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1 The Origin of a File Plan/ Filing Key

Records form the "memory" of an organisation. Even if someone were capable of remembering everything, there is still the problem that staff changes and later arrivals must know what occurred previously in order to carry on sensibly and purposefully. There has to be evidence of what was done and how it was done.

It is therefore necessary for the documents to be stored according to a logical sequence so that they can be easily retrieved, not only by the person who filed them, but also by anyone else.

2 The Necessity of an Effective File Plan/Filing Key

The establishment and maintenance of an effective file plan is essential to the smooth and efficient functioning of any administrative institution. It is dependent on the speed with which documents required can be traced and delivered and on the completeness of all the documents furnished in connection with a particular subject. An effective file plan ensures that all documents are stored or filed in such a way that all areas of on a given matter are together and can be found with the least loss of time.

3 Basic Requirements of a Good File Plan

The fundamental requirement for filing documents is that they should be grouped together in such a manner that those required to be read together should in fact be filed together. Therefore all documents concerning a certain matter should be filed together so that the background on the matter may be established with the greatest certainty and retrieved in the shortest possible time.

The basic requirements with which a good file plan must comply are:

- Logical and consistent;
- Flexible;
- As simple as possible;
- Descriptions are concise and unambiguous;
- No duplication or overlapping of subjects.

Being **logical and consistent** means that the file plan should be arranged logically and not merely compiled without purpose or sense. When a particular method of arrangement has been decided upon, it must be adhered to consistently and deviations should not occur without sound reasons. It implies that the file plan should be such that anyone and not only the compilers, must be able to understand and apply it as soon as the principles on which it is based have been grasped.

The file plan must be **flexible** so that any further additions can be introduced in the future without disturbing the original pattern and without requiring major amendments to the file plan itself.

The file plan should be as **simple as possible**, that is to say, it should not be made complicated without reason. Preference should always be given to the simple method rather than the complicated one, where both may achieve the same objective.

The description of any subject or subdivision in a file plan should be **concise and unambiguous** preferably consisting of as few words as possible. Under no circumstance should descriptions such as **General, Various, Miscellaneous** or **Main File** be chosen as headings. Such descriptions lead, without fail, to correspondence which should have been filed elsewhere or requiring new files coming to rest on the General (etc.) file without any effort being made to classify it properly.

Subjects should be so chosen and described to avoid **duplication or overlapping** of subjects. Documents about the same subject cannot be placed on two or more files. In cases where there is a possibility of incorrect filing of documents, as when provision has been made in different places in the file plan for two aspects of the same matter, attention should be drawn to this by means of cross references.

4   A Functional Subject File Plan

A subject file plan is the division of the functions and activities of the particular body into a number of main subjects; the division of each main subject is further subdivided into subjects; the further division of each subject, etc., until the subdivision has been taken far enough to justify a file for that aspect of the particular matter. For example, the first level identifies the functions; the second level describes the activities associated with the functions; the third level represents the transactions or documents associated with the activity. It is at the third level where files can be started.

The first file of a series should, where possible, be the policy file. Everything relating to policy and procedure, decisions and directives, should be placed on it, including all circulars related to policy matters. Where a policy decision arises from a matter dealt with on another file, a copy of that decision should be placed on the policy file. Such files

help to bring together all documents dealing with policy decisions and procedural instructions. They are of inestimable value in briefing someone who is not well informed on such matters within a short space of time.

Policy files are numbered by adding a capital letter "P" or the number "0" as the last component of the reference number allocated to the files. In this way, policy files for which no provision was made originally can be inserted easily at a later stage without renumbering the other existing files.

5 The Compilation of a New File Plan

Preliminary Study

Before compiling a file plan for an agency, it is essential to carry out a thorough study of the organisation and functions of the particular body; for the file plan will be based on this framework and requirements. The final file plan will therefore have to reflect the structure and functions of the particular body. The assumption is such that a suitable and stable organizational structure exists. Should this not be the case, this aspect should be corrected before a file plan is compiled.

When conducting the review, attention should be taken of whether the existing files are too thick or too thin. Should it transpire, for example, that there are hundreds of thin files, the indication is that the division is too small and that the new file plan should follow a more practical division. If, on the other hand, a file is far too thick and runs to several parts, thereby hampering efforts to trace previous correspondence, it is obvious that a further division of these subjects are required.

Compilation of File Categories

Firstly, the main subjects should be determined from the preliminary study. It should now be possible to divide the activities of the body under a number of headings. The organisational structure will usually identify a number of headings, as there will be sections dealing specifically with those aspects, e.g. Staff, Materials and Equipment, Administration and Organisation, etc.

A list of main categories should be compiled and should be such that the main categories together cover all activities of the Ministry/Department. The number of main categories should be as few as possible. The more there are, the more difficult it will be to describe them mutually exclusive and, consequently, the more difficult it will be to place a document correctly.

The decisive factor in determining how small the sub-category will be, is the amount of correspondence conducted on the matter. Should correspondence be voluminous, the

sub-category will have to be subdivided so that different aspects of it may be dealt with on different files.

The smallest subdivision is usually achieved when provision is made for a file for each person, place, institution, etc. These are the so-called "case files". It is seldom necessary to open sub-files for case files.

It should be borne in mind that, just as it is undesirable to place too much correspondence on one file, it is as undesirable to have too many sub-files.

The following is an example of how main categories can be subdivided to various levels:

4   MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT (Categories)

      4/P   Policies and Regulations

      4/1   Purchases and Requisitions

      4/2   Inventories

      4/3   Maintenance and Repairs

      4/4   Disposal

> Subdivision according to various aspects dealt with

It may transpire that correspondence in connection with Maintenance and Repairs (2/3) is comprehensive enough to justify a further division of the subject. This can be done as follows:

      4/3   Maintenance and Repairs

      4/3/1   Furniture

      4/3/2   Computer Equipment

Subdivisions should be kept on the same level. Here, it should be borne in mind that subject descriptions and the names of persons or bodies may not appear on the same level, for this invariably causes overlapping. It would be **wrong** to subdivide Schools as follows:

Schools

'   Alexandra Secondary

'   Primary Schools

'   Secondary Schools

'   St. Stephen's Primary

The **correct** subdivision would be:

11 Primary Schools

    11/P   School Policies & Regulations

    11/1   Chalky Mount Primary

        11/1/1   Student Affairs

        11/1/2   Use of Building

        11/1/3   Maintenance of Buildings

12 Secondary Schools

Sequence of Categories

The arrangement of the categories (main as well as sub-categories) should, as far as possible, be in order of importance - in other words, a logical arrangement. This, of course, presents problems, for no two persons will place a series of subjects in the same sequence. Nevertheless, an attempt must be made to obtain a logical sequence. Anyone using the file plan would hardly expect to find an important subject at the end therefore, no one should place Staff last and Boards/Committees and Meetings first.

In determining the sequence of the main categories it is advisable to place those main subjects dealing with support/administrative matters first and, thereafter, the main subjects dealing with line or core functions. The reason for this is that support matters are largely stereotyped and additions of new main subjects are seldom, if ever, necessary.   Line functions, however, may require alterations from time to time. Whenever main subjects with reference to them are placed at the end additions can be made without being forced to muddle main subjects for line matters with support matters.

Lay-out

The descriptions of main subjects and, in some cases, of the subjects themselves, are of too general a nature for use as file titles. Their sole use as headings is to permit further subdivision to yield more specific subjects. Such general subjects should be underlined in the file plan and should be accompanied by a clearly stated instruction in the introduction that subjects which are underlined do not represent files.

Numbering

Files are numbered mainly because the number is a simple and easy symbol for reference purposes and to maintain the sequence of files in storage.

As no file plan can remain static, provision has to be made for later additions and extensions in such a way that additions can be made at the correct place without dislocating the numbering. The term "correct place" means, that place where the subject

fits or where it would have been placed had it been known when the file plan was compiled. To achieve this, use is made of strokes and numbers, (e.g. 2/2/3/4). The more strokes and numbers used, the more flexible will be the file plan.

It is in fact seldom necessary to use more than five strokes, but should they be required there should be no hesitation about using more when necessary. The objection that a long number is confusing is not always valid, for if the file plan is logical and each number represents a subject, it can usually be remembered very easily. The problems inherent in a file plan that is insufficiently flexible are more and greater than those accompanying long numbers.

A number is allocated to each main category, sub-category etc., by starting from one at each series or sub-series. A file number is then obtained by combining the numbers of all the series, separating them by means of diagonal strokes, e.g. 5/2/3/1. Each figure in such a number represents a particular subject and the sequence of a figure in the number indicates that the subject represented is subordinate to, or an aspect of, the subject represented by the previous figure. Each file number must therefore be analysed so that each figure represents a subject or an aspect of one.

In numbering files the use of reference letters should be avoided if possible, for example, TAD 3/1/8 where TAD merely stands for Training Administration Division. This merely causes more writing and typing and lengthens file numbers unnecessarily. Its sole purpose might be to indicate that it is the file number of a particular body, but this is unnecessary in any case, since the address on the correspondence already indicates the origin of a document or its destination. File covers should carry the stamp identifying the organisation.

6 The Recommended File Plan for Administrative Functions

The following represents the recommended file plan for support/administrative functions. The administrative functions are further subdivided into activities. (Please note that the activities shown on the next page are generic examples and could vary from agency to agency). Therefore, the Senior Clerk could modify the activities to fit their organisation.

FILE SERIES	SUPPORT/ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS
1	Staff
2	Administration and Organisation
3	Accounting and Finance
4	Materials & Equipment
5	Buildings and Installations
6	Boards/Committees and Meetings
7	Information and Public Relations
8	Relations with Other Organisations
9	Not currently in Use - for future use
	LINE/CORE FUNCTIONS
10	
11	

1   **STAFF** - The function of recruiting, training and developing all staff. It Includes the activities of managing posts, training staff, etc. Personnel and leave matters for staff members will ***not*** be handled in this function.

1/P Policies and Regulations
(Policy matters, decisions and directives).

1/1 Post
(The activity of managing all the posts in the department. It includes recruitment, vacancies, job descriptions and duties etc).

1/2 Training/ Seminars/Workshops/Conferences
(The activity of training and developing staff such as training and study leave, training opportunities, etc).

2   **ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANISATION** - The function of administering the organisation and its activities. It includes the activities of requesting services, developing procedural manuals, security, reports, circulars, plans and programmes.

2/P Policies and Regulations

2/1 Circulars and Correspondence from Governmental Agencies
(The activity of facilitating projects and disseminating information sent by Government Agencies).

2/2 Procedural Manuals
(The activity of developing and issuing procedural manuals to support the functions of the organisation).

2/3 Security Services
(The activity of providing security services for the organisation).

2/4 Accommodation
(The activity of providing accommodation for staff).

2/5 Reports
(The activity of preparing and disseminating & receiving reports on the functions of the organisation and the agencies under the purview of the parent ministry).

2/6 Requests for Services
(The activity of requesting services to support the functions of the organisation).

2/7 Plans and Programs
(The activity of developing plans and programmes to support the functions of the organisation. It includes documents generated in the evaluation and testing stages, etc. of new projects).

3   **ACCOUNTING AND FINANCE** - The function of providing accounting and financial services to the organisation. It includes estimates preparation, financial reporting, and accounts payable.

3/P Policies and Regulations

3/1 Estimates
(The activities involved in the preparation of the annual estimates such as drafts, supplementary provision, approvals & allocations).

3/2 Financial and Accounting Documents
(The activities involved in preparing financial and accounting reports such as appropriation and revenue accounts, request for allocations & finance warrants).

3/3 Accounts Payable
(The activity of recording and tracking payables such as utilities and payments to suppliers).

4   **MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT** - The function of procuring and maintaining all materials and equipment, vehicles and office supplies. It includes the activities of purchasing, maintaining inventory and disposal.

4/P Policies and Regulations

4/1 Purchases and Requisitions
(The activity of procuring and purchasing all material and supplies such as requisitions, estimates, suppliers & contracts).

4/2 Inventories
(The activity of maintaining up-to-date inventories on all equipment and supplies).

4/3 Maintenance and Repairs
(The activity of maintaining and repairing all equipment, vehicles, computers and furniture).

4/4 Disposal Mechanisms
(The activity of disposing all equipment, vehicles, computers and furniture).

5   **BUILDINGS AND INSTALLATIONS** - The function of acquiring and maintaining buildings and real property. It includes the activities of construction, maintenance, leasing or rental and use of premises.

5/P Policies and Regulations

5/1 Construction
(The activity of constructing office buildings designing contracts, terms & conditions, etc).

5/2 Maintenance
(The activity providing maintenance to buildings and property such as quotations, complaints, reports and contracts).

5/3 Lease /rental of building
(The activity of acquiring office buildings by leasing or renting building and property, includes contracts, terms and conditions).

5/4 Use of Premises
(The activity of allowing clubs, schools etc., to use premises and property for recreation or training. Inclusive of terms and conditions, contracts, insurance).

6   **BOARDS/COMMITTEES AND MEETINGS** - The function of convening & recording all matters relevant to the management of all meetings attended by staff of the agency.

6/P Policies and Regulations

6/1 Official Boards/Committees
(The activity of managing & recording all activities related to official boards and committees. For example, minutes, notices and agendas).

6/2 External Committees
(The activity of coordinating staff assigned to committees not managed by the department).

6/3 Internal Committees
(The activity of coordinating ad-hoc internal committees).

7	**INFORMATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS** - The function of disseminating and collecting information such as the activities of public relations, responding to requests for information, ceremonies and public outreach.

7/P Policies and Regulations

7/1 Public Relations
(The activity of preparing speeches, press releases & the collection of press clippings and any other publication material, etc.).

7/2 Requests for Information/Comments
(The activity of responding to requests for information either by an external or internal agency/body).

7/3 Ceremonies/ Celebrations
(The activity of organising ceremonies and celebrations).

7/4 Public Outreach Programme
(The activity of disseminating information and education to the public).

8	**RELATIONS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS** - The function of facilitating projects with and giving assistance to organisations. It includes the activities undertaken with foreign governments and non-governmental organisations – local and overseas.)

8/P Policies and Regulations

8/1 Foreign Governments/Organisations
(The activity of facilitating projects in collaboration with foreign governments/organisations).

8/2 Non- Governmental Organisations (Local)
(The activity of facilitating projects in collaboration with the local non-governmental organisations).

8/3 Non- Governmental Organisations (Overseas)
(The activity of facilitating projects in collaboration with overseas non-governmental organisations).

7   Implementation of a New File Plan

A number of activities are now carried out in preparation for the introduction of the new file classification system. Ensured that, if necessary, the purging of the system has taken place, the rearrangement of the Registry and the required supplies obtained.

Preparations

A schedule is prepared for the introduction of the new Registry system. The schedule indicates the order, activities and times in which the Registry is to be restructured. The agreed timetable is circulated within the Registry and Ministry/Department.

The facilitator should arrange a meeting with the action officers. The purpose is to confirm the users' support, explain the procedures and timing for introducing the new Registry system. Reassure the officers that they will continue to have access to the files created in the old system but that the new correspondence will now be placed on a new set of files.

The facilitator ensures that Registry staff understands the new systems and procedures.

Installation of the New Records Management System

In preparation for closing the active files and opening new ones, the Registry staff decides how records will be physically stored in the records office. The basic principle is that the old files will be held as a block in the filing cabinets and the new files will be kept separately in a designated storage area. (Note: The old and new system may be running parallel.) Over time, the new files will steadily grow in number and the old files will gradually be moved out to the Records Centre. In normal circumstances, these closed files should not be held in the records office for **longer than three years**, so that within three years of the review exercise they should all be transferred to the Records Centre.

At the date of the changeover, when the mail folder is returned to the Registry section after circulation to senior staff, new files are opened within the new system for all new correspondence. Matters in progress may continue on the old file until a convenient time for transfer to the new system. The team monitors this process carefully. This strategy for opening files guarantees that no new files are opened unnecessarily.

An alternative method

Open new files beforehand for every file which may reasonably be expected to be required soon or was active on an agreed date. The preparation of file covers may cause delay in filing if everything is left until the date of the changeover. A simple rule of thumb is to include only those files that have had papers added to them within the

previous month. This strategy, while providing a ready filing system for all active subjects, has the disadvantage of opening new files that may never be used.

Each new file is assigned a reference number according to the new filing key. Files are indexed using the new file classification scheme, with new headings being created as the need arises.

When new file titles and numbers are used for the new files, a reference must be made on the inside cover of both files

When a new file is sent to an action officer, the corresponding old file is tied to it. The old file is used for reference only. The movements of both files are recorded in the File Transit Cards. Each action officer is given an adequate supply of file movement slips and informed that the records office will provide more, as required.