

Chapter 3

Records as Tools for Concealing and as Weapons for Fighting Corruption in Higher Educational Institutions in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aimed at establishing how corruption is hidden and perpetuated through use of some records in a public university, yet records should provide evidence to prove malpractices. Using a questionnaire data were collected from a purposively selected sample of participants employed in a university's four administrative sections. The findings revealed that corrupt malpractices such as employment or promotion of unqualified personnel, unfair tender awarding, forging of records and documents were concealed in the records yet things appear to have been done above board. The study recommends an anti-corruption strategy to campaign against all forms of corruption in the university.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Corruption manifests in various facets of life and has become a deep-rooted and widespread social evil. Transparency-International Corruption Perception Index Data of 2016 reports that Zimbabwe ranks low in the Transparency-International Corruption Perception Index, at 154 out of 176 countries. Corruption is so pervasive in all spheres of human life that it is not uncommon to observe education officials and even students/learners in higher education involved in acts of corruption. That the magnitude, actors and the networks of corruption have increased, is compelling enough to adopt a multipronged approach to

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fight it. The role of records management in preventing and detecting corrupt practices in state universities and other higher institutions cannot be underestimated yet it has been overlooked (Seniwoliba and Boahene, 2015). Although international legislation for the management of records exists, the requirements for recordkeeping have not been fully adopted in the country's public and private institutions and this undermines the fight against corruption. In records management, according to the International Council on Archives (ICA) (2016), the term 'integrity' is often used to describe record qualities as reliable, authentic and accessible which means the records are whole and without corruption. Kirinya (2018) observed that officials deliberately forge records and documents regarding expenses, sales, revenue and other factors to falsely benefit a financial performance. This improper management of records creates fertile ground for corruption

In the context of legal records Motsaathebe and Mnjama (2009) noted that missing files and absence of a systematic recordkeeping created an opportunity for corruption. The University of Fort Hare regards falsification of documents as a form of fraud and cites examples as follows: Altering or misrepresenting factual information such as prices or monetary amounts; Stating false information when requested to provide truthful statements; Forging of a signature; Using official letterheads without authorization; Concealing assets or property (especially in bankruptcy proceedings); Knowingly using or distributing a fake document; Destroying information material to an investigation or otherwise; Misrepresentation of academic status, qualification obtained (UFH, 2018 Issue 2). Nigeria has recurrent cases of fake admission list, fake accommodation list, fake verification, fake matriculation numbers, fake school fees receipts, fake registration and fake statement of results (Osumah, 2014). It is not surprising that a number of cases go unnoticed and the culprits feel some satisfaction as they benefit from such practices. Against this background, the current study sought to better understand how records conceal corruption as well as examine them as tools to fight corruption.

Nyoni (2017), Keorapetse and Keakopa (2012) have noted that corruption is endemic in the public sector and fighting it has proved difficult hence the need for anti-corruption institutions. In 2003, the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) senior management crafted a policy which saw seven senior managers acquiring a vehicle each every four years of their employment at zero book value (Nyoni, 2017) and obviously this was done above board thus hiding corrupt practices in the minutes generated by such meetings. From such practices it appears records are used to conceal some corrupt practices. The purpose of this study was to establish how records serve as proof of corrupt practices and also as vehicles of concealing or hiding corruption in a public university in Zimbabwe. (Please note that in the current study the name of the university, where this study was conducted, has been withheld for ethical reasons and as part of the requirements/ conditions to be granted permission to conduct this study). Specifically the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the nature and extent of corruption in university departments?
2. To what extent are records used to fight corruption in university departments?
3. To what extent are records used to hide corruption in university departments?
4. Are there any strategies employed by the universities to combat/prevent corruption?

Public universities' records management system in Zimbabwe operates under the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act (1986) which according to Mutsagondo and Chaterera (2014) needs to be revised in order to fully address the management of electronic records lest the country might find itself without archives in the near future. Universities generate and receive various types of records in their day to

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