrown away. This makes sure that sensitive information doesn't fall into the wrong hands. Clear drawers and cabinets, then begin from scratch to design a system that will work for everyone.

2. **Start filing and label clearly**

Having filing cabinets is vital. This helps colleagues retrieve documents easily and prevents misplacement of files. Thus, it should be easy to get access to and understand where each file is.

One can use an alphabetical order to store files in cabinets or label them in order of purpose or dates. Keep an index of all document folder names which will aid you in tracking of added documents.

3. **Use storage boxes**

Sometimes documents pile up and the filing room may not have enough space. Make use of document storage for office services. One can choose between classic cardboard or modern plastic storage containers. Storage document boxes should have appropriate labels and you can arrange them horizontally.

4. **Storage environment**

The documents should be stored in a cool environment that has temperatures around 20 degrees and relative humidity of 35 and 55 percent. Storing documents in a basement or attic will have a negative impact on the documents. Such areas have an irregular temperature. One should store documents off the ground to avoid moisture leaking from the ground into the boxes.

5. **Storage place**

A person may lack space to store documents within an office. Therefore, you may decide to hire a company that offers document storage services. You will benefit from transportation, storage, document imaging as well as disposal. With all this

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taken care of, you can cut the cost of operation and enhance efficiency at the workplace.

3.2.1.4 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. This will be monitored by your trainer.

1. Obtain office files as per workplace policy.
2. Label office file ass per SOPs.
3. Sort office files.
4. Index office files.
5. Store office files as per SOPs.

Field Visit

You will visit functional offices in the county headquarters; while complying with industry practices and procedures and with occupational, health and safety practices and any legal or regulatory requirements, you will perform out the following tasks.

1. Receive office documents
2. Receive office files.
3. Label office files
4. Index office files
5. Label office files
6. Sort office files
7. Store office files

After the visit you will write a report on the process of indexing office files, challenges observed and their likely solutions.

NB During your field visit, 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.

3.2.1.5 Self-Assessment

1. Mr. Munene works in the Registry office of a leading organization. What duties are he expected to perform?

2.When designing labels for office files, on should consider?

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3.What benefits would an organization get from filing its documents?

4. Discuss reasons of indexing documents in filing

3.2.1.6 Tools, Equipment, Supplies and Materials

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

3.2.1.7 References

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