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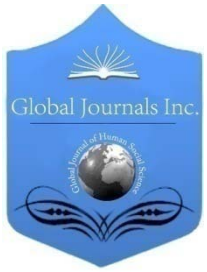

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Proper Filing and Computerized System as a Tool for Successful Business Operations in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract- Information is the backbone of every business organization. It is, therefore, essential to a company's health. However, it is easily taken for granted until its import is missing. Records and information management (RIM) exists to prevent that from happening, but when filing systems are overdue for a time –up, critical data is most vulnerable. A poor filing system is a problem which might easily elude an organization unless internal operations have already begun to unravel it. The consequences of missing records and duplicate data are severe enough to impact business performance, and there are legal and financial implications as well as security concerns. This paper attempts to describe a way to create a good system for organizing, maintaining, and backing up files and folders on a personal computer. Furthermore, the paper examines modern methodology through computer based applications. While there are a number of ways to accomplish this task, the paper attempts to provide some guidelines and directions for creating a system that works best for the type of information being organized. Additionally, this paper examines the definition of filing as well as the important role filing plays in the day-to-day operations of an organization.

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Proper Filing and Computerized System as a Tool for Successful Business Operations in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions

Isaac Obeng –Amoako

Abstract - Information is the backbone of every business organization. It is, therefore, essential to a company's health. However, it is easily taken for granted until its import is missing. Records and information management (RIM) exists to prevent that from happening, but when filing systems are overdue for a time –up, critical data is most vulnerable. A poor filing system is a problem which might easily elude an organization unless internal operations have already begun to unravel it. The consequences of missing records and duplicate data are severe enough to impact business performance, and there are legal and financial implications as well as security concerns. This paper attempts to describe a way to create a good system for organizing, maintaining, and backing up files and folders on a personal computer. Furthermore, the paper examines modern methodology through computer based applications. While there are a number of ways to accomplish this task, the paper attempts to provide some guidelines and directions for creating a system that works best for the type of information being organized. Additionally, this paper examines the definition of filing as well as the important role filing plays in the day-to-day operations of an organization. Furthermore, by conducting research into six Universities in Ghana, the paper assesses the impact of filing on Methodist University College Ghana and University of Ghana, in Greater Accra Region, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ashanti Region, Catholic University College in Brong Ahafo Region, University of Mines in Western Region, and University of Education Winneba, in Central Region. It identifies some weakness or common mistakes with filing system used at the tertiary institutions mentioned above, the importance of filing in general, the consequences poor filing system would have on the corporate image of a tertiary institution. Subsequently, the paper aims at the discussions of the challenges of filing and makes some recommendations which will ensure efficiency and effectiveness of filing at Methodist University College and the other Universities in Ghana. Finally, the paper concludes with the preservation of records and documents.

I. Introduction

a) Statement of problem

Poor filing system in most offices has been one of the major challenges over the years. It is in this regard that Harrison (1986) observes that Administrators, Stakeholders of firms, Organizations and Educational Institutions have been holding series of workshops, conferences and seminars with the view to facilitating the process of filing system. Harrison John (1986) observes that a delay in locating a paper will interfere with and delay the other sections of the business. Sparling Allan (1970), further stipulate that the misfiling of even one important letter may cause serious inconvenience to an executive, financial loss to the business, and considerable embarrassment to the person who misfiled the letter. Evans Desmond (1986), states that a recent survey found that one in every ten documents or files stored becomes immediately lost forever, due to inadequate and filing techniques and practices.

Good Filing system in offices leads to the achievement of organizational and educational objectives. In some offices the filing and storage of data, whether in the form of paper letters, invoices or memos or as computerized electronic files, is regarded sometimes as a chore or necessary evil. And, not surprisingly, it is in just these same offices that tempers become frayed and staff frustrated and irritable when vital documents cannot be found before, say, a meeting which the Chief Executive Officer is attending! Indeed, a recent survey found that one in every ten (10) documents or files stored become immediately lost forever, thanks to inadequate and careless filing techniques and practices. Accomplished records management skills and techniques form a most important part of a secretary's repertoire today, particularly since developments in electronic office automation are transforming the speed at which data may be stored and accessed and extending massively the amount of data which organizations wish to retain and refer to at intervals.

The efficiency and effectiveness of every office work basically depend on the systems of filing and indexing that have been put in place. This is particularly so where there is a large amount of manual work. Even if automation (computerization) is adopted on a very large scale, filing and indexing are equally important. A reliable filing and indexing systems supported by competent staff that is well-versed in the art of filing and indexing are great assets to the Office Management and Administration. It is, therefore, incumbent on every Office Manager in consonance with modern ways of filing to ensure that a good and efficient system of filing and indexing is being adopted and used in the various offices.

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b) Definition of filing

Filing is the term used to describe the process undertaken to arrange and classifying office documents in suitable forms so that they can be retrieved with ease without any difficulty. It is in this regard that **Denyer (1994), define filing as the process of arranging and storing records so that they can be located when. A file is, therefore, a collection of letters, memoranda and other papers relating to the same matter usually kept in a particular folder**. This brings to fore the need to put in place a good filing system which will ease reference to documents. Nonetheless, it is worth knowing the difference between a filing method and a filing system. Filing methods deal with the way materials are stored or preserved in a file. That is, how the materials are arranged, classified and numbered to ease reference.

On the other hand, a filing system is concerned with how the various files on the various subject matters are managed. This covers the type of equipment used to store the files and the identification strategy used to locate or retrieve a file from a cabinet or a cupboard George Terry (1984), on the other hand defines filing system as the method of keeping papers in an accepted file according to pre-determine system so that they can be easily as well as quickly found. Based on above definition, it is concluded that the process of arranging and storing the records for the future reference is called filing. Records are the valuable assets of every organization including Methodist University College Ghana. They therefore need to be preserved safely.

c) The Significance/Purpose of filing

The acts of keeping records are daily activities for every office. They, therefore, have their own importance and categories:

Firstly, it makes the proper arrangement of such records by classifying and analyzing for the proper views as per the requirement. The importance and purpose of filing is to keep the records and documents safely. Collected records may have their use in the future. So, filing keeps the records safety from insects, fire, water, theft, misplacement, dust, dampness etc. and makes available for the future use. Filing not only keeps the records safely but also arranges them in a systematic way which facilitates on the availability of records in a minimum effort.

Secondly, it is not for nothing that organizations spend time and money on training and equipment on filing systems and methods. Indeed, organizations that attach great importance to filing systems and methods do spend a lot of money to develop them because of the related benefits.

d) Factors that make filing on important office activity

Man has limited memory in the face of numerous files to be kept. It is thus incumbent that files are properly kept neatly through computerization and with hard copy backups. For example the computerized system helps to determine who has a particular file taken from a computerized cabinet or a cupboard.

For the sake of saving records from early destruction (protection of documents):

There are several cases of important office documents eaten up by insects, mice and other rodents not forgetting hazards that fire also poses to such documents.

For locating file movement: Filing is important because it helps to determine who has a particular file taken from a cabinet or a cupboard. This is through the use of an out-guide, out –marker or a tracer system.

Saving of valuable space: A good filing management because it helps to save more space. Sights of the desks of office staff inundated with files are common in many offices. Sometimes, the files are so many that they eat up a greater part of the desk top space needed for other things.

Keeping office and file neat and tidy: Filing is important because apart from keeping the files themselves neat and tidy, it has the same implications for the office generally. This is because desk tops, floors and other unsuitable places are cleared of files particularly, the dormant types. It is quite nauseating to pick files which are very dusty when they are not properly managed.

Providing security for confidential documents: The important of filing is also evidenced by the security it provides for confidential documents when file are kept under lock and key.

The importance of a good a filing system is to increase efficiency: Filing makes reality availability information available without delay. It facilitates to run the business efficiently. Written evidences: Filing keeps the written records safely which can be presented as evidence in the court to settle disputes because it provides factual information.

Promoting goodwill: Filing keeps the past records of customers and helps to deal with them accordingly which promote companies goodwill.

Statutory requirements: Filings keep all the records safely which are useful to full fill the statutory requirements. Provision of accurate and authentic records: Filing provides complete accurate and authentic application of documents.

Achievement of goals: Filing a report allows the university the opportunity to meet the goals of creating a safe environment that support the goals to be achieved.

Increase in productive level: A functional office filing system will not only help company officials to become more organized but it will also increase the productivity levels.

Production of tangible results: The right filing system produces important tangible results.

Time saving: Filing techniques can help the office staff save time and look much more efficient at work.

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Enhancing future planning of the organization: By providing availability of previous records, it helps in the future planning of the organization.

II. Literature review

Sparling Allan E. (1970) opined that the correspondence and records of a business are essential to its successful operation, and every important paper must be filed so that it can be found at a moment's notice. He stipulates that a good filing system is the best place to keep important papers, but it is also one of the worst places to lose them. The misfiling of even one important letter may cause serious inconvenience to an executive, financial loss to the business, and considerable embarrassment to the person who misfiled the letter. To ensure **"perfect filing" of papers, "perfect filing" is necessary.**

According to John Harrison (1979), a large part of the efficiency of an office depends not only on the existence of a reliable filing system, but also on the competence of staff in the art of methodical filing and indexing. Filing is carried out for two primary reasons:

i. To preserve correspondence and other documents, i.e. to keep them tidy and clean.
ii. To have the information contained in the papers available for quick and easy reference.

He stipulates that correspondence must be filed accurately so that it can be referred to quickly. A document filed incorrectly can be the cause of a delay in a business transactions and even the cancellation of a valuable order. Only when the filing system is efficient can the office function properly, as a delay in locating a paper will interfere with and delay the order sections of the business.

a) Technology; Computerized Filing Systems

COMPUTER systems can store vast amounts of data. But, as with records kept on paper, merely putting something into a file cabinet is not enough. There must be some way to retrieve the information again when it is needed.

That is increasingly falling to special computer programmes called ***data base management systems***. Like any good file clerk, a data base management sets up the electronic data bank files with necessary cross-references, stores the data and retrieves it when requested.

In addition to increased speed of retrieval over paper storage, an electronic data base makes it easier to keep information up to date. With paper storage, a company might have the same information in several places. A customer's address might be on a master mailing list and on the billing department's list of overdue accounts. If the customer moves, the address must be charged in several places. With electronic storage systems, a customer's address can be stored once and shared by everyone. The data management system must see to it that people retrieve only the data they are allowed to see.

Such systems, soled for several years by computer companies and independent software companies, are growing in popularity. Robert N. Goldman, Senior Vice President of Cullinane Database Systems Inc., which sells data management programmes to run on I.B.M. Computers remarked "When we started offering data base systems in 1974 and 1975, we had to justify why customers wanted them". He said "Today people accept that they need them." Once used only on the largest computers, such systems are also being sold to run on minicomputers and even desk-top microcomputers.

Data base management are also expected to be a central feature of the automated office of the future. An important use of the computer terminals that are landing on m ore and more desks is to allow office workers who need data to get it directly from the computer rather than ask a programmer to write a programme to get it. A marketing analyst for instance, might request sales totals for different cities. Some office automation companies have recently announced recently announced systems with such capabilities.

One development that will help allow such retrieval of information is the so-called Relational Data Base Concept. Every company has grappled at some time with how best to organize its records. But in the case of electronic record-keeping, the study of that problem has become a mathematical science and the subject of a somewhat abstruse debate.

Most existing data base management systems organize data in a hierarchy resembling s family tree. A university data base, for instance, might be broken down into schools, with each school further broken down into departments and each department then broken down into faculty members.

The main drawback of most such systems, according to Jeffrey D. Ullman, a Professor of Computer Science at Stand ford University, and other experts, is that to get the information, the user must tell the computer on what he wants, such as a list of the Faculty members in the Civil Engineering Department, but where in the tree to go. That means he must be familiar with the tree.

The relational structure was conceived in 1970 by an I.B.M. Scientist, E. F. Codd. In relational system, the data is stored in cross referenced tables. The university data base might have one table listing schools and their departments and another table for faculty members, listing their departments and other characteristics.

With that kind of system, the user does not have to know how the data are stored. He can merely ask for the information in a language resembling English and the computer will find the columns in the tables.

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Because of that ease of use, many experts see relational data bases as the wave of the future.

One drawback, however, is that to gain such ease of use of the relational systems have rendered to be slower than hierarchical ones.

The answer to that might be to build machines that would specialize in filing and retrieving. The machines as would attach to the main computer.

Progress is being made in other areas as well. With all the data being stored in computer, there is a need simply to catalogue what data are in storage. Such data about the data base are being stored in computers in what aare called "Data Dictionaries." Progress is also being made in letting computers in different locations split the storage task but share files.

Robert M. Curtice, head of the Data Management Unit at Arthur D. Little Inc., a Cambridge, Mass, Consulting firm, said "in data processing we have paid much more attention to the processing side than to the data side until a few years ago". The new developments, he said, reflect the growing recognition that **"the data has value in itself."**

III. Methodology

A population of eight-four (84) people from five regions of Ghana, that is, Central, Brong Ahafo, Greater Accra, Western, and Ashanti across the southern sector within six Universities such as, Methodist University College and University of Ghana, in Greater Accra, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ashanti Region, Catholic University in Brong Ahafo Region, University of Mines in Western Region, University of Education in Central Region, were interviewed to ascertain what has been the current state of filing system within their administrative set up. Thus, fourteen people were selected from each University to answer the questionnaire below. The constitutions of the fourteen people were made up of eight senior administrative officers and six junior staff members from each of the six Universities. More senior members were selected because of their in-depth experience in filing system.

1. Do you have any knowledge with regards to use of computing in filing system?
2. What type of storage system is used for keeping copies of files at your office?
3. Is it difficult retrieving hard copy files at your office?
4. Should personnel at the administrative setup periodically go for refresher courses with regards to filing system?

The rationale behind question one was to ascertain how the administrative personnel have been either attending seminars, refresher courses or have been abreast with modernity in filing system. Question one is followed by two to be sure of how well selected officers were in formed with regards modernity in filing system. The essence of question three was to find out how well officers kept files at their various offices. Finally, question four was asked to find out the readiness of administrative personnel to upgrade them with regard to filing system. Out of the eighty-four people who were interviewed, fifty of them indicated that their knowledge in computing was not much as compared to ten, who answered both questions one and two correctly, demonstrating a good knowledge in computing. However, the remaining twenty-four administrative staff comprising of both senior and junior staff members indicated that they had very limited knowledge in computing as regards filing system. With regards to question three, sixty of the selected officers indicated that file retrieval was very easy. Twenty indicated that it was a bit cumbersome and the remaining four indicated that it was very difficult with hard copy files but very easy with computerized filing system. With regards to question four all the population of eighty-four gave a positive response.

Analysis of the answers given by the population of eighty-four people from five regions across the southern sector of Ghana interviewed reveals the following:

1. There is the need for more refresher courses in computing pertaining to modernity in filing system.
2. Hard copies of files are well kept in all the six Universities thus indicating that most administrative personnel have good knowledge pertaining to keeping of hard copy files.

a) The Consequences of Poor Filing System

When documents are not properly filed, all the gains identified under the importance of filing above will be negated. In addition to the negation, the following are also some of the possible consequences if documents are not properly filed.

1. A poor filing system may lead to loss or misplacement of records and documents.
2. It may also lead to a hold up of some of the activities to be carried out in the office.
3. A poor filing system can lead to waste of precious time used to search for documents and records. It is also an indication of office mismanagement and maladministration.
4. When there is poor filing in an office, it can bring about malfunctioning of other departments, sections or units.

IV. Recommendations

To ensure a good filing systems in the university college (MUCG), the following recommendations must be strictly observed by secretaries and all those who are directly involved in handling office files.

A good filing system is a facilitator to quick references and retrieval of documents and records.

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What constitutes a good filing system may be characterized by the following:

- Simplicity

For ease of understanding and operation, a good filing system should be simple. A complex filing system will be difficult to understand and operate.

- Accessibility

This characteristic refers to the nearness of the files to the user. This implies that all the cabinets should be strategically positioned so that they could be easily reached by potential users.

- Safety and Security

The system being used should be capable of providing safety and security to the documents filed. This is necessary for confidential materials.

- Compact.

The system should have the characteristic of compactness. In other words, the system adapted should not take up too much space in terms of equipment and floor.

- Suitability

A good filing system should be relevant and suitable to the documents to be filed.

- Economy

A good characteristic of a good filing system is that, it should not be too expensive to operate.

That is, the expenditure on the equipment and the operation should be reasonable on the equipment and the operation should be reasonable and economical for the benefit of the University College.

- Cross -reference

Cross-reference refers to making room for documents or records to be located under different headings. A good filing system should provide for the possibility of location documents or records under different headings.

- Out-Guide /Out-Maker /Tracer System

Out-Guide /Out-Maker /Tracer system is a system that gives an indication of when and where a file has been taken to.

A good filing system should have this important characteristic so that a file that has been taken from its original place could easily be located.

- Expansion possibilities

The system of filing should make room for future expansion when the volume of operation increases.

- Classification system

A very important characteristic of a good filing system is appropriate classification system. For example, the classification may be based on Departments, Sections or Units. It may also be based on numbers or alphabets.

- Trained Personnel

The efficiency of the system in operating will depend on the availability of trained personnel. The system should, therefore, have well- trained personnel. There should also be in place, a policy which will enable secretaries and personnel who handle files in the University College, to go through regular in-service training programmes.

- Maintenance Culture

The policy of maintenance culture should be enforced to take care of filing equipment e.g. (Filing cabinets).

- Precaution against office accident

To avoid accident in the offices, that following precautions should be observed:

a. Secretaries should be taught never to open more than one drawer of a filing cabinet at one time.
b. Pulled out dreamers which obstruct movement in the office should be pushed in immediately after use.
c. Overloading of files, books and other materials on top of filing cabinets should not be entertained.

- Someone, preferably a responsible official, must authorize the filing of documents (by marking them in some way, perhaps initialing) and indicate also how and where each should be filed and indexed. The most likely person is the departmental head. (This is often referred to as 'releasing').
- Someone must be authorized to sort documents into file order.
- If an index is used, the documents must be entered on the index as authorized above.
- Some arrangement must be made for the removal of documents from, and their return to the files. Someone must be responsible for removal and replacement and for keeping records of documents issued and to whom.
- It must be worked out how long documents are kept in current files and at what regular intervals they are to be transferred to long-time storage. This is referred to as 'weeding'.
- At what regular intervals the documents in the long-time storage files are to be removed and destroyed.

V. Conclusion

The importance of a good filing system at Methodist University College Ghana should not be under-rated since it promotes efficiency and effectiveness of office activities and operations. The efficiency and effectiveness of every office work basically depend on the systems of filing and indexing that have been put in place. This is particularly so where there is a large amount of manual work. Even if automation (computerization) is adopted on a very large scale, filing and indexing are equally important. A

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reliable filing and indexing systems supported by competent staff that is well-versed in the art of filing and indexing are great asset to the Office Management and Administration. It is, therefore, incumbent on every Office Manager in consonance with modern ways of filing to en sure that a good and efficient system of filing and indexing is being adopted and used in the various offices. Sparling Allan E. (1970) opined that correspondence and records of a business are essential to its successful operation, and every important paper must be filed so that it can be found at a moment's notice. He stipulates that a good filing system is the best place to keep important papers, but it is also one of the worse places to lose them. The misfiling of even one important letter may cause serious inconvenience to an executive, financial loss to the business, and considerable embarrassment to the person who misfiled the letter. A poor filing system may lead to loss or misplacement of records and documents. It may also lead to a hold up of some of the activities to be carried out in the office. A poor filing system can lead to waste of precious time used to search for documents and records. It is also an indication of office mismanagement and maladministration. When there is poor filing in an office, it can bring about malfunctioning of other departments, sections or units. A good filing system is, therefore, a facilitator to quick references and retrieval of documents and records. To ensure "perfect filing" of papers, "perfect filing" is necessary.

Preservation of Records and Documents: Preservation of records and documents is a very vital activity which every office cherishes. In the absence of a good filing system of preservation of records and documents, offices can hardly achieve their objectives. Occasionally, it becomes necessary out of emergencies, to make references to certain documents and records such as payroll, receipts, invoices and other statistical data. When these are not properly stored or preserved, they cannot be referred to immediately and will create a lot of inconveniences and hamper office activities. The frustrating experience of searching for a customer's or student's records for hours an end before a service can be rendered is a nightmare that can easily destroy the corporate image of the University.

When records and documents are properly preserved, retrieval becomes easy. This promotes fasters processing of office information and other activities.

On the bases of the above, the University College or an Organization will be paying dearly for neglecting the importance of good filing system in the areas, of preservation and retrieval of documents and records.

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