UNIT 6 : WORK FLOW IN OFFICE

UNIT STRUCTURE

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- learn the flow of work in an organisation
- discuss the different types of problems in the flow of work
- describe the various types of flow charts
- explain the advantages of flow charts.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we are going to discuss about flow of work in a particular organisation. Office organisation as a subject of study is now attracting attention from business firms, companies, institutions and even from countries. Here we are going to study about the various types of problems that are encountered in the work flow of an office organization. This unit

also tells us about the different types of flow charts that are prevalent in today's scenario. Further, in this unit we are going to discuss about the advantages of the flow charts.

6.3 OFFICE SYSTEM-AN OVERVIEW

People work better if they are given the proper surrounding and equipments along with a systematic work flow. In management, a system may be regarded as a planned approach to the activities which are necessary for the attainment of desired objectives. To have a proper work flow there should be a good office system.

Definition of System : A system is an interrelated method which is necessary to achieve a very defined goal.

Objectives of Systems : A system may be defined as an interrelated method bringing in the necessary inputs and processes which are necessary to achieve a very defined goal (output). Developing the system perspectives in an office setting helps in achieving the following.

1) To have efficiency in the optimum utilization of all the resources of the company office.
2) To have a control over the operating costs.
3) To improve the efficiency of the operating systems.
4) Lastly but not the least to help the organization achieve their goals and aims.

System Design : Initially the system analysts were concerned with the simple design of the system. They know that specific systems should be purchased but they could not make up their minds which specific machines should be purchased. Even they have not decided which procedures to follow, so they only concentrate on the general systems flow.

In an office setting, having a well defined system is very important. An office receives information, processes information and submits reports. An office receives letters, reports, payments etc. All these things need to be received and passed on for the use of the concerned decision makers in a systematic manner. The office procedures need to be designed in a

systematic way. In the absence of system design, the office activities will be carried out in a haphazard manner resulting in loss of time and inefficiency.

Advantages of Office System : The following are the advantages if suitable systems and procedures are adopted in an office–

i) Delays can be eleminated.

ii) Uniformity in office work can be achieve.

iii) Systems and routines help in training office personnel.

iv) Better co-ordination is possible through the introduction of a system.

Limitations of Office System : Some of the limitations of the office system are–

i) The effectiveness of a system depends on planning. A system will fail to produce results unless proper planning goes into its formulation.

ii) The frequent changes in an office may impose the burden of a great expenditure on the organization.

iii) The efficiency of a system should be evaluated by making a cost-benefit analysis.

6.4 FLOW OF WORK

Flow of Work : Flow of work is the procedure of moving the work from one operation to another operation. How much work has been gone through done, what is the rate that it has moved along and how is the smoothness of the work smoothly that has been done are some of the important areas related with the study of work flow. A steady and constant flow of work following a particular routine has a greater efficiency than the one which has no routine to follow.

Interruption of the flow of work is the greatest hindrance that can be there while achieving the output. The efficiency of work should be there so that the work is done properly. In order to get the efficiency in work, interruption of the flow of work should be eliminated.

A workflow consists of a sequence of connected steps where each step follows without delay or gap and ends just before the subsequent step

may begin. It is a sequence of operations of people or organization or staff,etc. Work flow is supposed to follow the process from one step to another in a continuous manner.

Workflow Management System : A workflow management system is a computer system that helps to manage a series of tasks within an organization to produce a final result. Workflow management systems allow the performer to define various workflows for different types of jobs or processes. For example, in a manufacturing setting, a design document might be automatically directed from designer to a technical director to the production engineer. At each and every stage in the workflow, one individual or group is responsible for a specific task. Once the work is complete, the workflow software informs that the individuals or the groups responsible for the next task are informed and they receive the data that they need to perform in their next step of the process. Workflow management systems also looks over unnecessary work and see to it that the uncompleted work are being followed up.

Similar types of work flows are found in offices also. For example, in a branch office of a bank different types of work flows are there for different types of activities. In case of a creating a fixed deposit for a customer, the dealing clerck will administer the form, verify the data and supporting documents, enter the data, collect the payment, asks for authorization by higher officials. Then only the fixed deposit will be issued. Accordingly, the entries will be recorded in the issue register. These are official procedures which help in defining work flow systems.

Workflow management systems have been proved to be very useful because it has lessened the work load. Now a days, the paper work has been made easy because of the management system in the work flow system. For example, in banks the banking software have enabled faster and effective delivery of service to customers. Now a days, instead of ledger entry, data are stored in digital format.

Depending on the type of office the work flow in the office varies.

6.4.1 Straight-Line Flow of Work

Straight flow of work is a method where the operations when it moves from one to another goes in a particular course which may or nearly be in a straight line. This implies that an operation starts from the beginning and goes to the end. But if the straight line flow of work is not planned properly, then there can be a lot of wastage of time and effort because most of the office operations are repetitive in nature.

Advantages of Straight-Line Flow of Work : Some of the advantages of straight line flow of work are discussed below :

- Speed is increased.
- Less danger.
- Less messenger work because work flows in straight lines.

Analysis of Flow of Work : It is very difficult to have an office where work flows in absolute straight lines or the flow of work never reverse back. All the offices we have seen where all these things happen. In some small cases only where the organization is small and the amount of work is also less then the flow of work can go in straight directions. But in many organizations where the flow of work cannot move in straight lines. Because of so many different routines some work processes take place concurrently. For example, in a hospital out patient department, laboratory, diagnostic services, canteen, registration desk etc. have separate work processes. The patient needs to be served in a coordinated manner, not on the basis of sequential completion of the work processes in each function. Many of the activities will take place simultaneously and will not fully depend on the completion of the sub processes. Therefore it is very much necessary to analyse the work before hand. This is necessary because then we would be able to correct the wrong things that has been going on. By analysis of the work, we can measure the work properly in the right direction and also make suggestions or recommendations if and where ever needed.

6.5 PROBLEMS IN THE FLOW OF WORK

Flow of Work is sometimes disturbed by many factors. When the factors come in the way of the flow of work then the output of the work is affected. Some of the main factors that comes in the way of the flow of work are :

1) **Unequal Flow of Work :** Due to heavy work sometimes during the week or during the month or at the end of the financial year, the amount of work is unequally divided amongst the employees. Some of the workers are given less amount of work, while others are loaded with heavy work. So this can be one of the main set back of the flow of work. To the extent possible, work distribution should be equal. The seasonality factor also can be arrested by giving incentives. For example, in a hotel the work pressure during season can be reduced by charging higher price during season and offering off-season discount during lean season.

2) **Interruptions to Work :** Interruptions can be in a various way during the flow of work. The interruptions in the flow of work can be internal or external. Some of the reasons behind the internal interruptions are as follows :

- Lack of the materials with which the employees are required to work.
- Lack of adequate information which is needed for the proper functioning of the work.
- If there is any change in the planning structure , there will be definite changes in the pattern of work.
- Because of inefficient planning, there also arises change in the pattern of work.
- Repetitive callings from superiors.
- Unwanted talks or chats among employees.

The other interruptions are external. Some of the reasons behind these external interruptions are as follows :

- Absenteeism of the employees.
- Visitors of the company.
- Telephone calls.

- External noise interrupting the concentration of the employees.

3) **Unequal Times Required for Different Operations :** A job can be completed by different employees in different time duration. So if an employee completes a particular job in less time than an another employee then the first employee will sit idle because he has already completed the work. This is not a proper thing to sit idle for the employees. Additional work needs to be identified and allocated hence and time duration for each job should be divided properly.

4) **Lack of Standards :** The workload should be divided among all the employees. An employee who is given a greater workload will slow down his flow of work which will effect the output of the company.

5) **Lack of Planning and Scheduling :** If there is no proper planning and coordination then the flow of work gets affected. Without proper planning, scheduling also gets affected.

6) **Faulty Layout :** As Mr. Terry had mentioned that "an office layout is the arrangement of all physical components within the available floor space to provide the maximum effectiveness and the co-ordination of these components into an efficient and effective unit.'' So ifIf the layout is not planned properly, then the flow of work is also not in a steady position and also the flow of work is delayed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Define straight line flow of work.

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Q 2: Discuss any two problems in the line of flow of work.

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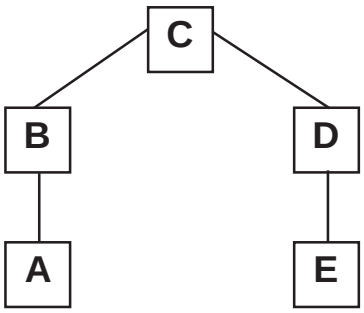
6.6 FLOW CHARTS

A flowchart is a formalized graphic representation of a logical sequence, work or manufacturing process, organization chart, or similar formalized structure. The purpose of a flow chart is to provide people with a common language or reference point when dealing with a project or processof work. Flowcharts use simple geometric symbols and arrows to define relationships. There are three types of flow charts which are prevalent for an analysis. They are :

6.6.1 Office Layout Chart

This chart basically tells us about each and every work that is being done in the office environment. These charts are generally prepared for day to day operations or those work which are done frequently. The lines in this chart are drawn to indicate where the office documents or files are going from and to which place.

Office Layout Chart



A – Correspondence section
B – Typing Pool
C – Registering section
D – Despatch section
E – Filing section

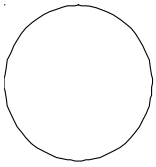
Fig. 3.1

6.6.2 Flow Process Chart

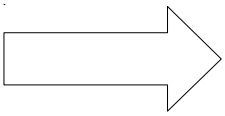
Flow Process Chart is also known as work simplification chart

because they help in simplifying the work load. This chart helps the people in the organization by making a graphical structure of the organization. The flow chart represents the office procedures and office systems in a picture like thing. By the use of some diagrams and pictures, the flow chart helps to depict the flow of work under a specific system to make the presentation of the organization make it seem easier functioning of the organization effective. The main goal of these flow charts is to make the work easier and in simple manner. Some of the common or basic symbols which are used in the flow charts are :

1) **Operation :** This is to show who is actually doing the work like typing or printing etc.



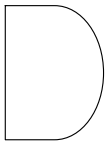
2) **Transportation :** The above symbol is to show that how one thing is passed to the other place. The work is also sometimes passed on.



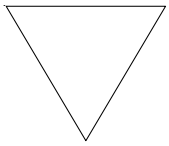
3) **Inspection :** This symbol is to indicate the comparisons or reviewing the work done.



4) **Delay :** The above symbol is to tell us if there are any delay due to interruptions of some other external factors. The delay can be for some changeovers as well.



5) **Storage :** This symbol basically indicates the holding of any kind of work due to some awaiting actions like instructions not given, etc.



These above symbols have been developed by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, New York and it was published in the Operation and Process Flow Charts (ASME

Standard, 1937). It is said that the most important symbol of all the symbols above is that of the Operations because this is the one which get things done. The other symbols are not that productive, even when necessary although they may be inevitable. Hence, under the best conditions, the frequency of the other symbols like the transportation or the storage or the inspection should be kept as less as possible.

6.6.3 Management Type Flow Chart

This chart gives a picture of a horizontal flow of work. In this chart, each and every activity or work done is explained in a short as well as descriptive sentence which is written in a horizontal form from left to right. This chart becomes very useful for future references. In a hospital setting, the following may be cited.

i) The patients will be allotted the out patient departments after they pay the registration fee.

ii) Separate files should be created for new patients.

iii) Already registered patients will seek prior appointment for consultation as their files will have to be brought from the medical records department.

6.6.4 Advantages of Flow Charts

Following are some of the advantages of Flow Charts :

- Flow charts help in diagnosing the faults in a better way. The problems can be viewed properly in a chart more than on office layout.
- Flow Charts can be made easily without the help of any reports.
- The flow charts also help in giving a proper and systematic as well as informative detail about the various processes. This would make improvements in the processes.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Define Flow Chart.

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Q 4: Discuss any two advantages of flow charts.

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6.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed about the flow of work in a particular organisation. We have also discussed about the various types of problems that are encountered in the work flow of an office organization. This unit also tells us about the different types of flow charts that are prevalent in today's environment. The flow charts that are being followed in the organizations and the various symbols that are being used are also given much importance have also been shown in this unit. Then we have further discussed about the advantages of flow charts. All these indicate that having well defined flow charts in an organization facilitates the work processes, enhances productivity and improves the effectiveness in the functioning of an office.



6.8 FURTHER READING

1) Balachandran, V. and Chandrasekaran, V. (2009), Office Management, Published by Tata McGraw Hill Education Private Limited.

2) Chopra, R. K. and Chopra, Ankita (2009), Office Management, Published by Himalaya Publishing House.

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No. 1 : Straight flow of work is a method where the operations when it moves from one to another goes in a particular course which may or nearly be in a straight line. This implies that an operation starts from the beginning and goes to the end.

Ans. to Q. No. 2 : The two problems faced during the flow of work are :

1) **Unequal Flow of Work :** Due to heavy work sometimes during the week or during the month or at the end of the financial year, the amount of work is unequally divided amongst the employees. Some of the workers are given less amount of work, while others are loaded with heavy work. So this can be one of the main set back of the flow of work and should be avoided to the extent possible.

2) **Unequal Times Required for Different Operations :** A job can be completed by different employees in different time duration. So if an employee completes a particular job in less time than an another employee then the first employee will sit idle because he has already completed the work. This is not a proper thing to sit idle for the employees.henceTime duration for each job should be divided properly and additional work needs to be identified and allocated accordingly. Likewise the slow employees should be shown the ways of developing speed. This helps in making the work processes smoother.

Ans. to Q. No. 3 : A flowchart is a formalized graphic representation of a logical sequence, work or manufacturing process, organization chart, or similar formalized structure. The purpose of a flow chart is to provide people with a common language or reference point when dealing with a project or processof work.

Ans. to Q. No. 4 : The following are the two advantages of flow charts :

1) Flow Charts can be made easily without the help of any reports.
2) The flow charts also help in giving a proper and systematic as well as informative detail about the various processes. This would make improvements in the functioning ofprocesses.

6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1 : Discuss the concept of Flow of Work.

Q 2 : Define Work Flow Management System with a proper diagram.

Q 3 : What are the different types of Flow Process Charts ? Explain each one in detail with diagrams.

Q 4 : What do you mean by Management type flow chart ?

Q 5 : What is management type flow chart? Give some examples.

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