



Citizen and Ethical Control of File Management in the Teaching Secretary's Office

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Abstract

Cuban society is immersed in an Educational Revolution so that the people can acquire an adequate development in file management with high ethical principles and better management of the records that circulates in the Teaching Secretary's Offices at the Ministry of Higher Education Institutions. Actions are carried out to achieve this purpose. Hence, it is a challenge that Educational Sciences lead to the development and transformations in each school institution from the activity of teachers. This article describes the main theoretical foundations that support a methodological strategy to enhance citizen and ethical control of file management in the Teaching Secretary's Office at University of Granma, Cuba, as well as the results obtained through the application of different research methods based on the existing insufficiencies in the knowledge and handling of the documents that regulate the activities of file management. The contribution is constituted by the methodological strategy itself, which relevance was corroborated through its practical application, achieving satisfactory results that demonstrate its effectiveness in educational practice.

Keywords: Methodological Strategy; File Management; Teaching secretary's Office; Ethics

Introduction

File management is a process that preserves the history of institutions and the personal course of subjects by issuing, registering, archiving and protecting the information that keeps the memory of social processes in the form of documents. Each institution has dependencies specialized in file management, which is basically secretaries' work content, as an expression of a public function of an administrative nature, recognized in each historical type of society.

In Cuban Higher Education, the documentary memory of university processes is preserved from personal files, documents that expose the memory of events of various kinds and specific reports that reveal the characteristics of the organization and management operation. Due to its character and significance, the Teaching Secretary's Offices file management in the Higher Education Centers in Cuba, confers an official character to the documentation and legitimizes from legality the value of the documents it issues. Ethics is an important value that the personnel working in

these departments must have, since the information handled is only of interest to certain and determined people.

The new Cuban constitution has ratified the country's commitment to the development of an information and knowledge society, centered on people, integrating and oriented towards sustainable development, in which everyone can create, consult, use and share information and knowledge in improving their quality of life, by virtue of a more open public communication model.

However, there are limitations associated with file management, among them it is evident that the documents that regulate file management activities are not always consulted by teachers and managers, who generally do not have the necessary knowledge about these documents to guarantee the quality of file management in citizen control of university processes as an area of professional performance.

On the other hand, they lack preparation for file management in university processes and elaboration of the forms that must be presented to the Teaching Secretary's Office and sometimes there is a lack of spaces and ways to promote knowledge as an ethical foundation of civic behavior for file management in the citizen control of the university processes of the teachers and staff that work in offices in order to achieve an appropriate and scientific preparation of all the practices that are carried out in the Teaching Secretary's Office.

Similarly, there are difficulties in the quality of the documents received by the Secretaries, which affects the conservation of documentary evidence of the substantive processes. Taking into account the above mentioned, it is defined as a controversial situation: the need to enhance knowledge as an ethical foundation of civic behavior for citizen control of file management of university processes, by teachers and staff working in offices in order to achieve an appropriate and scientific preparation of all the processes that are carried out in the Teaching Secretary's Office. The situation described above leads to the objective of this article, which is to highlight the design of a methodological strategy to enhance citizen and ethical control of file management in the Teaching Secretary's Office at University of Granma, Cuba.

Materials and Methods

For the development of the research, the Faculty of Higher Education at University of Granma was chosen and as the population for the study, the Dean, two (2) Vice Deans, five (5) technicians from the teaching secretary's office, and 28 Principal Professors of Academic Year (PPAA) of the six teaching departments in the Faculty (100%). While the

sample was intentionally integrated by two (2) secretaries, five (5) PPAA, the Dean and Vice Deans.

Through research methods such as document analysis, survey, interview, observation and descriptive statistics, it was possible to verify the problem addressed and corroborate the effectiveness of the strategy in the practice.

Analysis and Discussion

Management is above all a system of knowledge or skills for action, a system of practices that cannot only be learned intellectually, although they can be supported or served by interrelated intellectual processes, which are continuously improved to achieve successful results inside and outside of an organization which purpose is to prepare a group of highly qualified professionals in each of the subsystems that comprise it [1]. Management is the set of integrated actions for the achievement of a certain term, objective that includes, among others, administrative, personnel, economic, planning and programming [2]. When referring to the educational field, it can be said that educational management is a complex process that involves the input of diverse resources, generates (new knowledge, professionalism, cognitive and investigative skills, capacities in the discovery, formulation, approach and resolution of professional problems), trying to minimize errors and maximize successes in order to guarantee the continued progress of human society in balanced harmony with the nature to which it belongs [1]. Based on the definitions proposed, it is considered that management requires committing people towards the fulfilment of the proposed objective, and in the framework of the Teaching Secretary's Office, management implies planning actions, distributing tasks and responsibilities, directing, coordinating and evaluating processes and results.

As Sole and Llinàs-Audet refer, it is not by chance that the modern university requires an organizational design adapted to professional management and an information system [3]. Management at the university facilitates the understanding of educational systems that help strengthening the values of the organization and the need for professionals to acquire responsibility and ethical principles in the use of advances in science and technology, based on the social demands to the University of the 21st century. File management is one of the oldest professions of humanity since men needed to record their actions in lasting documents, and as a consequence of the need to memorize things that concerned everyone and therefore should not be forgotten. That is why material evidence of such activity is known in civilizations as old as Sumer, China or Mesopotamia [4].

At the beginning of the 30s of the 20th century, file management or records management, by its original in

English, originated in the United States of America due to the large accumulation of documents that had been originating in state offices. It was conceived as a set of techniques and procedures aimed at solving the organization of documents; while they are necessary for conducting the activities and affairs of companies and administrations, concluding their activity once they are selected for perpetual conservation [5].

The purpose of file management is aimed at ensuring adequate documentation, avoiding non-essential documentation, simplifying the systems for creating and using the procedure, improving the way of organizing and retrieving documents, providing care and storage at low cost of documents in the intermediate files and ensure the proper redaction or disposal of documents that are no longer needed in the management of current affairs. Roberge considers file management as a system: the information that enters, the information processed the information that leaves, giving priority to the various information systems, classification and description, and preservation. Its function is to support decision-making and daily operations of an organization; its objective remains administrative efficiency and profitability [6].

This author maintains that one of the challenges facing organizations today is to protect their corporate memory and be viable for the proper functioning of the government through a sustainable system that includes its components, to give accredited persons access to any relevant information through the support documenting the activity of the organization. A Teaching Secretary's Office file management is important in each school institution. If the documents are not prepared with quality and are properly preserved, so that they can be easily consulted, they do not have any useful function, which affects the quality of decision-making, accountability and institution's capacity to comply with its obligations and certify its reliability, which is one of the aspects taken into account in the accreditation of institutions and specialties.

From the point of view of protection, ethical principles must be maintained and the integrity of the documents must be guaranteed, avoiding their loss or deterioration and restricting access to the documentation, so that only authorized persons can access it. Documents must be easily retrievable by users, either through hierarchies, text search or through folder systems, so that the minimum possible time is spent on this type of task.

The file manager of a Teaching Secretary's Office must treat people with respect, giving them a dignified, courteous, cordial and tolerant treatment. It is necessary to work in accordance with the legal norms inherent to the function

performed, with the obligation to know, comply with and enforce the legal provisions that regulate the processes that are carried out, there must be transparency in what is done, and responsibility for performance; functions must be performed with efficiency, ethics and quality. It is typical of this type of work to develop continuous improvement processes, with openness, modernization and optimization of resources. Leadership must be achieved and the performance of functions that promote values and principles in society must be fully ethically fulfilled.

Currently, file management at a Teaching Secretary's Office exhibits strengths from the existence of a regulatory framework, made up of the documents (resolutions, opinions and other regulations) that govern the file management of a Teaching Secretary's Office of a Faculty and that professors sometimes search for the methodology of some file management in different processes individually and spontaneously, which shows interest in working as best as possible. The importance of quality in file management is also recognized.

To work in a Teaching Secretary's Office, a staff with ethics, responsibility, integrity is required, who act with honesty and adherence to the law. They must be honest people who avoid obtaining profit or personal advantage from the position or to favor third parties.

Classification of Documents in a Teaching secretary's Office

Documents are classified according to different points of view, some of them are shown below, taking as an element of analysis those that can be used to label those used in Secretaries' file management:

According to the way of transmitting information:

- Textual (Written texts)
- Through the use of ICTs (in digital form).

According to the author or producer:

- Public documents: Produced by institutions.
- Private documents: Produced by individuals.

According to age and consultation frequency:

- Active document: document that, due to its young age, has an administrative value.
- Semi-active document: it is in its second stage, the frequency for administrative purposes begins to decline since over the years it loses its primary value.
- Inactive document: document that is in its final stage from the administrative point of view has a historical or secondary value.

According to the documentary type:

- Devices: are those in which the authority establishes its will with the intention of being obeyed. E.g. laws,

decrees, resolutions, regulations.

- Informative: documents to establish communication in administrative units. E.g. letters and circulars [7].

Documentary groupings are divided into two categories

Documentary unit: It is the indivisible element of a documentary series. This can be: simple, that is, constituted by a documentary type, example: report or letter; or complex, for example, a set of documents generated organically and functionally by a subject producing the same matter, taking into account that in the Teaching Secretary's Office the main axis is the student's file where his or her curriculum is collected; the documents that make up a file are linked together, and include the study cycle with the necessary documentation.

Documentary series: Set of documents that have common characteristics, the same documentary type or the same subject and that, therefore, can be kept, used, transferred or eliminated as a unit. E.g. files, records, etc. The series are the documentary and continuous testimony of repetitive activities developed by an organ or by virtue of a function [8]. The difference between a documentary unit and a documentary series lies in the fact that the first constitutes a document in itself, while the series constitutes a set of documents that may or may not be directly related to each other. On the other hand, while the unit is produced by a concrete activity, the series is formed starting from an administrative function.

Taking into account the above mentioned, the behavior of these differences can be exemplified in the documents that are managed in the Teaching Secretary's Office as follows:

Documentary unit: Exams records, awards, attendance and promotion report, documents for teaching records, grade records, control records and curricular maps.

Documentary series: The Board of Directors' Records; statistical reports, documents that make up the teaching file, documents that contain data to make up other writings, plans of the educational teaching process with the content of disciplines and hours.

Within the value of the document the following can be cited

Primary value: Administrative value, informative value, legal value, cultural historical value. It is referred from its creation and its main objective is to serve as a guarantee or proof of something and is what is called administrative value or legal value, that is, it serves as testimony. On the other hand, this initial value includes a series of parallel values that vary according to the document type. The archive

document is created as a tool of the administration with the purpose of keeping informed the continuity of management or administrative continuity, despite the natural change of successive managers, hence its administrative value. It serves to have references about people, places or issues if necessary, therefore its informative value. It can be used to safeguard rights and obligations according to established rules and procedures, hence its legal value. It is valid to comply with the requirements of a law; its legal value is there. It can also be a resource to reconstruct and revise the past, due to its historical and cultural value.

Secondary value: It fulfils a role of serving as a source for history, after having fulfilled its rights and obligations in the administrative and primary aspects; to this end, it must have a serial character, since it is not an isolated or loose piece.

When the moment arrives in which the rights and obligations guaranteed by written testimonies prescribe, the document acquires secondary value. The document has already fulfilled its vital process in the administrative aspect, it has ceased to be active and from that moment it fulfills another role: that of serving as a source for history [9].

Issues that arise when ethical principles are not followed related to what is confidential in public records

Public records are the places where citizens go to present applications, writings and communications addressed to Public Administrations. It is also the place used by the Administration to register documents they send to citizens, to private entities or to the Administration itself. There are two types of records: general records and auxiliary records and in both we can present our documents [10].

General records are those which function is the reception and recommendation of applications, writings and communications to one or more administrative centers. On the other hand, auxiliary records are those with the same function and for the same administrative centers of the general record office, they are located in dependencies different from them. Several auxiliary record offices may be dependent from each general record office. Auxiliary record offices have to submit a copy of all the entries they develop to their general record office and the latter will be the one that performs the functions of constancy and certification in the event of litigation, discrepancies or doubts about the reception or applications referral, writings and communications [10].

Therefore, the Teaching Secretary's Offices in an academic institution can be considered as a public record of a general nature since there, applications, writings and

communications are received and sent to one or more institutional administrative centers, in this case, educational centers whose documentation is confidential. Hence, there must be strict ethics as well as a high level of professionalism. When there is not ethics and professionalism, and the principles related to what is confidential in public records are not followed by people who work in Teaching Secretary's Offices, there would be serious problems in the process of file management in these areas where people work with confidential documents that are only inherent to the administration and workers. It can exist loss of information, uncontrolled accumulation, recovery problems, unauthorized access, even accidental destruction of information.

There may also be a conflict of interest when personal, family or business interests, in the exercise of their function as public employers, affect the impartial performance of employment and position, receiving gifts or gratuities that may be interpreted as attempts to influence the integrity of the personnel who work there.

Likewise, as negative issues there can be found

- Cheating when enrolling students who are not on the official award lists.
- Errors in the consignment of the official data system, violating the regulations.
- Illegality when allowing a foreigner to pursue university studies without equivalence in curricula because the processes established by law have not been carried out.
- Improper procedures in filling out registration documents.
- Students without the right to enter higher education unduly enrolled because they are not registered in the official lists
- Change of information.
- Theft of documents and theft of equipment.
- Cheating when entering data to benefit or harm a student.
- Delivery of university degrees without having legal support in the files.
- Improper payments.
- Violation of information discipline.

If there is no competent professional with ethics and respect for confidentiality in their work actions with file management, relevant evaluations cannot be achieved in audits, inspections and careers accreditations.

Results

An initial diagnosis was made in the months between September and December of the 2020-2021 school years

in the Teaching Secretary's Office of the Faculty of Higher Education at University of Granma, located on the "Blas Roca Calderío" Campus, in Manzanillo, Granma, Cuba. Instruments were built for the application of the empirical level methods, the measurement scales and the assigned value; then the instruments were applied, the data were collected and statistically processed to finally grant an evaluation and infer the causes that affect the detected weaknesses.

In the survey applied to the teachers of the sample, the following results were obtained: 70% of those interviewed was evaluated as regular, while the remaining 30% was evaluated as bad in relation to filling out the final exams records and their delivery to the Teaching Secretary's Office. In question two (2), 85% of the teachers considered that the Secretary's Office guides the delivery date of the documentation for filling out the data, but in general it was known that a methodological preparation is not carried out for the execution of the different types of documents that are managed throughout the school year in the different processes developed knowing the complexity, quality and ethics required to register them in the documents that control student's results.

In question three (3), related to what the Faculty does to improve teachers in file management, they refer that there are no ways to do it, only, in some cases, agreements are made in the Faculty Board of Directors to solve the urgent problems in documents delivery and in their preparation due to the lacking of knowledge of these teachers, who individually, go to the Secretary's Office, receive the information and in many occasions the importance of keeping ethics when working with these documents is not taken into account. According to the opinion of 100% of the interviewed teachers, the majority of the documents delivered to the Teaching Secretary's Office are returned because they contain errors in their elaboration. They also stated that it would be very important to receive, in advance, a preparation to be able to execute with the greatest possible clarity all the management of documents that they make, since they are working with information that only authorized persons should know.

It was also possible to verify there are great difficulties in the documents teachers prepare related to quality, transparency of the information, lack of data necessary for the completion of the document, since abbreviations, blurs, poorly readable letters, little exquisiteness appear in many occasions according to its typology, which threatens the clarity for the future archive, as appropriate as historical memory of both the Faculty and the University, so the results are enclosed in a regular value. There is evidence of a lack of necessary knowledge about the social significance of the document, its historical value, and source of information,

future research, accreditations and inspections of the different levels that in each school year is a prioritized task by the Ministry of Higher Education.

After analyzing this situation, a methodological strategy was developed to enhance citizen and ethical control of file management in the Teaching Secretary's Office at University of Granma, Cuba. It consisted of three stages:

- **Diagnosis:** To verify teachers' difficulty in the Faculty file management.
- **Guidance:** To offer the necessary methodological preparation to promote citizen and ethical control of document management.
- **Execution:** For each teacher to carry out file management during the different stages of the course.
- **Control:** to verify the quality of documents completion that must be filed in each student record.

Once the strategy was executed, it was found that

- Teachers' knowledge acquisition about what is related to the preparation of the document to be managed in each process that comes from the Teaching Secretary's Office increased.
- The Faculty's Board of Directors is properly oriented for the information quality delivery requested by the Teaching Secretary's Office.
- Teachers receive the necessary guidance and do not need to go to the Secretary's Office for doubts in the elaboration of documents, thus there is a better file management and the information handled in the Secretary's Office is preserved, which may be at risk of being disclosed by the constant interruptions that were previously made due to doubts when filling out a document.
- 100% of the PPAA managed to master the Manual of norms and procedures for the work at the Secretary's Offices in Higher Education institutions (Ministerial Resolution 184/11), as well as others that regulate the file management process and the ethics that must characterize the staff that work in Educational Secretary's Offices.
- Related to the flow of output and input information of the documentation in each of the stages required by each process, it was achieved the quality, efficiency and compliance with schedules.
- The Faculty acquired the ways for teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge to know and know how to manage records from the Teaching Secretary's Office, which improved the quality of the historical memory that is left as legal testimony at the end of each school year and for the future as an institution.
- The methodological monitoring of the actions carried

out during the educational teaching process in terms of file management was increased.

The analysis of these results allows us to state that the methodological strategy developed to enhance citizen and ethical control of document management in the Teaching Secretary's Office at University of Granma, Cuba is effective.

Conclusion

Management in a teaching institution facilitates having a vision of educational systems that help strengthening the values of the organization and the need for professionals to acquire commitment and ethical principles in the use of advances in science and technology.

File management is one of the oldest tasks of humanity. In a Teaching Secretary's Office, it is important because it allows ethical principles to be maintained and the integrity of the documents is guaranteed, avoiding their deterioration and limiting access to documentation.

There are different types of documents in correspondence with different points of view.

The interviewed teachers presented difficulties in knowing how to fill out documents in the Teachers' Secretary's Office. These deficiencies were eradicated through the elaborated methodological strategy.

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