

## Corruption audit and the blank cheque theory

One way to reduce corruption in any institution is to execute a corruption audit every six months.

The staff should know that it is a regular exercise. The contract between employer and employee must include a statement of consent by the employee to be subject to a corruption audit (King).

In terms of management, a number of questions need to be posed during the audit.

Is there a manager that is dominant? Does any manager override controls or systems? Has any manager's lifestyle changed during the last six months? Is any manager working long hours, weekends and taking no leave?

Has any staff member not taken any leave for some time? It often happens that when a person has created a corrupt system, he or she cannot afford to take leave because the corrupt system is due to be discovered by someone during the leave period.

The morale of the people also needs to be audited. If there is a low level of morale, it is more likely that corruption is present.

Understaffing of a finance department can cause corruption.

Another issue is the rotation of staff to prevent corruption. When appointing people, integrity audits should be executed, meaning their references should be followed up, also their credit records.

In terms of the employment contract, the employer should have the right to access the employee's and his or her spouse's bank accounts. Grievance procedures must be in place.

Over socialising with a customer and/or stakeholder can be a red flag, and the saying "there is nothing like a free lunch" should also be remembered.

Cash transactions between staff members can be an indication of corruption. Corruption audits should become an essential part of good governance (King).

### ACCOUNTABILITY

The signing of documents in batches can also be an indication of some operations that need further investigation. During the early 2000's, a former Chief Executive Officer of the Social Security Commission (SSC), Dessa Onesmus, signed blank forms for investment policies and also blank cheques. Crucial



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sections of investment policies and cheques were left open (Amupadhi, 2003: 1).

On a question of the Chairperson of the Commission of Inquiry into corruption at the SSC, Bro-Mathew Shinguadja, as to why Onesmus signed blank forms and blank cheques, the Chief Executive Officer replied that "... sometimes you get into the practice that some parts I cannot fill in ..." because information is not available.

The Chairperson of the Commission of Inquiry asked if Onesmus was knowledgeable about the theory of the blank cheque. Onesmus responded positively, however later said: "No. I should not say I know the blank cheque theory. What is it?"

According to Onesmus, the system should have picked up any irregularities. "Accountability has got nothing to do with responsibility ... You cannot tell me just because I signed I should take responsibility for that (Amupadhi, 2003: 2)."

The example of Onesmus can provide some insight into understanding what public accountability is not.

Accountability is always in relation with responsibility. Accountability cannot be delegated, only responsibility. Once responsibility is delegated, that person is responsible to his or her accountable officer about the positive and negative aspects of the execution or ill implementation of these responsibilities. Accountability also implies that such employee should report to his or her supervisor without being asked to do so. It also means that once responsibility is being delegated, the accountable officer is accountable but not responsible anymore for the specific task(s) delegated.

### References

- Amupadhi, T. 2003. "Crucial info was allegedly withheld from the SSC board". Article in *The Namibian*, 27 February.  
King, M. 2006. *The Corporate Citizen*.

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