



Title **Corrupted “A Study of Chronic Dysfunction in South African Universities”**

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Review By **Christelle Faul Marais (Founder and Director, Lucidum)**



Lessons For

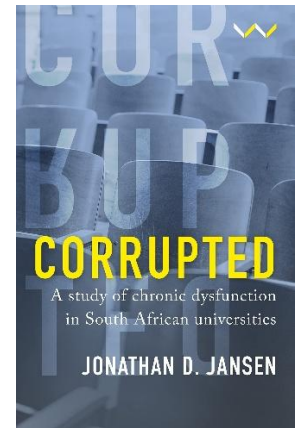
Directors, Prescribed Officers, Executives
Governance Officers, Company Secretaries
Ethics Officers, Risk Managers, Compliance Managers
Audit Professionals
Strategy and Sustainability Professionals
Line Managers

Relevance

9
10
9
8
7
5

Overall Rating

8,0



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Synopsis

Corrupted examines why roughly ten South African universities have descended into chronic dysfunction, drawing on investigative reports and interviews across institutions including Fort Hare, while also showing how others (among them the University of the Western Cape and the University of Venda) fought their way back. In South African higher education, the images of dysfunction are everywhere. Student protests. Violence. Police presence. Rubber or real bullets. Class disruptions. Burning tyres. Damaged buildings. Injury and sometimes death. Reports of wholesale corruption. Year after year, often in the same set of universities; the problem of routine instability seems insoluble. Jonathan Jansen argues universities are ‘a concentrated and exploited resource’, and an intense, sometimes deadly competition for that resource draws in local politicians, managers, and outsiders alike. He documents council members and employees stealing directly from institutions, IT staff leaking procurement specifications so favoured vendors can bid at precisely the right level and split the margin, taxi associations extorting monopolies over campus transport, and financial-aid fraud in which fake student applications and inflated accommodation billing are exploited by vendors and staff working together. Jansen’s central argument is that capacity-building alone cannot fix this: dysfunction takes hold only where weak administrative capacity and weak leadership integrity coincide, and both must be rebuilt together. For governance and audit professionals specifically, there is a key takeaway: the fraud schemes he documents almost always required a willing insider with legitimate system access.

Key Concept:

Institutional Dysfunction

Weak administrative capacity or weak leadership integrity are individually survivable, but where they coincide, dysfunction will be entrenched.

Quotes:

"[Universities are] a concentrated and exploited resource." "In South African higher education, the images of dysfunction are everywhere." "At the heart of the problem lies the vexed issue of resources or, more pertinently, the relationship between resources and power: who gets what, and why?" "You have to do it with...staff who sit on the information technology procurement system." "If you do not steal, you are regarded as the problem." "'n Vis vrot van die kop af". "If we don't shed a light on corruption, it is easier for these people to commit those crimes in the dark."

Practical Tips

- Consider whether your governing body is depoliticised enough to appoint and hold leaders to account on integrity, not factional loyalty.
- Consider how your governing body measures that it has capable people, chosen and protected from patronage pressure. In the current climate, this will protect the right people as much as it exposes the people who are not credible and/or may not have integrity.
- Consider your segregation of duties wherever a single insider can see both sides of a transaction – procurement specifications and vendor bids, or student eligibility and disbursement amounts. Almost every corrupt scheme needs one cooperative insider with legitimate access.
- Ensure that early red flags (so-called ‘near misses’) where controls may breakdown is reported and acted upon – that is the first most effective defense against corruption.

Think About

- Avoid treating a resource-rich institution as safe by default – almost all types of organisations have been captured and/or corrupted and the exposure is real to every type of organisation.
- Concentrated budgets, infrastructure grants and bursary funds attract predatory attention precisely because they are concentrated.
- Understand that external actors (e.g., contractors, transport operators, political appointments) will test an institution’s boundaries wherever internal oversight is thin.
- Consider whether your organisation invests in capacity while tolerating integrity gaps at leadership level, or the reverse. Either one alone leaves the door open to wrongdoing.

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