Determinants of Misgovernance in TVET Colleges: Diagnosis & Remedy

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FRAMING

Central Thesis

Misgovernance in TVET colleges is usually not a single scandal.

It is a repeatable pattern created when blurred authority, weak controls

& rationalised ethical compromise reinforce one another over time.

We have spent years treating it as a knowledge deficit -

as if principals & councils govern poorly because they do not know

what good governance looks like. The frameworks are sound. **The findings repeat.**

The correct diagnosis is structural, cultural & **incentive-based.**

This input addresses the determinants, not the symptoms & possible remedies.

OFFICIAL RECORD

The Official Standard is Already Clear

"College leadership at council & management levels is vital for ensuring that the system transforms in the desired direction."

- DHET White Paper, 2013

"Credible financial reporting is not an accounting issue; it is fundamental to managing resources & preventing financial mismanagement."

- AGSA, 2024/25

The standard is not minimal compliance. It is ethical, effective, accountable governance in service of the students & the public.

DHET White Paper for Post-School Education & Training, 2013 | AGSA Consolidated General Report, 2024/25

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Legislative Framework: What the Law Requires

PFMA — Section 51

Accounting officers must ensure effective, efficient & transparent systems of financial & risk management. Prevent unauthorized, irregular & fruitless & wasteful expenditure.

King IV

The governing body should lead ethically & effectively. Ethical leadership is exemplified by integrity, competence, responsibility, accountability, fairness & transparency.

CET Act

Places the governing obligation with councils. Their work is strategic, fiduciary & oversight-oriented - not operationally opportunistic.

Batho Pele

People First. Transparency & openness are key to public trust. Accountability ensures responsiveness to public needs. Governance cannot be reduced to a code of conduct.

AUDIT VIEW

There Has Been Progress but the System Remains Fragile

24/50	27→12	10→12
colleges improved since 2015/16	modified opinions reduced	clean audits gained

"Many auditees display a minimum compliance mindset & have a false sense of achievement despite not having embedded basic financial, performance & compliance disciplines."

- AGSA Consolidated General Report, 2024/25

Improvement is real & should be acknowledged. But a college can improve its audit opinion while retaining weak disciplines, poor institutional memory & fragile ethical culture.

AGSA Consolidated General Report, 2024/25 — TVET sector decade view, p. 30

DIAGNOSTIC FRAME

From Symptoms to Determinants

Audit findings, protest, administration, SIU investigations, these are symptoms.

They sit downstream from deeper causal conditions.

The six determinants addressed in this presentation:

1. **Role confusion & blurred authority between council & management**
2. **Procurement as the concentrated point of failure**
3. **Normalisation of deviance over time**
4. **Weak capability, records & absent consequence management**
5. **Capture pressure, patronage & institutional capture**
6. **Funding & data failures that injure students**

DETERMINANT 1 OF 6

1 Role Confusion & Blurred Authority

"Poor governance indicators included political interference in appointing council members, ineffective governance structures, problematic functioning of college councils & unfulfilled statutory functions."

- DHET Governance Evaluation, 2024

Councils drift into operations. Management treats council as ceremonial. Principals face mixed signals from DHET, council & local stakeholders. Blurred roles create cover for blame-shifting without personal accountability.

REMEDY

Annual authority matrix. Committee charters with scope limits. Mandatory council induction within 60 days.

Record every attempt to influence operational decisions outside proper channels.

DHET Evaluation of the TVET College Governance System, 2024

DETERMINANT 2 OF 6

2 Procurement as the Point of Failure

"Irregularities persist in tender awarding, fund mismanagement & nepotism during staff appointments."

- DHET Governance Evaluation, 2024

AG findings follow a predictable pattern: ***bid committees not properly constituted, specifications written to favour predetermined suppliers, deviations approved without adequate motivation, and contracts extended without competitive processes.***

SCM often reports to the very manager whose decisions it is supposed to check.

REMEDY **Independent bid committee. SCM practitioner with a protected reporting line.**

Recorded reasons for every deviation before approval. Post-award contract monitoring.

AGSA Consolidated General Report, 2024/25 | DHET Governance Evaluation, 2024

DETERMINANT 3 OF 6

3 Normalisation of Deviance

"The growing trend of treating irregular expenditure as a mere technicality rather than a serious governance failure is concerning."

- AGSA, 2024/25

Year 1: concern. Year 2: acknowledgement. Year 3: standard audit narrative.

Each individual deviation is rationalised. Over time the deviant behaviour becomes the norm.

This requires no corrupt actor - only an institution that has lost its capacity for self-correction.

REMEDY

A zero-repeat culture: no finding that appeared last year may appear this year. Named accountability for every recurrence. Principal answers to council on repeat findings.

AGSA Consolidated General Report, 2024/25

DETERMINANT 4 OF 6

4 Weak Capability, Records & Absent Consequences

"Where there are vacancies in senior positions, these should always be filled promptly as a leadership vacuum can be extremely detrimental to an institution."

- DHET White Paper, 2013

Not every governance failure begins with bad intent. Many begin with weakness:

vacancies, poor records, inconsistent systems, a habit of late correction.

Once controls are weak, temptation becomes easier to rationalise & harder to detect.

Absent consequence management is the most corrosive signal an institution can send.

REMEDY Vacancy closure as governance priority. Monthly control packs. Dated consequence log.

Council monitors consequence application - not management. It is a governance function.

DHET White Paper, 2013 | AGSA Consolidated General Report, 2024/25

DETERMINANT 5 OF 6

5 Capture Pressure, Patronage & Institutional Capture

"The reason for that was they thought the college was going to be a milking cow."

- College principal, DHET Governance Evaluation, 2024

Gert Sibande: R83.1m e-learning tender awarded without proper processes. SIU investigating.

Coastal KZN: CFO & others arrested over alleged false R30m investment proposal.

Eastcape Midlands: staff & students demanded lifestyle audits, alleging nepotism & fraud.

Treat urgency, known supplier & trusted person as danger signals, not reassurance.

REMEDY **Conflict declarations at the start of every bid & appointment - not once a year.**

Separated specification, evaluation & adjudication. Red-flag review before award.

DHET Governance Evaluation, 2024 | OUTA, 2023 | SIU, 2022 | Sowetan, 2020

DETERMINANT 6 OF 6

6 Funding & Data Failures That Injure Students

"Where are we supposed to sleep right now? Some of the students have not been paid the scheme since 2019."

- Student, Umgungundlovu TVET College protest, GroundUp, 2020

SIU found colleges retained unallocated NSFAS funds due to inadequate controls.

Motheo: R38.7m. Northlink: R33.4m. Majuba: R25.9m. Tshwane North: R15m.

Delayed allowances & accommodation breakdown drive protest, dropout & harm.

Misgovernance is not only corruption - it is administrative failure transferred onto students.

REMEDY Monthly bursary & accommodation exception report. Escalate before crises emerge.

Student outcomes on the governance dashboard. Not outside it.

SIU Statement, January 2026 | GroundUp, March 2020

ETHICAL LAYER

Moral Temptations: How Failure Is Rationalised

'We need to move quickly'	**expediency overrides due process**
'I know this person'	**loyalty overrides objective merit**
'Do not disclose this yet'	**self-protection overrides transparency**
'I will deal with it later'	**fear of conflict defers accountability**
'Our outcomes are good overall'	**moral licensing excuses irregularity**

Ethical synthesis grounded in AGSA warning on treating irregular expenditure as technicality, 2024/25, p.10

ETHICAL LAYER

The Isolation of the Principal

- Principals carry fiduciary, operational, academic, financial & human resource
- Accountability, often with limited institutional support structures (& authority).
- In that environment, the path of least resistance is to accommodate.
- Not because the principal lacks integrity, but because the personal cost of integrity is high, & the institutional support for integrity is low.
- Governance is not done to principals. It is done with them.
- A council must stand behind a principal who refuses irregular procurement.
- It must protect them from the consequences of enforcing consequences.
- The principal is not an isolated compliance officer.
- The principal is a trustee of public trust & must be supported as such.

THREE DISCIPLINES

The Three Disciplines of Ethical Governance

1 CLARITY	2 COURAGE	3 CONSISTENCY
Every member of the college community must know precisely what the rules are, who is responsible for what, & what the consequences of failure are. Where there is ambiguity, misgovernance fills the space.	Governance requires a willingness to enforce rules even when doing so is uncomfortable. To hold a colleague accountable. To refuse a council member who has overstepped. Courage cannot be trained - it can only be cultivated in cultures that reward integrity & protect those who exercise it.	The most corrosive thing an institution can do is apply rules selectively. When findings are pursued against some & quietly absorbed for others, the institution signals that its rules are not real.

GOVERNANCE TENSIONS

The Core Tensions in TVET Governance

Autonomy vs Accountability

The CET Act enables institutional discretion.
The PFMA imposes strict accountability.

Discretion must remain bounded by public value - not by convenience.

Efficiency vs Equity

Resource allocation is political.
Programme selection shapes student access.
Equity cannot be residual to efficiency.

Leadership vs Stewardship

Leadership: targets, outputs, visibility.

Stewardship: integrity, continuity, trust.

Institutions outlive individuals.

The principal is a trustee, not an owner.

Transparency vs Self-Protection

The temptation to protect the institution by withholding disclosure is one of the most common rationalizations in the sector.
Transparency is not a risk. Opacity is.

RESPONSE MATRIX

How to Address Each Determinant

DETERMINANT	CONTROL RESPONSE
Blurred authority	Authority matrix, committee charters, council induction, external review
Procurement failure	Independent bid committee, separated SCM functions, red-flag review
Normalised deviance	Zero-repeat culture, named accountability for every recurrence
Weak capability / records	Vacancy closure, monthly control packs, dated consequence log
Capture pressure	Conflict declarations at every process, recorded justifications
Student harm	Monthly bursary exceptions, payment dashboard, escalation protocol
Ethical drift	Ethics pause on deviations, decision journal, speak-up protection

ACTION PLAN

Agenda for Change

1. Table & approve an authority matrix for council, committees & management.
2. Review all high-risk procurements, deviations & SCM appointments from the current year.
3. Place fraud risk, ethical risk & consequence management on every audit committee agenda.
4. Publish a monthly bursary & accommodation exception dashboard.
5. Refresh conflict-of-interest declarations for council, executives & SCM staff.
6. Commission an independent check on the audit action plan & overdue control fixes.

Synthesis from DHET White Paper, AGSA, SIU & Parliament sources cited throughout.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Governance Must Be Anchored to Student Outcomes

- A TVET college can receive a clean audit & fail its students.

  It can comply with every regulation & produce graduates who cannot find work.
- When governance is decoupled from student outcomes, it loses its moral purpose.
- It becomes bureaucratic compliance - a performance for auditors, not a genuine commitment to the institution's reason for existing.
- Every council meeting must include a student outcomes report.
- Not enrolment numbers. Outcomes. Graduate employability.
- Completion rates. Student welfare indicators.
- Governance decisions on resources, programmes & staff performance must be made with explicit reference to their impact on those outcomes.

Governance without ethics becomes administration.

Ethics without governance becomes an aspiration.

Leadership Commitments

— Protect role clarity between council & management

— Refuse rationalized irregularity, even under pressure

— Treat student harm as a governance signal, not an operational matter

— Make transparency routine, not a crisis response

— Steward public trust as your primary institutional obligation

The determinant question is harder than the scandal question. It asks not only who failed, but what system made failure easy, normal & survivable.

See you at JBS soon.
We have an Executive Leadership Development Programme (ELDP) waiting for you.

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