Safeguard Office Files

3.2.6.1 Introduction to the learning outcome

This outcome describes the competencies required to safeguard office files in an organization. It involves control of stored documents, document storage systems, file transfer, filing equipment/storage devices, retrieval of files, monitoring of file movement, retention policy and disposal of obsolete files in an organization.

3.2.6.2 Performance Standard

3.2.6.2.1 Office policies' manuals on safeguarding office files are familiarized with as per the SOPs.

3.2.6.2.2 Office policies' manuals on safeguarding office files are initiated.

3.2.6.2.3 Responsibilities are assigned.

3.2.6.2.4 Office files are stored in the filing equipment/storage devices.

3.2.6.2.5 File movement is monitored as per the SOPs.

3.2.6.2 6 Digital file passwords are protected as per the SOPs.

3.2.6.3 Information Sheet

Definition of terms:

Safeguarding: Protecting from harm or damage with an appropriate measure.

Storage: The act of putting something that is not being used in a place where it is available when needed or where it can be kept safely.

Transfer: The act of moving something or someone to another place.

Retrieval: The process of finding or locating old data, documents, files, or records.

Retention: It is the safeguarding of important records that document important business of an organization such as decisions, policies, financial activities and internal controls.

Document Control

Document control is a document management practice whose purpose is to enforce controlled processes and practices for the preparation, review, approval, release, distribution, access, storage, security, alteration, change, withdrawal or disposal of documents.

The role ensures that documentation available at official points of use within an organization is trusted by its users and contains up-to-date, reliable, verified and formally approved information.

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Document Control manages documents throughout their lifecycle;

Importance of document control

It is a crucial element to ensure efficiency, performance, reliability, traceability, quality and safety.

ISO* 9001 international standard (Quality Management Systems - Requirements) identifies the following as important aspects of document control:

- Reviewing and approving documents prior to release.
- Ensuring changes and revisions are clearly identified.
- Avail relevant versions of applicable documents are at their "points of use".
- Ensue documents remain legible and identifiable.
- Ensure external documents (such as customer-supplied documents or supplier manuals) are identified and controlled.
- Prevent “unintended” use of obsolete documents.

(*) ISO = International Organisation for Standardisation
Source: Extract from ISO 9001 standard. The complete latest version of this standard can be purchased here: iso.org

Integrated document management comprises of the technologies, tools, and methods used to capture, manage, store, preserve, deliver and dispose of documents in an organization. In this context documents are any of information assets including images, office documents, graphics, and drawings as well as the new electronic objects such as Web pages, email, instant messages, and video.

Document Storage/Management systems

Document management, often referred to as Document Management Systems (DMS). Document management is the software that controls and organizes documents throughout an organization. It incorporates document and content capture, workflow, document repositories, electronic records management and output systems, and information retrieval systems. Also, the processes used to track, store, and control documents.

Document management systems range in size and scope e.g small stand-alone systems to large scale enterprise-wide configurations serving a global audience. Many document management systems provide a means to incorporate standard physical document filing practices electronically. These include:

- Storage location.

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- Security and access control.
- Version control.
- Audit trails.
- Check-in/check-out and document lockdown.

The following link gives further information on document management systems:
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwip2Mvji4LvAhW2R0EAHRHyBqoQFjACegQIDxAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tdx.cat%2Fbitstream%2Fhandle%2F10803%2F6160%2F04Nfm04de12.pdf%3Fsequence%3D4%26isAllowed%3Dy&usg=AOvVaw33yMcHOcrG6BlP_kfl6yQp

File transfer

When people take files out of the filing system, or they take documents out of a file, we must ensure that they don't lose them or forget to bring them back.

NB People must never take the suspension files out, they should only take out the flat folder inside the file.

To keep track of files we need a record of all the files or document that people borrow.

To do this we can use:

A file-out book A file-out book is simply a book in which we write

a. Who borrowed the file or document.

b. Name of the file or document.

c. When they borrowed it.

d. When they returned it.

Figure 11: ***Sample of a file-out book entry:***

NAME FILE DOCUMENT DATE TAKEN OUT DATE RETURNED

Ms Mo Admissions 12-02-2021 12-02-2001

Mr Niswa Returns File 23-01-2021

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The person responsible for maintaining the system can use the file-out book to check who has which files and remind them to return it.

A file-out card They are used in a filing cabinet. They are the same size as the files and are put in the place of the file, which has been borrowed.

On the file-out card we write the same information as in the book.

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Filing equipment/storage devices

Open File Shelving

Open file shelving helps keep files more organized and in less space than lateral four-drawer file cabinets, and are also much more accessible to staff so they can find and access what they need quickly. Unlike lateral file cabinets that require space for drawers, the vertical design of the open filing shelves take up as much as 60% less space and has shelves that are completely adjustable for storing whatever you need.

Mobile Shelving

Mobile shelving moves back and forth on tracks with the pull of a handle turn of a crank, or push of a button. They take up much less space than static rows of shelving since the aisles compact together, and only one or two access aisles are needed at any given time. Mobile shelving reduces floor space by up to 66% compared to traditional lateral and vertical filing cabinets, and can be used with new or existing shelving units to save on costs.

Rotary Cabinets

They are double-sided revolving cabinets which spin closed to secure files, supplies, and other

items and inventory. The cabinets can be positioned directly next to each other or up against a wall to save space. To access materials, the user simply presses down on the foot release pedal and pushes the cabinet to rotate it into an open position. The cabinets can also be locked to secure materials and come with many other optional accessories and store more files in the same floor space as traditional filing cabinets.

Bi-File Shelving

The cabinets are placed two or three deep to save space and slide back and forth on tracks for easy access. To access the back cabinets, the user simply rolls the front cabinets to the left or right and out of the way.

These units save space by eliminating the need for access aisles between shelving units, allowing more room for actual storage. The sliding shelving can also be configured with new or existing shelving units, and additional sliding units can be added at any time to increase storage capacity.

Pull-Out Shelves

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They have a patented linear motion design to provide space savings, increased storage capacity,
security, and ease of operation. The movable carriages slide in and out and use the natural egress aisle in front of the shelving as an access aisle.
Since the shelving units operate independently from each other, multiple users can access multiple shelving units at the same time, and each unit can be customized with different depths widths. The units can also be moved or added to without disrupting the adjacent units.

For electronic files

File transfer is the transmission of a computer file through a communication channel from one computer system to another. Typically, file transfer is mediated by a communications protocol.
In the history of computing, numerous file transfer protocols have been designed for different contexts.
File Transfer Protocol is used to transfer files between computers on a network. You can use FTP to exchange files between computer accounts, transfer files between an account and a desktop computer, or access online software archives.

Retrieval of files

Keeping information in files is only useful if everyone in our organisation knows how to find the documents we need. We file information so that we can find it easily.
Finding information that is in the files is called retrieving information.
Everyone who needs to use the files should be able to find information quickly and easily. This means that they must know the method of filing we use.
These major tools for retrieval of documents are Catalogues, Classification Schemes, Indexes, Abstracts and Bibliographies.
A filing method book could be a small book that we use to explain how we file documents.
For example:
a. All letters are filed under correspondence.
b. All membership cards are filed under number.
c. Reports are filed by subject.

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An index book can also help us to find files. The name of each file can be written on the page with that letter.

For example:

The MINUTES file is written on the M page. Then we can write where that file is: "MINUTES - filing cabinet 1 drawer 2 or lever arch file 4"

Monitoring File movement

File Movement Manual

A file movement manual assists in managing the movement of files to provide:

1. Where a file is located.
2. Who is in possession of a file.
3. Accountability of files for security purposes.
4. Overall integrity of the filing system.

Systems for monitoring and recording the movement of files vary between offices. The type of system an office uses will depend upon the size of the firm. Larger offices tend to have more formalized and complex systems for recording the movement of files, whilst smaller firms prefer to use more simplified and informal systems.

A formalized system of file movement makes use of one or a combination of the following file recording devices:

File registers A file register is a book or an electronic device used to record the movement of a file as it moves from storage back into active use and back into storage again. A file register may record the date the file was put into storage, where the file is located, when the file can be destroyed, the date the file was opened, the date the file was taken from storage, the date it is expected to be returned, who requested the file, who retrieved the file and who currently is in possession of the file.

Outcards an outcard is a card that records the movement of a file from storage. Outcards are usually placed inside the file index. When placed in the file index, outcards are placed in the same position as the index card for the file. After a file is returned to storage, the outcard registering the movement of the file is taken from the file index and disposed of.

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Electronic software In some offices file movement is recorded electronically. Files might be tracked electronically via the use of a computer based file register or as part of an integrated file management system. When file movement is recorded electronically the person taking a file from storage is electronically registered as being in possession of the file.

More advanced computer systems are also capable of generating reminder notices for overdue files. These notices appear on the personal computer of the person in possession of the file.

Electronically based registries normally require the same information as a paper based registries and outcards. Thus, in using an electronically based registry to record file movement, an entry on a computer should be made detailing the date the file was taken from storage, the date it is expected to be returned, who requested the file, and who retrieved it.

Calendars and diaries Calendars and diaries may also be used to register file movement.

Registering the issue date and the expected date of return of files on a calendar or in a diary may help staff see which files are currently in use and which are overdue. Staff may then send reminders to people in possession of overdue files. Reminders may be sent verbally, electronically, or via a return slip.

Misplaced files

At times files are misplaced and you may need to search the office to find a file. If a file has been misplaced, you should:

- Look in the file index under similar file names.
- Examine the file register or outcards for information regarding the last recorded borrower.
- Check the filing cabinet either side of the file you are looking for.

Retention policy

A records retention schedule is a policy that defines how long data items must be kept and provides disposal guidelines for how data items should be discarded. Records retention schedules are often part of a data retention policy, an established protocol for retaining information based on business needs.

The link below give samples of document retention policies:

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https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved
=2ahUKEwip6ID7rYLvAhVku1kKHaqEC58QFjACegQIDRAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.
wordtemplatesonline.net%2Fdocument-retention-policysample%
2F&usg=AOvVaw3Z2hz1RR2Oc11xrgPppKN7

Disposal of Obsolete documents

When a document is tagged as being obsolete, it means that it is no longer appropriate for the purpose it was created for.

Records disposal is the process by which an organization's records are either destroyed or retained as organizational archives. Disposal is a range of processes associated with implementing the records retention, destruction or transfer decisions documented in the organization's records retention and disposal policy.

Records disposal schedules

Not all papers are worthy of preserving permanently. All papers created in, or received by, organizations have to be examined in order that those which are of no administrative or historical value are not permanently preserved in high-cost storage.

These records should be identified at the earliest point and marked in some distinctive way to ensure they are transferred to archives after the minimum retention period has elapsed.

A disposal Schedule is the key document in a records management system which:

- Enables the organization to meet legislative requirements.
- Outlines the types of records held within an organization.
- Outlines the associated legislative/policy guidance framework.
- Identifies the minimum period for which records should be retained.
- Outlines the action required when the minimum retention period has been reached.
- Disposal schedules define the minimum length of time specific types of records have to be retained before being reviewed, destroyed or transferred to records center.

Records fall into four main categories of action:

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- Records to be destroyed after an agreed period.
- Records selected for permanent preservation by records center.
- Records to be reviewed.
- Records which are required to be kept permanently in the organization.

Files with specified destruction dates included in the Disposal Schedule should be destroyed according to the agreed instructions.

There are four options when the minimum retention period has been reached:

Review

The appraisal of records to determine:

- Continuing business need and to
- Determine if they are required for historical or research purposes.

Retain permanently

This occurs rarely but it is necessary where organizations need to retain records permanently for business administrative need.

Permanent preservation

The organization decides these records are of long-term historical research value and must be transferred to archive.

Destroy

Records considered to have no continuing business/legal value and are of no historical or research value to the organization which has the final decision on the preservation of records.

Methods of disposal of records

- Shredding
- Pulping
- Burning
- Overwriting
- Physical destruction

3.2.6.4 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.

- Control stored documents.

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- Transfer Files.
- Store files in different filing equipment/storage devices.
- Retrieve files.
- Monitor files movement.
- Adhere to organizational retention policy.
- Dispose obsolete files as per the SOPs.

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:

- Control stored documents.
- Transfer Files.
- Store files in different filing equipment/storage devices.
- Retrieve files.
- Monitor files movement.
- Adhere to organizational retention policy.
- Dispose obsolete files as per the SOPs.

After the visit you will write a report on the practice of safeguarding office files, 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.

3.2.6.5. Self-Assessment

1. Highlight various filing equipment that can be found in an office
2. Which are the advantages of controlling movement of files?
3. Explain the procedure of retrieving a file
4. Discuss details that that should be captured in the file movement monitoring register
5. Why Use Document Retention Policies in organizations?

3.2.6.6. Tools, Equipment, Supplies and Materials

- Computers
- Filing equipment

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- Internet connectivity
- Registers
- Stationery
- External storage devices

3.2.6.7. References

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