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Office Management: Conceptual Discussion

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Modern business is complex. A business organization is today faced with ever-changing conditions. The present decade and the next are only the decades of changes and challenges in our country. The manufacturing techniques are undergoing a rapid change and so also the techniques of management. The techniques of manufacture must be matched with the techniques of management. They are complementary to each other. The management techniques have to master the simple calculating machine as the complex computer. They also have to take care of the new emerging human relations in business.

Meaning of Office

The term office has been defined in many ways. In a simple form, it can be described as a place where some "business is carried on". This is an adequate definition of office. Denyer (1969) describe it as a place where clerical operations are carried on. Although the definition given by Denyer falls short of the modern concept of an office, yet it does convey an idea about its functional aspect. The term Office is intimately connected with clerical operations. It is those concerned with paper work. The term Office is to be identified with an activity and not a paper.

Sannie (2009) defined office as any place that is set aside for handling information. Office can be described as any place where information is documented, presented and used for current and future operation of business.

Office management is to apply effectively all the managerial skills towards achieving the objectives associated with the office function of providing appropriate information and a communication network to all sectors of the organization.

At senior executive level, which implies overall responsibility of all office activities, this function is now termed "administrative management" in most organizations. At middle management level, where responsibility is usually for a system consisting of a number of procedures, the term departmental office manager is generally used. However, at lower management level, where responsibility for one or a few procedures generally applies, the title could be 'office supervisor or chief clerk' in a large firm.

Importance of Office

Office can be described as an important part of an organization. The very existence of an organization or institution is based on the office whether it is a government department, a business enterprise or an educational institution, office is vital for its functioning. To sum up, the importance of the office arises due to the following factors:

1. Office as information center: It can be described as the information centre of data bank of an organization. All kinds of information and figures, whether past or present, are available in the office.
2. Channel of communication: It is a channel through which communications, especially written ones move from top to bottom and vice-versa.
3. Aids in coordination: The process of coordination is almost impossible without presence of office. Office furnishes the machinery for coordination.
4. Aids in managerial control: Control can be described as the measurement and correction of the performance of subordinates in order to make sure that enterprise objectives and the plans made to achieve them are accomplished. Control is thus a necessary function of management.
5. Importance vis-à-vis workers: Effective human relations require effective organization. Preparation of large and salary sheets and their payment are the responsibilities of office.
6. Importance of vis-à-vis shareholders and creditors: Office serves a link between the shareholders on one hand and company on the other. Similarly, office links the creditors with the organization and has to act as serving department for them.
7. Importance in relation to customer: The importance of office in relation to customers is of great significance. Office acts as the channel that links the business organization with its customers.
8. Importance in relation to government and general public: Today, a business organisation is recognized as a social institution.

Functions of Office

The functions of a modern office can be classified into two categories:

- a) Basic or routine functions and
- b) Administrative management functions

Basic or Routine Functions

The office has been said to provide a service of communication and record, in fact a leading spokesman of the institute of office management has referred to the office manager as the "information officer". The basic functions of the modern offices are as follows:

- 1) Receiving and collecting information: The office receives and collects information about the various activities of the organization. This information may be from:
 - i) The internal sources: In the normal course of their functioning, various divisions or department receive and gather information to perform various management tasks. I.e. the different department, sections or divisions of the organization.
 - ii) The external sources: Information is also received and collected from outside sources by the office. The information may be received or collected from the government departments, financial institutions, research institutions, universities and general public.
- 2) Recording Information: The information received and collected must be given a suitable shape. This is done by converting the information into the written record.
- 3) Arranging or processing information: This is a vital function of the office. In fact, it is perhaps the most basic function of the office. The information received cannot be used by the management the way in which it has been received.
- 4) Communicating information: All accumulated and processed information is useless unless it is put to further use. The office furnishes two-way channel for information, it receives information and then it transmits the same to the relevant department for their use. Classification of information to be communicated may be on the basis of its nature, time, etc. it is of the following categories:
 - i) It may be 'routine information' or special information.
 - ii) Information to be communicated may be oral or writing.
 - iii) Information may be "internal information or external information.
 - iv) Another category of information is the "active information" and the "passive information".
 - v) The information may also be the past information or the future information.

Administrative Management Functions

The functions discussed above are the basic functions of the office, but there are certain administrative management functions which are to be performed for the smooth functioning of the office. Following are some of the important administrative management functions.

1. Safety and record of assets: The office keeps in safe custody the records of assets of business. Besides it is also responsible for their upkeep and safety.
2. The assets are protected against hazards of fire and theft through insurance and other means.
3. Function of management process: Various processes of management account for the efficient functioning of an organization. In brief these processes are, planning, organizing, staffing, directing, communicating, controlling, coordinating and motivating.
4. Instituting office systems and routines: In any modern organisation it is necessary to institute systems and routines. Systems and routines indicate a systematic and planned approach to the problem of management.
5. Forms designing and control: Preparation of records is a basic function of the office. Offices are used extensively for the purpose of preparing records.
6. Stationery and supplies control: Stationery and other supplies also require careful purchasing and proper storage. In today's office, stationery is a costly consumable material.
7. Selecting and purchasing of office machines, equipment and furniture: Modern office requires for its functioning proper types of machines, equipment and furniture.
8. Recruiting, training, placing and remunerating office personnel: Although the problem of personnel is a part of the total management process, yet it would be essential to pay special attention to the personnel at all levels in the office.
9. Effective public relations: Public relations are very important aspect of the functions of modern office. The public relations are: (i) to keep the management informed about the changing public opinion. (ii) To communicate probably to the public the policies, aims and objectives of the organization.

The Office Manager

Office manager is used to describe the middle management level operating within the administrative function. The office manager's role may be recognized by considering the typical duties and responsibilities of the four distinguishable levels in administrative organizations:

1. The Administrative Manager: The office manager is responsible to the administrative manager, who is located in the organization at a point where all the

systems and clerical activities peak, which is at senior executive level. A typical list of responsibilities assigned to administrative manager is:

- a) To effectively control the administration functions throughout the organization at minimal cost
- b) To comply with legal requirements
- c) To provide an efficient communication network
- d) To ensure full use is made of information technology consistent with cost benefits.
- e) To co-ordinate and integrate all clerical activities with view to optimizing the main objectives of the concern.
- f) To approve a master budget for all administrative activities and submit it to the managing director.

2. The Office Manager: At departmental level it is likely that a number of supervisors will be reporting to the office manager. Each supervisor will be responsible for a section which may be limited to dealing with one procedure or may deal with more, depending upon the size of the organization. A representative list of the office manager's responsibilities would be :

- a) To control the system and procedures within his department.
- b) To coordinate the clerical activities with other departments
- c) To ensure optimum use of all machines and equipment
- d) To maintain an effective group of staff
- e) To work within the agreed budget
- f) To maintain a close link with the administrative manager

3. The Office Supervisor: Sometimes the office supervisor is referred to as section leader and he may be responsible for six to ten group leaders or senior clerks, each one dealing with a segment of the procedure which is known as an activity. A typical list of his responsibilities would be :

- a) To run the section on a day to day basis
- b) To control the clerical staff in his section
- c) To advise, guide and instruct staff
- d) To maintain discipline and sanction staff where necessary
- e) To utilize supervisory skills in the most efficient way
- f) To control output in terms of quantity and quality of work, timeless and cost

4. Group Leader or Senior Clerk: Although the senior clerk is responsible for a group of about three to six clerks, it is not unusual for him to spend as much as 80% of his time on clerical duties.

The Purpose of Clerical Activity

The purpose of any activity may be defined as the design of effecting something, or the thing it is designed to effect. The definition includes all the main elements of office management described below, provided that the term service is employed in its broad meaning to include information technology and all its associated activities.

The Main Elements of Office Management

- i) Management Skills: These must be applied effectively making office management both an art and a science
- ii) Administrative Knowledge: An abundance of knowledge in the various disciplines and knowledge areas is essential
- iii) Clear Objectives: The aims must be concise and in the various disciplines and knowledge areas is essential
- iv) The Office Function: This function represents the work the office is designed to perform namely to receive, record, arrange and give information wherever and whenever it is needed throughout the organization.
- v) The Communication Network: The flow of information in many diverse directions depends upon the provision of a formal and informal comprehensive network of communication channels.
- vi) The Staff and Environment: The successful operation of the function rests with administrative staff and their degree of effectiveness within the environment they are expected to work in
- vii) Software and Hardware: The provision of suitable forms, systems, procedures, and other paperwork, machines, equipment and technique is an essential support feature which demand constant attention safeguarding.

Current Problems in Office Management

Practicing office managers will be well aware of the main difficulties associated with their function. The potential office manager must be prepared to accept the difficulties which underlie the job and he should work towards overcoming them eventually. Ten typical problem areas are now illustrated.

- 1) Recognition: Although there are indications that more and more concern are recognizing the importance of the administration function, many organizations are still not geared towards acceptance of his concept.
- 2) Development of Information: The teething troubles with any new technology tend to detract from its immense possibilities.
- 3) Assignment of blame: There is distinct tendency to blame the technology if a scheme associated with it fails.

- 4) Indistinct objectives attainment: Objectives are easy to state but it is very difficult to prove that they are being approached or achieved if the results are not measurable in quantitative terms. Unfortunately some of the objectives in office management and administrative management are qualitative. Their achievement often depends upon personal opinion and it is impractical and impossible to separate other influencing factors which affect the outcome of operational effectiveness in this function. It is essential to have goodwill and an understanding of the evolving situation in which the function plays its part.
- 5) Cost-benefit analysis: Closely connected with the problem mentioned above is the complexity of rising costs in office work.
- 6) Overall control: The problem of actually finding a suitable senior executive who possess the high capability necessary to control this function effectively is difficult to solve at present.
- 7) Information requirement: One of the unfortunate features of administrative inefficiency is that management's information requirements are not accurately known. The cause of this problem is debatable. There are two extreme schools of thought: One feels that each manager should say what information he requires and the other feels that the administrative manager should decide. One solution is to discuss information requirement together, thus using both parties more effectively.
- 8) The leadership problem: An entirely different form of leadership is needed to cope with the current situation in industry and commerce compared with thirty years ago.
- 9) Technology change: A problem which is shared by all specialist is one involving the work of keeping pace with technological change.
- 10) Co-coordinating company activities: The professional administrator is fast becoming involved in the coordination and steering activities of the business alongside other professionals.

Office Organisation

An office or any business concern needs to manage human and material resources effectively and effectively in order to survive. Organization is a system of consciously coordination of activities of people.

Principle of Organization

1. Objectives and purpose: Organization must provide the framework within all activities to achieve the overall organizational objectives and mission.
2. Work specialization: Work specialization is the degree of which task in the organization are sub divided into separate jobs.
3. Span of control: This is the number of subordinates a supervisor can effectively and

efficiently manage; the span of control limits the number of subordinate reporting to as superior.

4. Delegation of Authority: This is the resting of decision making powers on a subordinate by his superior.
5. Co-ordination of activities: Coordination is a facilitative function aimed at integrating the other managerial functions and activities to achieve goals and objectives.
6. Responsibility: These are jobs or assignments or duty that an individual must deal with and take decisions relating to them.

Forms of Organization

Functional organization

This is an organization where all types of similar work of the organization are grouped into units, sections and departments managed by executive. The manager in these functional areas has the authority over all employees in this function.

Advantages

- a) The functional efficiency of the worker is maintained
- b) Greatest use of division of labour
- c) Mass production is made by standardization and specialization
- d) Methods and operations can be standardized
- e) The system is based on expert knowledge

Disadvantages

- a) Too many, expert and bosses create confusions in the mind of workers
- b) It is difficult to fix responsibility on workers
- c) There is often contradictory orders from different superior expert on the workers

Line Organization

In this type of organization authority flows from top to bottom, through the use of delegation, subordinates are responsible to their immediate superior.

Advantages

- a) It is simple to work with
- b) It is economical and effective
- c) It facilitates quick decisions and prompt actions
- d) Quick communication is easy

Disadvantages

- a) The organization is rigid and inflexible
- b) It works on a dictatorial basis
- c) In big businesses it does not operate satisfactorily

Line and Staff Organization

This is a hybrid of line function and staffs function. The line officers carry out the functions within the organization while the staff officer advises them and provides support services.

Advantages

- a) It is based purely on specialization
- b) It pays more attention to expert knowledge
- c) It may increase efficiency of operation

Disadvantages

- a) There may be confusion if the responsibilities are not clearly indicated
- b) Workers may misinterpret expert advice given through line managers

Committee Organization

A committee is a group of people who meet to discuss or make decision on a particular matter. Committee organization is used for discharging advisory functions of management.

Advantages

- a) It facilitates coordination of ideas and activities of various departments
- b) It is a good media of training employees
- c) It provides improved motivation and morale of employees
- d) It promotes mutual understanding, team work and cooperation among employees

Disadvantages

- a) It consumes time
- b) Difficulty in reaching agreement on decision
- c) Indecision may lead to a breakdown of group action

Office System and Procedure

A system is a way of working, organizing which follows a fixed plan or set of rules. A system is a pre-planned approach to the day to day work to attain the set goals. Office system is therefore a standard sequence of operations in a particular business activity and how these operations are performed and where they are performed.

Office Procedure

A system is composed of a number of procedures. Office procedures are series of logical acts organized under supervision to accomplish the purpose of the office. Office procedure is a series of logical steps by which all repetitive business actions is initiated, performed, controlled and finalized.

Method

A method is a manual or a particular way of achieving a task. Method can also be a mechanized means and devices of performing a task or an operation. Methods are used to attain procedures and various procedures makes a system.

Characteristics of Functional Office System

- i) Adaptability
- ii) Acceptability
- iii) Dependability
- iv) Flexibility
- v) Resourceful
- vi) Systematic

Eleven principles of office system and procedure

- i) To have a good flow of work without bottle necks
- ii) To avoid duplication of work and records
- iii) To reduce unnecessary movement of staff
- iv) To avoid unnecessary writing
- v) To make the best use of specialization
- vi) To keep the amount of paper work to the minimum
- vii) To use the principle of management by exception
- viii) To make as few exceptions to the rule as possible
- ix) To avoid unnecessary checking
- x) To make the best use of machines
- xi) To seek simplicity

Need/Reasons for/Importance of System and Procedures

- i) Office efficiency is improved
- ii) Delay can be avoided
- iii) Responsibilities can be assigned to a particular employee
- iv) Better control of work is possible
- v) Better coordination is possible'
- vi) It frees the management from repetition of orders

Office Manuals

Office manuals are document or a book that contains the details of the entire office duties and other related issues. It is the office system and procedures in the book form. It contains general informations, office rules and regulations, safety instructions, job description, office facilities, executive relationship etc.

Benefits of organizational manuals

- a) It makes supervision of work in offices easier
- b) Office manual clarify doubts when they arise
- c) It is a source of ready information at anytime
- d) It enhance the understanding of how employee perform their jobs
- e) It include delegation authority and assignment of duties

Delegation

The office work is designed with the belief that no one person can do all the work at the same time, therefore the need for delegation. Delegation means assigning work or tasks to others and giving them the required authority to do it.

Importance of Delegation

- a) Delegation is necessary for performance of the organization
- b) It allows superiors to be released and have less burden
- c) It reduces workload
- d) It helps train subordinates

Elements of Delegation

Three major components of delegation are authority, responsibility and accountability.

1. Authority: According to Simon, authority is the power to make decision which guide the actions of another. It is a relationship between two individuals, one superior and the subordinate.
2. Responsibility: Responsibility is the work, task or duty assigned to a subordinates. It can also be define as the work assigned to a position.
3. Accountability: It is the stock taking of tasks, duties, events that has been assigned to the subordinates.

Centralization and Decentralization of Authority

Centralization and decentralization are the qualities that make up authority. Thus, the two are closely connected with the delegation of authority. Centralization is the systematic and consistent reservation of authority at central points within an organization. Centralization of

authority means all office works are carried on in a central place and managed by a single top official. In other words, centralization refers to the concentration of decision making.

Decentralization on the other hand, is the systematic effort to delegation to the lowest level, all authority except that which can only exercised at the central points. Decentralization is closely linked with the delegation of authority. Decentralization of office therefore means that each department of the concern possesses its own office (Bako & Taiwo, 1998).

Advantages of Centralization

- 1) The office manager can distribute the work equally amongst the member of the staff
- 2) There is elimination of under centralization duplicators, typists, etc.
- 3) There is possibility of better supervision by a single man
- 4) Each worker will have to perform a particular type of work
- 5) It brings uniformity of action
- 6) There is no need to give overtime work to any department
- 7) Quick decisions can be taken

Disadvantages of Centralization

- 1) There is a delay in getting information because if information is needed, the central office must be approached
- 2) The section-heads suffer from an inferiority complex for every information, the central office (supreme) is to be approached
- 3) The staff working in the central office may feel proud, at the same time such feelings may wound the staff working in different sections
- 4) It is possible that mistakes or errors will creep in since the central office is overloaded
- 5) Too much concentration of authority or control over others may spoil the interest and initiative of the subordinates
- 6) There is delay in the accomplishment of work owing to the transmitting of the records from and to centralized units
- 7) Needs for Decentralization of Authority
- 1) Larger size of an organization needs decentralization
- 2) Growth and diversification of activities leads to overburdened work
- 3) The increase in competitive markets calls for decentralization
- 4) Training executives leads to decentralization
- 5) External and internal factors lead to decentralization

Factors Affecting Decentralization

- 1) Costliness of the decision: The general principle is that more costly the action to be decided upon, the more probable it is that the decision will be made at the upper levels of management.
- 2) Uniformity of Policy: Decentralization is essential for having uniformity of policy.
- 3) Size: The large the enterprise, the greater the number of levels and the decisions to be made at each level.
- 4) History of the enterprise: Often those enterprises which grow from within have a greater degree of centralization and those which have a large size due to mergers or initial decision shall have a greater degree of decentralization.
- 5) Desire for independence: The desire for independence is inherent in all men and it is more so in more dynamic amongst them.
- 6) Availability of managers: The shortage or otherwise of management personnel affects the degree of decentralization.

Office Accommodation and Layout

The central objective of all management process is to get the work done willingly at the lowest cost. Office management aims at getting the work done in the office at the lowest cost through proper selection and training of staff and the machines and equipment that they use. The efforts of the best kind of equipment would not produce the desired amount of efficiency unless the environments are congenial to efficient working. Hence there is the need for sufficient accommodation with the right type of amenities imbibed in it. Suitable and congenial accommodation affects favourably the mental and physical well-being of the office worker; he is bound to be more efficient since he feels that he is properly looked after in terms of accommodation. Although in our country, office accommodation is not been paid the attention it deserves, yet over the last two decades or more, government as well as business are showing a greater awareness about this aspect of the office. We now find well maintained offices in the sphere of business.

Factors to be considered to Provide Accommodation

The following factors are to be considered in providing the right type of office accommodation:

1. Locating the Office building

It is necessary to locate the office building properly. A bad location destroys efficiency as it results in loss of time and causes inconvenience and annoyance to the office workers as well as the outsiders who deal with the organization. It is difficult to state precisely as to what is the best location. Each organization whether business or non-business, has to select its own site by taking into account the various factors that affects its functioning.

Choice of location: Urban or Sub-urban

The management has to take a major decision as to whether the location of the office is to be in an urban area (or a large city or town) or in a suburban area, situated at a distance from a city but quite closely connected with it by means of transport and communication. In the west, there has been an increasing tendency to locate offices away from urban concentrations to suburban areas. The reasons for such a tendency have been many. Some of the more important of the reasons are (i) higher cost. (ii) Over-crowding and congestion (iii) growing transport and communication facilities (iv) shift in industrial activity etc.

Centralized versus decentralized location.

Large concerns, which had traditionally operated from a single location, are now following the pattern of setting up branches in different parts of the country. They are doing so to take advantage of factors like local raw materials, labour supply, regional markets, transport economics and such other factors which influence their functioning. Some of the concerns (like Hindustan machine tools HMT) have tried to keep each plant small enough for convenient administration and for closer labour management relations.

Factors Affecting office Location

Once a decision has been made as to urban or suburban location, it would be desirable to consider the following factors for choosing the office building.

- i. Availability of means of transport: The office should be so located that efficient means of transport. This would ensure smooth functioning of the office. Location near a railway station, inter-state bus terminal or airport is of great advantage to certain types of businesses.
- ii. Availability of various service facilities: Service facilities as banks, insurance companies, post offices road transport company's offices, retail stores and restaurants ensure greater efficiency of the business since they are to be used by the staff as well as the business.
- iii. Relation of office with other units of the enterprise: It would be worthwhile to locate the office in the same building as the factory if the firm is a manufacturing firm. Similarly the location of the office would be influenced by other activities of the business, e.g. sales. Proximate location of different units of the same business results in saving of line of communication between different units of the organization, better parking facilities, better public relation and better personnel servicing.
- iv. Relation of office with surroundings: it would be ideal to locate office building in a manner that the surroundings are healthy. Noise, firms and congestion in an area have a bad effect on the health and efficiency of the office worker.

- v. Effect of localization: If the office is located at a place where the offices of units carrying similar business are located, it would ensure reputation and better customer service. But this cannot be a guiding factor. In fact over the last one decade or so, there has been a tendency against this type of concentration in our own country due to better means of communications (telephone and telex, etc.) and improved transport facilities.
- vi. Central, state and local taxes: such taxes too influence the location of the office. Lower taxes on property, manufacturing and sales, etc in a given area may be helpful in locating the office in that area. But the tax advantage will have to be considered in the light of other factors of location.
- vii. Getting the required space: Before finally deciding the location, it would be essential to find out whether the minimum required space is available in a given location. It is an important factor that puts a constraint or choosing a preferred location.

2. Securing the required Office Accommodation

Once the location has been finalized, it would become necessary to choose office space or building. Such office space or building should be of adequate size and proper shape to suit the requirement of the organization. Besides, the space secured must allow for expansion of the office in future.

Ownership versus lease

One of the basic questions as to office building is whether it is to be owned or taken on rent or lease. This is a policy decision which is to be taken by managers at the top.

3. Size of Office Accommodation

Once a decision is to whether the office space is to be owned or taken on lease has been made, another decision to be taken along with that is the decision as to the size of the office accommodation.

The size of the office accommodation must be such that it suits the present needs and allow for possible expansion in future. To provide for the future growth of the office, it is necessary to find out the rate of growth of the business and the effect that this growth will have on the office. However, it is desirable to avoid the provision of unnecessary space for future use, if the growth rate cannot be calculated with some certainty because it means payment of rent for the unutilized space. However, it is necessary to provide adequate space for machines and equipment and the personnel in and the least inconvenience.

4. Shape of Office Accommodation

Shape of the office accommodation is an important factor to be considered while procuring space. The shape of the accommodation may be square, rectangular, I-shaped, narrow and long, vertical or horizontal. There are two important reasons why proper shape should be selected. Firstly, lot of space may be wasted in providing for corridors and space is narrow and long, the cost of providing space may be unduly high. Other things being equal, rectangular shape of the office is ideal. It ensures better utilization of office accommodation and greater efficiency of the personnel as they move over a limited area.

5. Lighting and Ventilation of the Office Space

Adequate and proper lighting and ventilation of the office building or space, is of great importance since this has an important effect on the efficiency and morale. A well-lighted and ventilated accommodation put lesser physical and mental strain on the office worker and consequently, his morale is higher.

6. Layout and Facilities for Office Organisation

Modern business rests not only on its personnel and equipment but also how they are arranged. Much of the efficiency of men and machines in the modern office depends upon their layout. In the modern office, the internal arrangement must take place on the basis of the office systems and structure of organization.

7. Customer and Staff Convenience

In selecting or constructing office accommodation, it is necessary to provide properly for the convenience of customers and staff.

Departments such as sales and cash, which are visited more frequently by customers, should be so located that they have an easy accessibility.

8. Cost of Office or Accommodation

It is the most important single factor that would ultimately determine the choice of the office building location as well as its size and internal arrangements. The management should aim at striking a balance between the total requirements and the capacity to pay for office space. While balancing these two factors, it is necessary to keep in mind the efficiency factor. However, the cost of space should be within the means of the business but at the same time efficiency cannot be sacrificed merely for the sake of economy in cost.

9. Miscellaneous Considerations

There are some other considerations which must also be borne in mind while selecting office space or accommodation. More important of these are flexibility of the space to match the changing needs of business, ease in installing machines and equipment, safety of the machines and equipment and safety of the personnel in the office.

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