



Public Sector Ethics Survey 2022

Ethics Survey of National, Provincial
and Local Government

May 2022



The Ethics Institute in collaboration with:



the dpsa

Department:
Public Service and Administration
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**cooperative
governance**

Department:
Cooperative Governance
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

SALGA

Inspiring service delivery

Author: Kris Dobie

Qualitative analysis: Dr Julio Andrade

Editorial support: Dr Julio Andrade, Fatima Rawat & Prof Deon Rossouw

Cover design and layout: Elsie Weich

Public Sector Ethics Survey 2022

© 2022 The Ethics Institute

ISBN: 978-0-6397-1574-2

Published by: The Ethics Institute

PO Box 11233 Hatfield 0028 Pretoria South Africa

Website: www.tei.org.za

Contact: info@tei.org.za

© This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
A. Background and purpose	6
B. Methodology	6
1. Survey content	6
2. Survey administration	6
3. Response rate	7
4. Demographic data	7
C. Findings	11
1. Ethical behaviour risks	11
1.1. Ethical behaviour risk: Overview	11
1.2. Ethical behaviour risk: Per audit outcomes	13
1.3. Ethical behaviour risk: Comparison between spheres of government	16
1.4. Ethical behaviour risk: Comparison with previous surveys	17
2. Ethical culture risk	19
2.1. Ethical culture risk: Overview	19
2.1. Ethical culture risk: Per audit outcomes	21
2.2. Ethical culture risk: Comparison between spheres of government	24
2.3. Ethical culture risk: Comparison with previous surveys	25
3. Ethics management initiatives	27
3.1. Ethics management awareness: Overview	27
3.2. Ethics management awareness: Per audit outcomes	28
3.3. Ethics management awareness: Comparison between spheres of government	29
3.4. Ethics management awareness: Comparison with previous surveys	30
3.5. Lifestyle audits	31
4. Whistleblowing / Reporting of misconduct	32
4.1. Observing misconduct	32
4.2. Reporting misconduct	32
4.3. Reasons for not reporting misconduct	33
4.4. Where would people report misconduct	33
4.5. Response to misconduct reports	35
5. Respondents' suggestions for improvement	35
D. Key findings and root causes	38
E. Recommendations	39

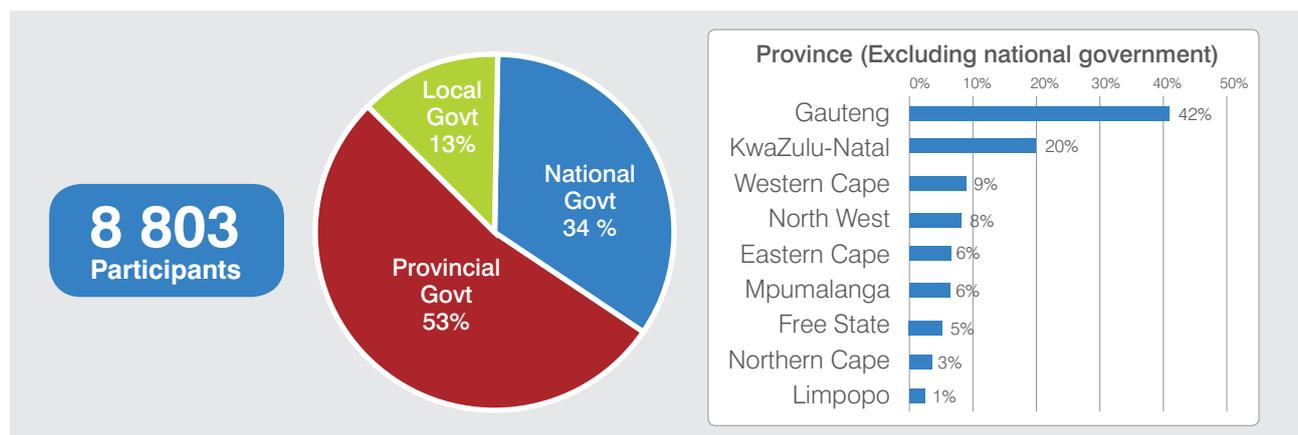
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The Ethics Institute (TEI) reserves intellectual property rights and copyright of materials and processes generated by ourselves prior to or during the completion of this study. This includes (but is not limited to) consultation processes, research instruments, and reporting methodologies. It excludes research findings and project reports which were generated specifically for the project but includes the processes, instruments and methodologies used in generating these reports. Our intellectual property may not be used beyond the scope of this project without our express written permission.

The Public Sector Ethics Survey aims to assess the state of ethics and ethics management in the South African public sector. It is conducted by means of an online survey of public servants. This third iteration of the survey, was conducted between 26 October 2021 to 27 February 2022.

The survey is conducted by The Ethics Institute (TEI) in partnership with the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG), and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

1. Overview of findings - 2022



Top ethical culture concerns

1. Fear of speaking up
2. The right people aren't promoted
3. Action is not taken against unethical behaviour

Top ethical behaviour concerns

1. Poor and inconsistent application of discipline
2. Appointment of inappropriate people
3. Unprofessional work behaviours

Result differences based on audit outcomes



Reporting misconduct

“Have you observed misconduct?”



YES

38%

“Did you report the misconduct you observed?”



YES

41%

“Why would you not report misconduct?”

TOP 3

I am afraid that I may be victimised at work	51%
I don't believe that anything will be done about my report	44%
I fear for my safety	37%

“Where would you report misconduct?”

TOP 3

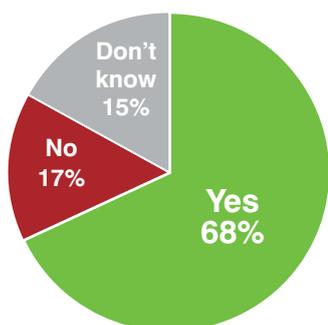
Whistle-blowing hotline / facility (Anonymously)	55%
My manager	38%
The person responsible for ethics (Ethics Officer)	29%

Awareness of ethics management initiatives

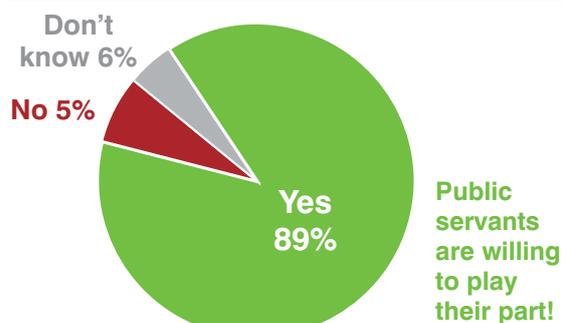
Move from 2018

Aware of the code of conduct		92%	2%
Know the policy on gifts		82%	1%
Know the policy on private work		81%	1%
Know policy on sexual harassment		70%	New indicator
Believe all new appointees are screened		68%	New indicator
Aware of hotline		47%	1%
Received ethics training		45%	3%
Up 16% from 2015! Aware of 'ethics officer'		43%	6%
Aware of policy on lifestyle audits		42%	New indicator

Do you think lifestyle audits will be effective in reducing corruption?



Would you be open to undergo a lifestyle audit?



'The one thing to improve the ethical culture in the public sector'

Themes derived from more than 5 000 verbatim comments from public servants.

Sample comments shown

Strengthen accountability (27%)

Persons who are found to be unethical should be announced ... so it can scare others from doing something similar.

Punish the wrongdoers or perpetrators of corruption, or else all government programmes are going to become a mockery. We are sick and tired of corrupt officials who operate with such high levels of 'impunity'!

At present it's like a circus where everyone gets away with everything because nothing is ever done.

Senior managers are not exemplary in their behaviour and actions, creating great challenges in how they influence future leaders. 'If you lie down with dogs, you wake up with fleas!'

We need honest managers who'll separate politics from management duties.

A political will to do so. People with ability and clean hands. This is not rocket science guys.

Ethical & competent leadership (18%)

Improve ethical conduct (16%)

Stop thinking that they are there for themselves and not there to provide a service to the public. Move from self to selfless. We have lost touch with what it means to be a public servant.

All public servants need to re-evaluate their purpose and responsibilities as public servants; we need to take our jobs seriously.

To accept responsibility that as public service we have to serve the community like we are serving our families and friends. To build the culture of Ubuntu within yourself.

All employees should be treated with dignity; respect; uniqueness; no favouritism and nepotism; and not be harassed or intimidated irrespective their level.

Give employees more power over their work. If employees have more control over their work outcomes, they are likely to justify your trust in them.

Better treatment of staff (14%)

Ethics capacity & awareness (16%)

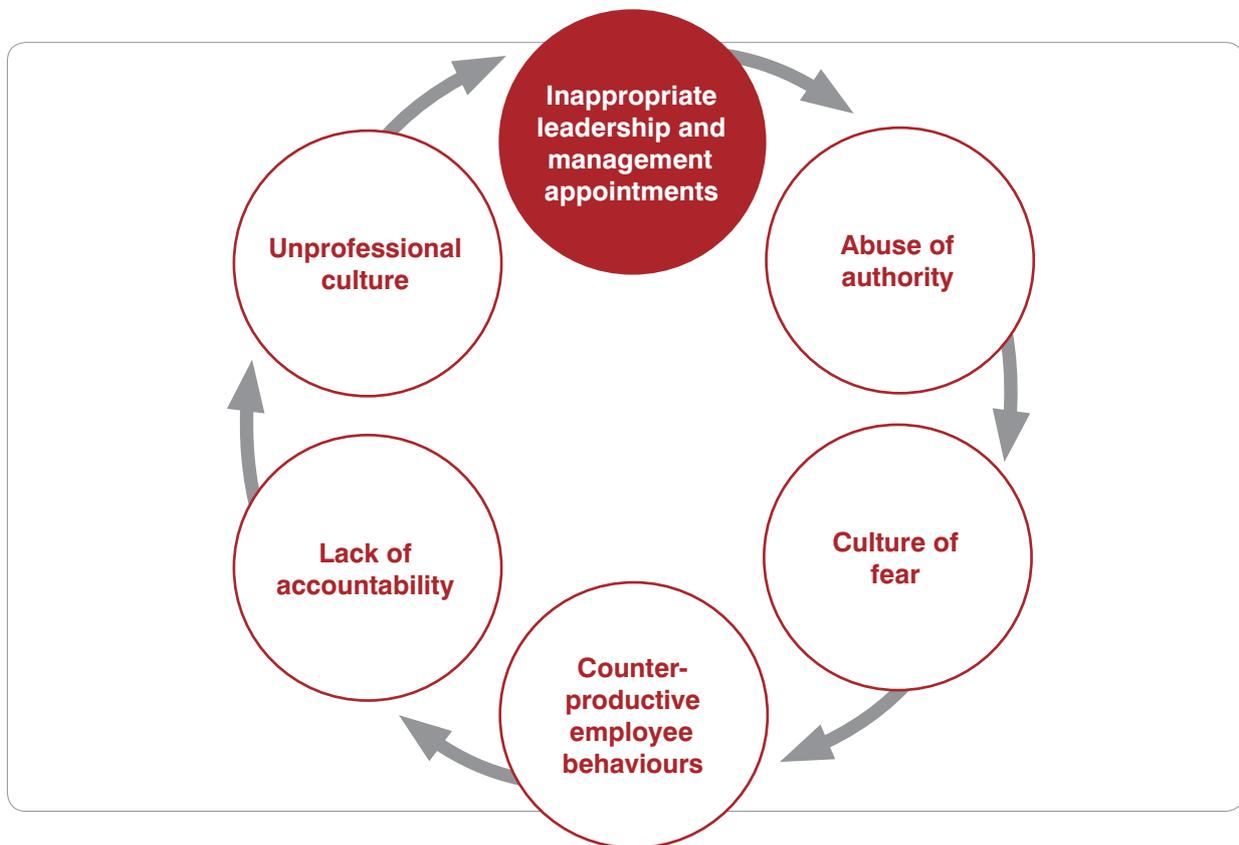
Employees need to be educated about the ethical conduct in the workplace, during my 13 years in the department I have never heard any ethical information being discussed, promoted, training or even shown the ethical officer.

They hire inexperienced, straight from varsity people to come manage us simply because they're related to politicians. We provide proof but they're never dealt with.

Recruit on merit (8%)

2. Root cause analysis

(More detail on page 38)



3. Recommendations

(More detail on page 39)



A. Background and purpose

The Public Sector Ethics Survey was first conducted in 2015 as a way of getting a clearer understanding of the state of ethics and ethics management across the South African public sector. The purpose of the survey is to conduct a coherent measurement of these issues at a sufficiently large scale to inform public policy and debate around public sector ethics and ethics management, and to track progress over time. The survey was repeated in 2018, and this is the third iteration.

B. Methodology

As with previous versions of the survey, the 2022 Public Sector Ethics Survey was conducted through an online survey. To ensure comparability of data, the questionnaire was largely the same as the one utilised in 2015 and 2018, with some additions and changes to probe new topics.

1. Survey content

The basic content of the survey was developed in 2015 based on the outcomes of 27 structured interviews and focus groups conducted in national, provincial and local government.

Besides demographic information, the survey consists of the following sections:

1. Ethical behaviour risks
2. Ethical culture risks
3. Awareness of ethics management interventions
4. Perceptions of misconduct reporting / whistleblowing (New addition in 2022)
5. Verbatim suggestions for improving ethical culture

2. Survey administration

Questionnaire application

An email containing background information, along with a link to the online questionnaire, was distributed through the following avenues:

- The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) sent the email to employees in national and provincial governments.
- The Director General of the Department for Cooperative Governance (DCoG) also wrote to provinces requesting that they send out the survey to their municipalities.
- Updates on provincial progress was forwarded to the Department for Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and DCoG who followed up with the offices of premiers in provincial governments to request further distribution.

The survey was live from 26 October 2021 to 27 February 2022. The closing date was extended a number of times to achieve the targeted response rate.

Anonymity of respondents

Several measures were taken to ensure that respondents remained anonymous. As such, the respondents were not requested to fill in their names or staff numbers on the questionnaires. Nor was it obligatory to provide demographic information.

The survey was also hosted independently and externally to increase confidentiality. This was communicated to employees upfront. This strategy was deemed appropriate in order to assure anonymity and hence to increase the reliability of responses.

Data security

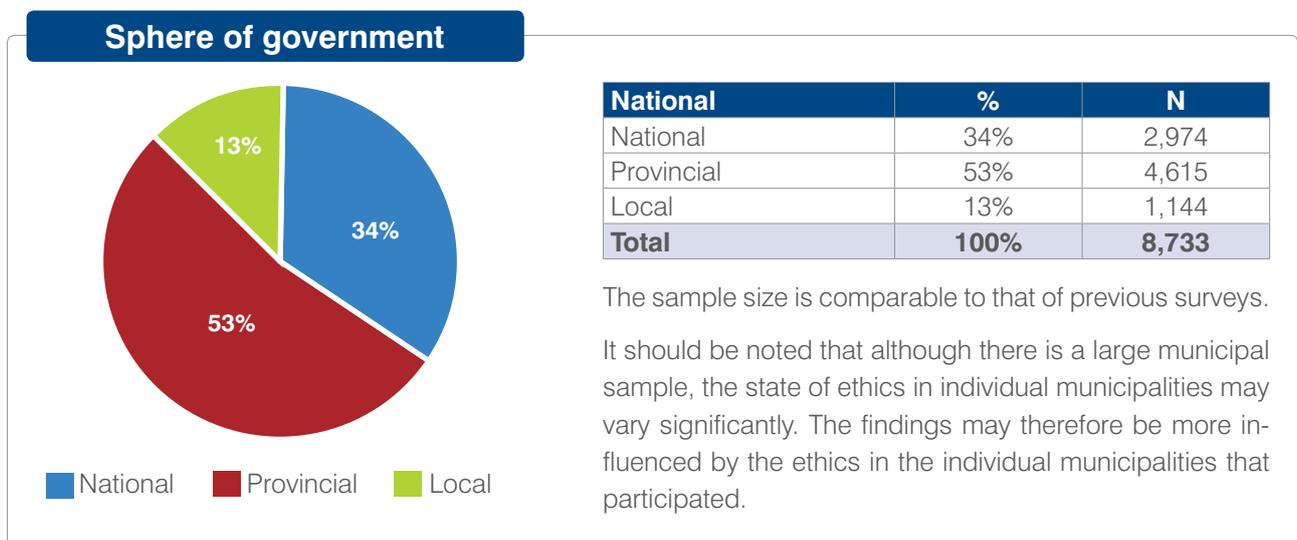
To ensure data security, all data was captured and hosted by an independent third party under the supervision of TEI.

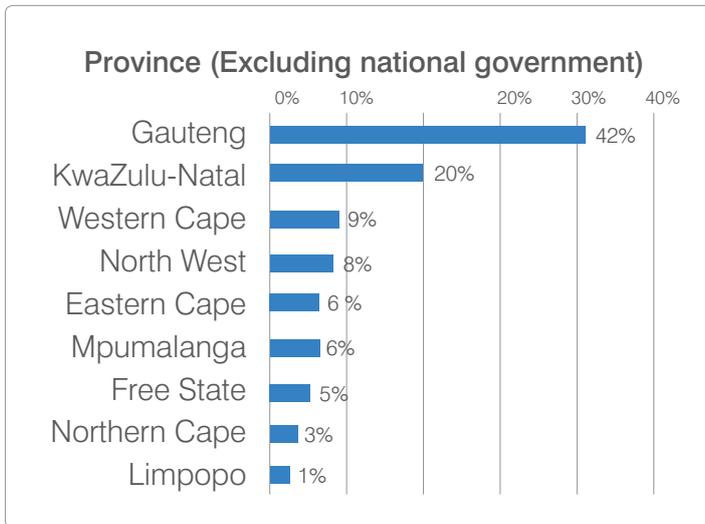
3. Response rate

A total of 10 252 responses were received, but many were significantly incomplete. The total number of used responses was 8 803.

4. Demographic data

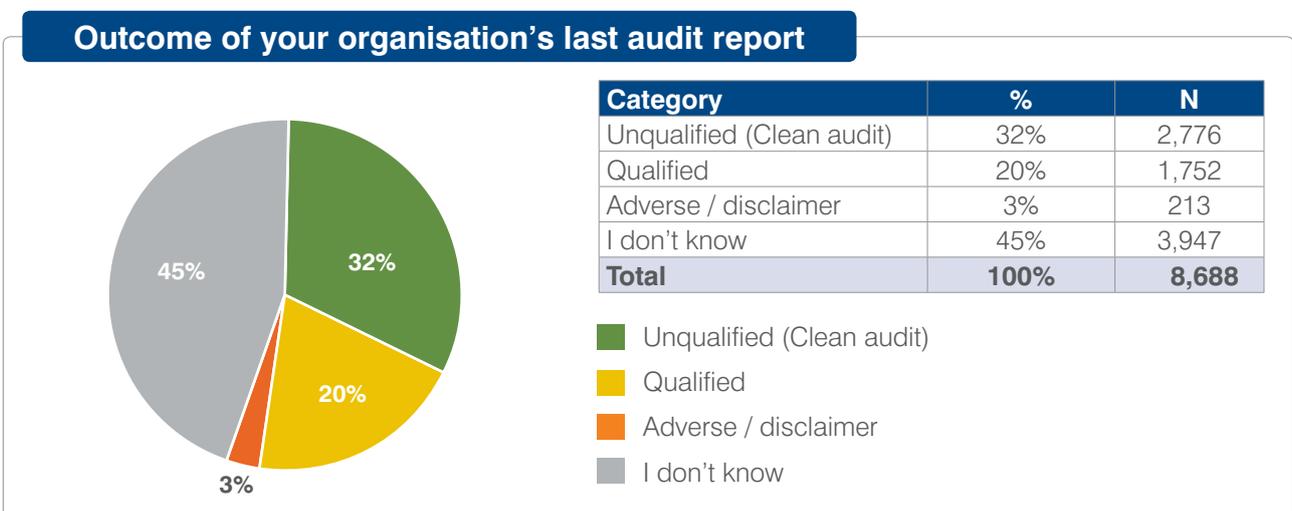
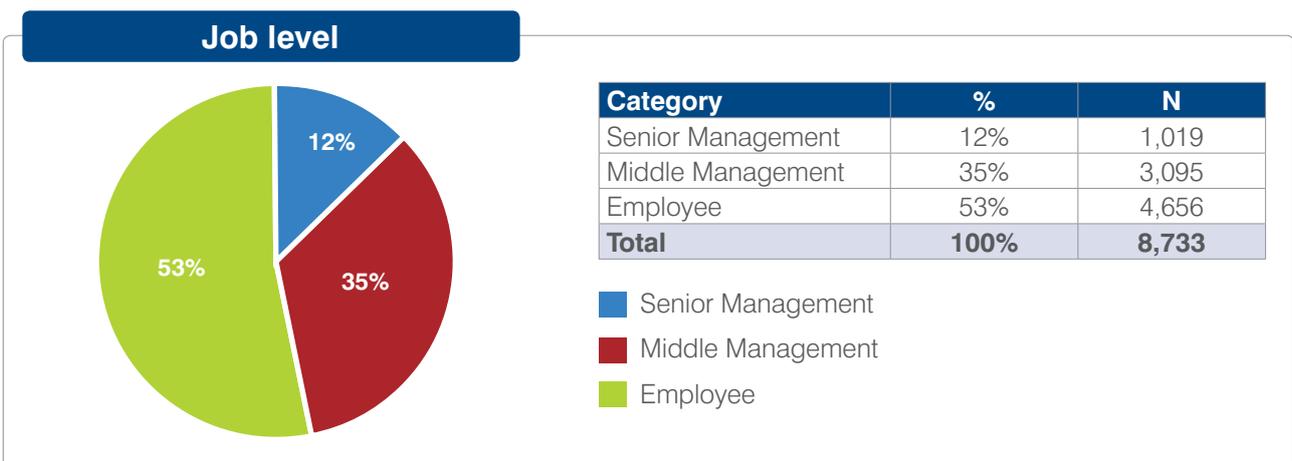
The following graphs give the demographic data for the survey. To provide anonymity, the demographic data was not compulsory for completion. Therefore, the numbers are inconsistent and below the total responses of 8803.





National	%	N
Gauteng	42%	2,482
KwaZulu-Natal	20%	1,165
Western Cape	9%	501
North West	8%	477
Eastern Cape	6%	371
Mpumalanga	6%	364
Free State	5%	279
Northern Cape	3%	175
Limpopo	1%	79
Total	100%	5893

Some provinces have very low response rates, especially when the data from only the provincial government is extracted. These provinces findings may therefore not be statistically representative.

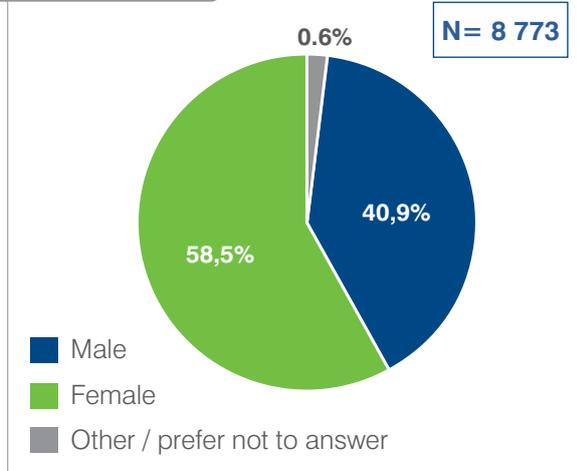


Department / Area

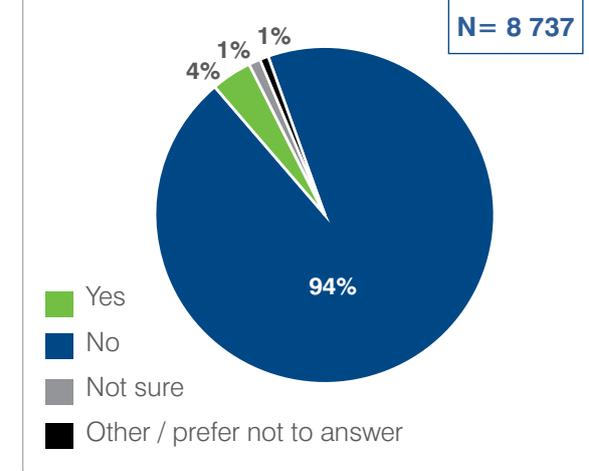
Category	%	N
Administration	31.8%	2,807
Health	17.8%	1,569
Education	9.0%	793
Infrastructure	4.4%	385
Social development	4.0%	357
Transport	2.3%	206
Community development	2.2%	190
Energy & Environment	2.0%	179
Peace & Security	1.8%	163
Food & Agriculture	1.8%	160
Housing	1.4%	122
Independent entities	1.1%	96
Public utility	1.0%	90
Parks & Recreation	0.6%	55
Justice	0.5%	46
OTHER	18.3%	1,613
Total	100%	8,831

Personal Information

Gender



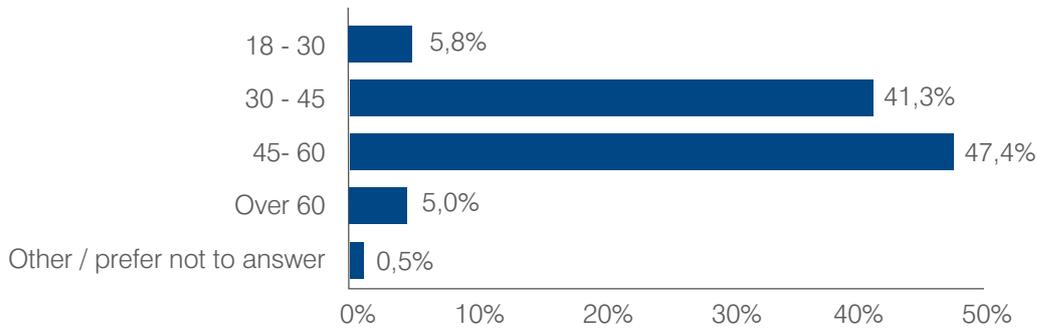
Disability



Personal Information

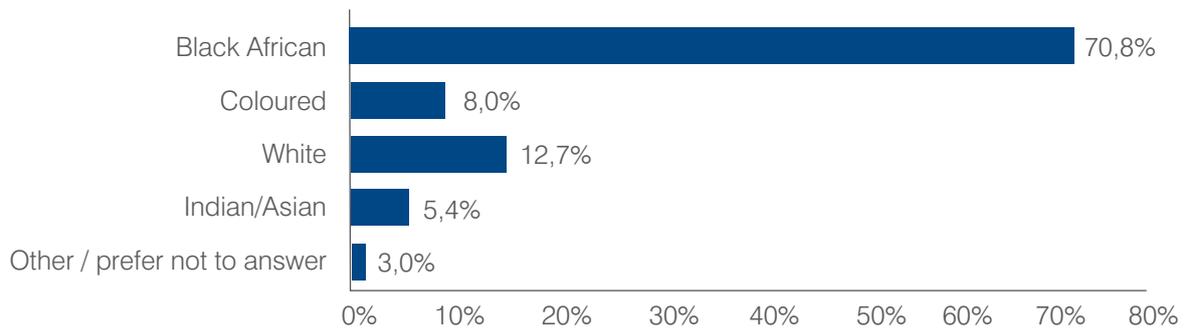
Age

N= 8 803



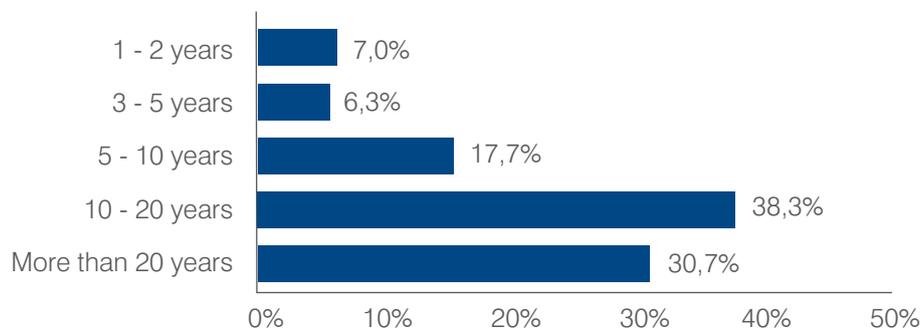
Ethnicity

N= 8 790



Tenure

N= 8 798



C. Findings

The findings from the survey are presented in the following sections:

1. Ethical behaviour risks
2. Ethical culture risks
3. Ethics management initiatives
4. Whistleblowing / reporting of misconduct
5. Suggestions for improvement

1. Ethical behaviour risks

The purpose of the ethics risk section is to get clarity on which types of unethical behaviours or practices occur frequently in the public sector.

Respondents were asked to what extent each of the listed behaviours occurs in their organisation. They could answer on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘Never’ to ‘Very frequently’. They also had an ‘I don’t know’ option. The risk rating is calculated based on the distribution of respondents’ answers. In other words, how frequently respondents believed the behaviour occurs. If more respondents believe a behaviour occurs frequently, it poses a higher risk, and if more believe it occurs less frequently, it poses a lower risk.

The data is categorised using the following risk rating scale

Low risk	0 – 33
Moderate risk	34 – 49
High risk	50 – 66
Severe risk	67 – 100

1.1 Ethical behaviour risk: Overview

The purpose of the ethics risk section is to get clarity on which types of unethical behaviours or practices occur frequently in the public sector.

Indicator		PSES 2022
1	Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline	57
2	Victimisation of employees who differ with managers	56
3	Abuse of time	55
4	No consequences for unethical behaviour	53
5	Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed	51
6	Abuse of cadre deployment	51
7	People being at work, but not working	51
8	Abuse of resources for personal matters	50
9	Jobs being given to family members and friends	50
10	Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures	49
11	Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees	49
12	Political interference	48
13	Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individuals	46
14	Private work interfering with official duties	39
15	Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks	36
16	Cheating on claims / allowances	33
17	Disrespectful treatment of the public	30
18	Inappropriate acceptance of gifts	23
19	Sexual harassment	23
20	Sextortion	22
AVERAGE		44

Comment:

- From the 20 items, none fall in the severe risk category, which is a positive. Eight are in the high-risk category, seven in the moderate risk category, and five in the low risk category.

- Many items in the high-risk category can be seen as ethics failures at the management level. This includes:
 - Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline
 - Victimisation of employees who differ with managers
 - No consequences for unethical behaviour
 - Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed
 - Abuse of cadre deployment
- There is an adage in the ethics field that you build a culture by “who you hire, who you fire, and who you promote”. The management issues identified as high risks indicate shortcomings in who is hired, and in how misconduct is dealt with. These issues will invariably have an impact on the organisational culture.
- The remaining three issues in the high-risk category all point to counterproductive work behaviours by employees that are indicative of low levels of staff engagement and an unprofessional work environment:
 - Abuse of time
 - People being at work, but not working
 - Abuse of resources for personal matters
- Other counterproductive work behaviours, that lean more to misconduct than simply unprofessional behaviour, are less frequently observed in the workplace. These include:
 - Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks
 - Cheating on claims / allowances
 - Inappropriate acceptance of gifts
 - Sexual harassment
 - Sextortion
- The public service has a strong track record of managing gifts to avoid conflicts of interest. It is therefore interesting to note that not many people report observing the inappropriate acceptance of gifts. It might indicate that the management of gifts over the years has had an impact, or that it is not as big an issue as once feared.
- Sexual harassment and sextortion are both of the least observed behaviours on the list. It should however be kept in mind that at least 1 in 10 employees do say that they observe these behaviours frequently or very frequently. (These numbers are higher for female respondents than for male respondents.) Considering the high-impact nature of these behaviours, this should still be considered too high.

1.2. Ethical behaviour risk: Per audit outcomes

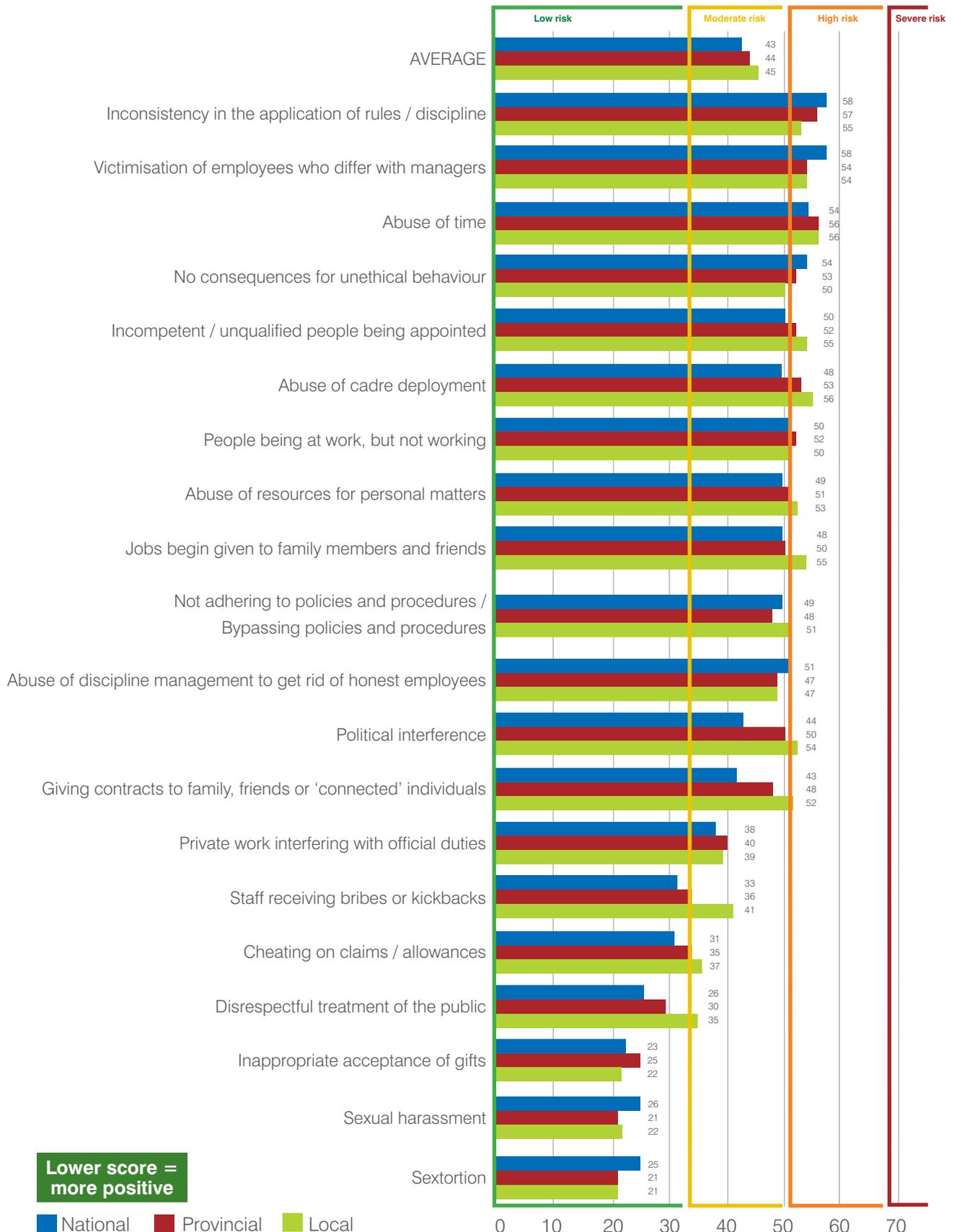
The following table shows the comparison between the ethical behaviour risk rating of public sector organisations that achieved unqualified audit outcomes, and those that achieved qualified or disclaimer audit outcomes. This is taken to be a proxy (if not a perfect one) for distinguishing between better and worse performing organisations, and gives an interesting view of what sets these organisations apart in terms of ethics behaviour risk.

Ethical Behaviour Risk	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
		Most negative	
Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individuals	40	-10	50
Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks	32	-9	41
Political interference	45	-9	54
Disrespectful treatment of the public	26	-8	35
Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures	45	-8	53
Abuse of cadre deployment	49	-8	57
No consequences for unethical behaviour	50	-8	57
Inappropriate acceptance of gifts	21	-7	29
Cheating on claims / allowances	30	-7	37
Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed	47	-6	53
Abuse of time	52	-6	58
People being at work, but not working	48	-6	54
Jobs being given to family members and friends	46	-6	52
Abuse of resources for personal matters	47	-6	53
Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline	54	-5	60
Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees	45	-5	51
Private work interfering with official duties	37	-5	42
Victimisation of employees who differ with managers	53	-3	56
Sextortion	22	-3	24
Sexual harassment	24	-1	25
		Most positive	
AVERAGE	41	-6	47

Comment:

- Organisations with qualified or disclaimer audits show higher levels of unethical behaviour on all indicators in the study than those with clean (unqualified) audits.
- The top two issues that set these organisations apart both relate to corruption:
 - Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individuals
 - Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks
 It therefore seems that corruption is more prevalent in organisations that are less well-governed.
- The next few items that set the organisations apart give us some idea of the type of governance failures that might create a conducive environment for corruption and misconduct:
 - Political interference
 - Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures
 - Abuse of cadre deployment
 - No consequences for unethical behaviour.

1.3. Ethical behaviour risk: Comparison between spheres of government



Comment

- In general, the most misconduct is observed in local government, followed by provincial and then national government – although the differences are relatively small.
- It is however interesting to note certain themes that emerge when one looks at which types of behaviours are more frequently observed in each level of government.

National government – A theme emerges around consequence management

- Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline
- Victimisation of employees who differ with managers
- No consequences for unethical behaviour
- Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees

Provincial government – A theme emerges around the professional performance of duties

- People being at work but not working
- Private work interfering with official duties

Local government – Themes emerge around appointment of staff, the politicisation of the organisation and corruption.

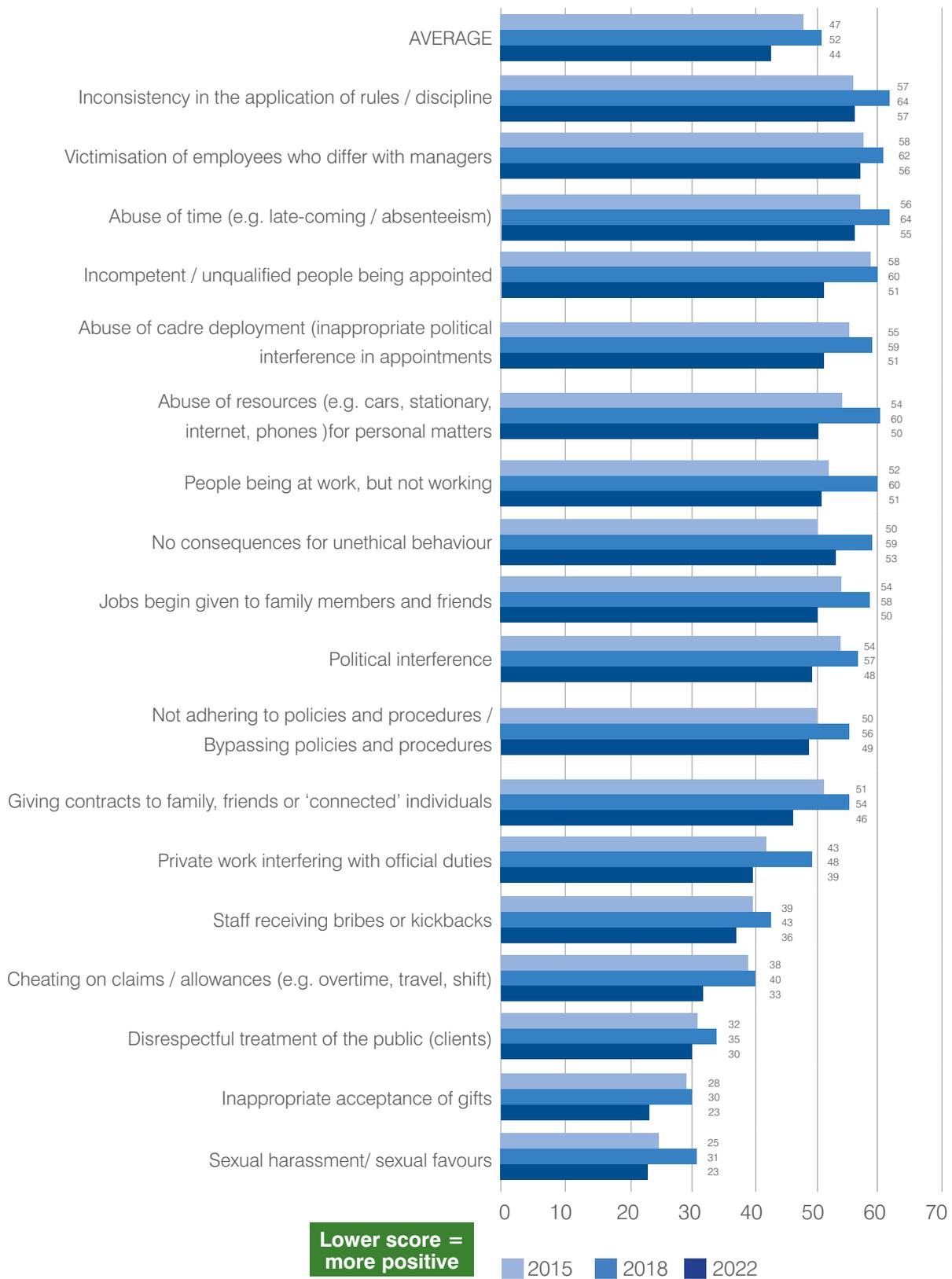
- Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed
- Jobs being given to family members and friends
- Abuse of cadre deployment
- Political interference
- Giving contracts to family, friends or connected individuals
- Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks

1.4. Ethical behaviour risk: Comparison with previous surveys

The following graph shows the results from the 2022 survey in comparison with those of the previous two surveys.

Comment:

- The results for the 2022 survey are more positive than the results for both the previous surveys.
- The results for the 2018 survey are consistently worse on all indicators which may mean that the differences might be put down to sampling. Due to these consistent difference on all items we do not believe that an analysis at the item-level will be sensible.
- The results nevertheless follow a similar pattern with similar issues being observed more than others.



2. Ethical culture risk

The purpose of the ethical culture component is to determine how supportive the environment is for people to behave ethically and to highlight elements that counter an ethical culture.

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with a number of positive statements. They could answer on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. They also had an 'I don't know' option. The agreement score is calculated based on the distribution of respondents' answers. In other words, the extent to which they agree with the positive statement. A low agreement score means that people generally do not agree with the positively framed statements, and it therefore poses a higher risk of an unsupportive ethical culture. Conversely, if more respondents agree, it shows a more supportive ethical culture and poses a lower risk.

The ethical culture component uses the following risk rating scale, which is inverted from the scale used in the ethics risk component:

Low risk	67 – 100
Moderate risk	50 – 66
High risk	33 – 49
Severe risk	0 – 32

2.1. Ethical culture risk: Overview

The table below gives an overview of the 'ethical culture' component of the survey.

Indicator		PSES 2022
1	Employees can report unethical practices without fear of retaliation / victimisation	35
2	Media reports on corruption are exaggerated and are not an accurate reflection of the public sector	36
3	Employees are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors	37
4	Employees are comfortable approaching their managers with ethical matters or concerns	39
5	Management appreciates employees	40
6	People who are honest and responsible are the ones who get ahead in this organisation	41
7	Things are made difficult for unethical people	41
8	Discipline is applied consistently across all levels	43
9	The organisation always takes action against unethical behaviour	43
10	My organisation's leaders set a good example of honest and responsible behaviour	47
11	There is sufficient separation of powers between the political and administrative heads of my organisation	49
12	Employees consider the code of conduct when making decisions	50
13	Employees are dedicated and professional	53
14	People who act ethically will be supported by leadership	54
15	It is easy for people to do the right thing	54
16	My organisation is doing well in terms of service delivery	55
17	Sexual-related offences are taken seriously in my organization	60
18	Management expects that employees will do what is right for the public	72
19	Ordinary public servants like me can make a difference in building a stronger ethical culture	80
AVERAGE		49

Comment:

- There are no items in the severe risk category, which is a positive.
- Statements with an agreement score of below 50 generally show that more than half of the respondents have some level of disagreement with the statement, and this poses a high risk. Some interesting clusters appear in this high-risk category.
- Among the highest risk areas are these statements that all seem to show a sense of fear among staff for speaking up, questioning their superiors, or even just raising an ethical matter.
 - Employees can report unethical practices without fear of retaliation / victimisation
 - Employees are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors
 - Employees are comfortable approaching their managers with ethical matters or concerns
- The next cluster again relates to the adage of building a culture by who you hire, fire and promote. There is disagreement with the following statements that ethical staff are promoted, and that unethical staff are sanctioned.
 - People who are honest and responsible are the ones who get ahead in this organisation
 - Things are made difficult for unethical people
 - Discipline is applied consistently across all levels
 - The organisation always takes action against unethical behaviour
- It is very concerning that most public servants do not think that media reports on corruption are an inaccurate reflection of the public sector. In other words, they believe that the media reports corruption in the public sector accurately.
- On the positive side, it seems that management does expect that employees should do what is right for the public. (Although the other indicators seem to show that they don't create a conducive environment to do so.)
- Most public servants do have a sense of personal agency and believe that they can make a difference in building a stronger ethical culture.

2.1. Ethical culture risk: Per audit outcomes

The following table shows the comparison between the ethical culture risk rating of public sector organisations that achieved unqualified audit outcomes, and those that achieved qualified or disclaimer audit outcomes. This is taken to be a proxy (if not a perfect one) for distinguishing between better and worse performing organisations, and gives an interesting view of what sets these organisations apart in terms of ethical culture indicators.

Ethical Culture Risk	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
		Most negative	
My organisation is doing well in terms of service delivery	61	12	49
There is sufficient separation of powers between the political and administrative heads of my organisation	53	8	45
Employees consider the code of conduct when making decisions	54	7	47
The organisation always takes action against unethical behaviour	47	7	41
Employees are dedicated and professional	57	7	50
My organisation's leaders set a good example of honest and responsible behaviour	52	7	45
People who act ethically will be supported by leadership	57	6	52
Employees can report unethical practices without fear of retaliation / victimisation	39	6	34
Things are made difficult for unethical people	44	6	39
Discipline is applied consistently across all levels	46	5	41
Management appreciates employees	44	5	39
Sexual-related offences are taken seriously in my organization	63	5	59
Management expects that employees will do what is right for the public	74	4	70
Employees are comfortable approaching their managers with ethical matters or concerns	42	4	38
People who are honest and responsible are the ones who get ahead in this organisation	43	4	39
It is easy for people to do the right thing	57	3	54
Employees are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors	41	3	37
Ordinary public servants like me can make a difference in building a stronger ethical culture	83	2	81
Media reports on corruption are exaggerated and are not an accurate reflection of the public sector	36	2	34
		Most positive	
AVERAGE	52	5	47

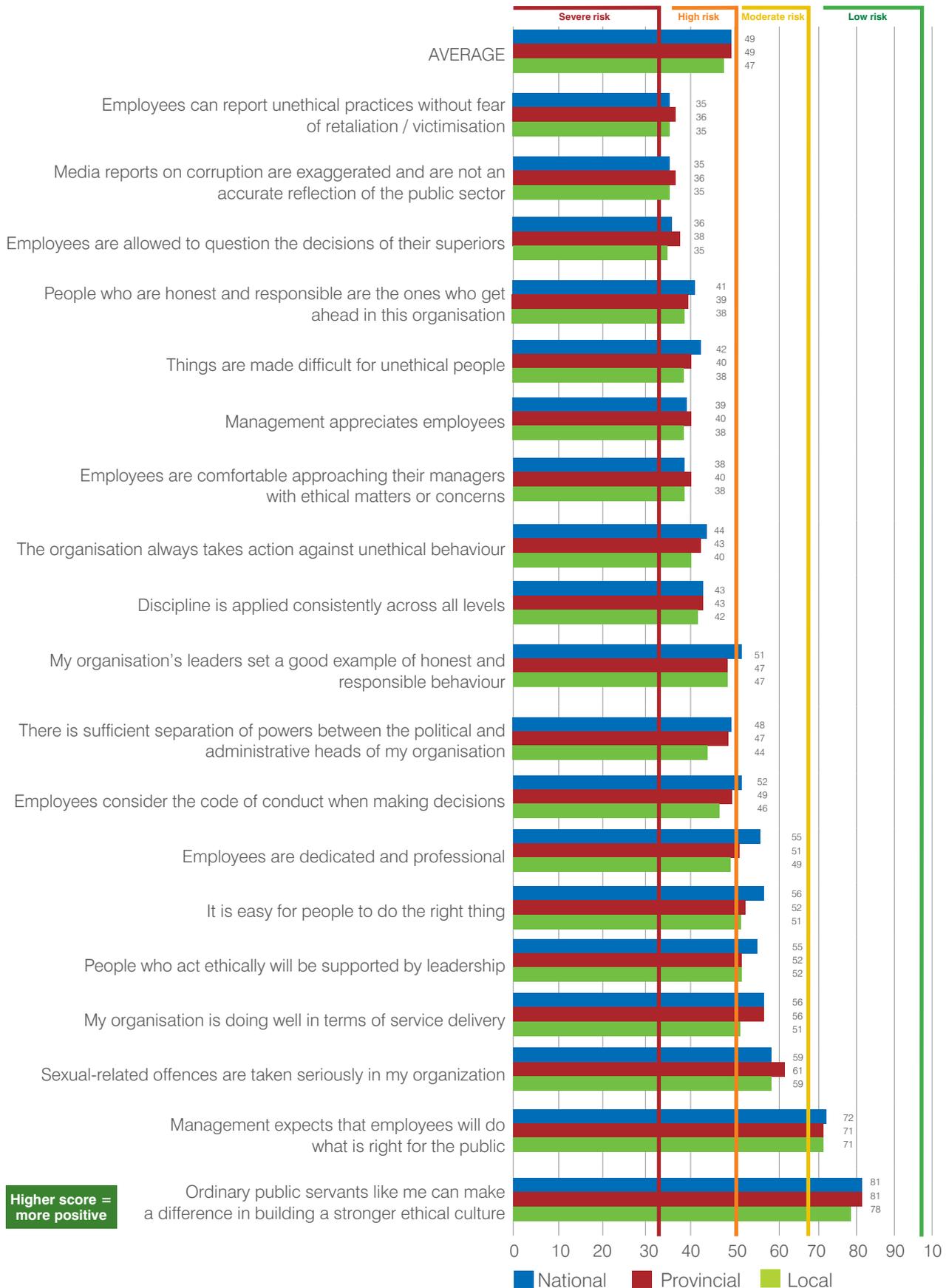
Comment:

- Organisations with qualified or disclaimer audits show higher levels of unethical behaviour on all indicators in the study than those with clean (unqualified) audits.

- The top two issues that set these organisations apart both relate to corruption:
 - Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individuals
 - Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks
 It therefore seems that corruption is more prevalent in organisations that are less well governed.

- The next few items that set the organisations apart give us some idea of the type of governance failures that might create a conducive environment for corruption and misconduct:
 - Political interference
 - Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures
 - Abuse of cadre deployment
 - No consequences for unethical behaviour.

2.2. Ethical culture risk: Comparison between spheres of government



Higher score = more positive

Comment:

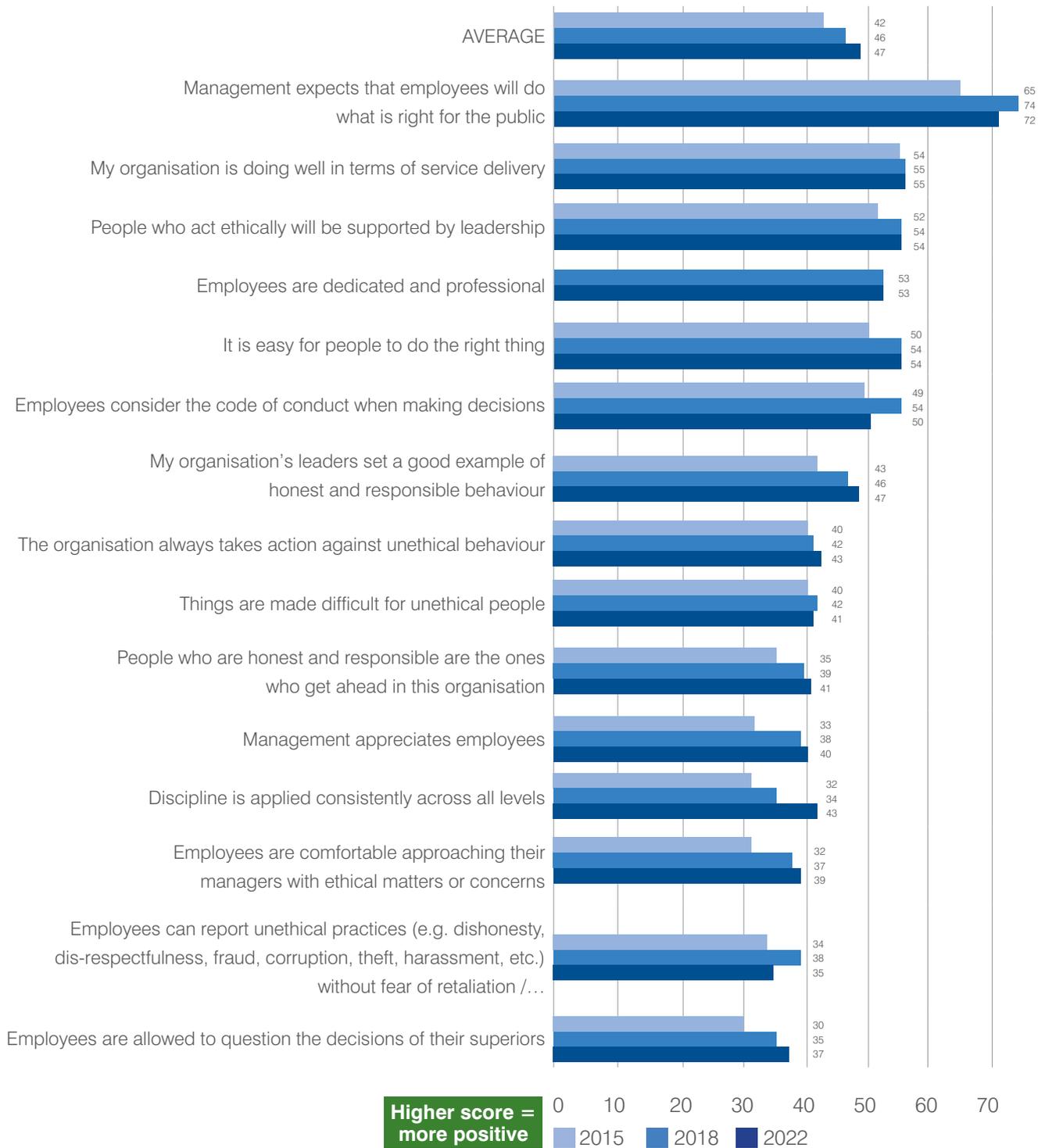
- On average, local government seems to have a slightly less supportive ethical culture than national or provincial government.

2.3. Ethical culture risk: Comparison with previous surveys

The following graph shows the results from the 2022 survey in comparison with those of the previous two surveys.

Comment:

- On average, the ethical culture score is slightly more positive (with one percentage point) than it was in 2018, and quite a bit more positive (five percentage points) than it was in 2015.
- The one indicator to stand out as significantly more positive in 2022, is that discipline is applied consistently across all levels.



3. Ethics management initiatives

3.1. Ethics management awareness: Overview

Organisations manage ethics to promote an ethical culture and to reduce ethics risks. This section of the survey aimed to establish the extent to which employees are aware of ethics management initiatives in their organisations.

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of, or had experienced, specific initiatives. They had 'Yes', 'No', and 'I don't know' options. The data indicates the 'Yes' responses and therefore indicate the proportion of the respondents that are aware of the initiatives.

Awareness rating scale

The data is categorised as follows:

Very high awareness	>90%
High awareness	75%-90%
Moderate awareness	50%-74%
Low awareness	25%-49%
Very low awareness	<25%

PSES 2022		Yes
1	Aware of organisation Code of Ethics / Code of Conduct	92%
2	Know organisation's policy on receiving gifts	82%
3	Know organisation's policy on private work	81%
4	Know organisation's policy on sexual harassment	70%
5	Organisation does pre-employment screening for all new appointees	68%
6	Aware of a hotline for reporting unethical behaviour	47%
7	Received ethics training in the last two years	45%
8	Aware of 'ethics officer'	43%
9	Aware of organisation's policy on lifestyle audits	42%
AVERAGE		64%

Comment:

- There is good awareness on some policy issues (e.g. Code of Conduct, gifts and private work).
- There is moderate awareness of the policy on sexual harassment.
- The only policy area with low awareness relates to lifestyle audits. This is not surprising as this is a new area of focus in the public sector.
- Awareness of ethics officer and an ethics hotline is still worryingly low, and might be correlated to low levels of ethics training.

3.2. Ethics management awareness: Per audit outcomes

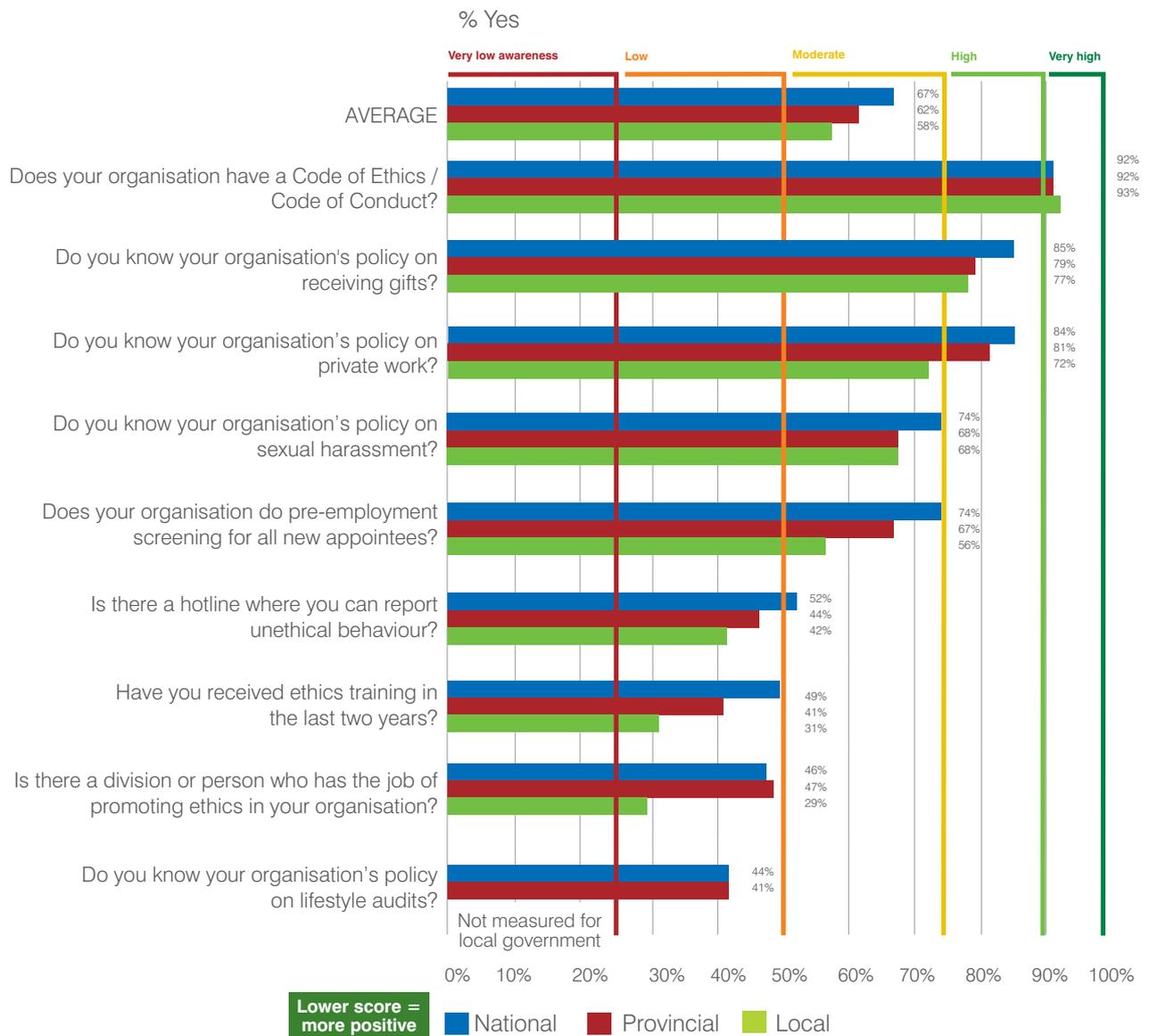
The following table shows the comparison between the ethics management awareness in public sector organisations that achieved unqualified audit outcomes, and those that achieved qualified or disclaimer audit outcomes. This is taken to be a proxy (if not a perfect one) for distinguishing between better and worse performing organisations, and gives an interesting view of what sets these organisations apart in terms of ethics management.

Ethics Management Awareness	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
		Most negative	
Aware of 'ethics officer'	58%	-13%	45%
Received ethics training in the last two years	55%	-12%	43%
Aware of a hotline for reporting unethical behaviour	58%	-7%	51%
Organisation does pre-employment screening for all new appointees	77%	-6%	70%
Know organisation's policy on private work	89%	-6%	84%
Know organisation's policy on receiving gifts	89%	-4%	85%
Know organisation's policy on sexual harassment	77%	-4%	74%
Aware of organisation Code of Ethics / Code of Conduct	95%	-2%	93%
Aware of organisation's policy on lifestyle audits	47%	3%	50%
		Most positive	
AVERAGE	72%	-6%	66%

Comment:

- In organisations with a clean audit (unqualified) significantly more employees are aware of an ethics officer, have received ethics training, and are aware of an ethics hotline.
- The awareness levels are higher in organisations with clean audits on all areas of ethics interventions, except for the policy on lifestyle audits.

3.3. Ethics management awareness: Comparison between spheres of government



Comment:

- Awareness levels of ethics interventions are lower in provincial government than in national government, and lowest in local government.
- The most significant areas where awareness is lower in local government are awareness of an ethics officer, and then whether people have had ethics training. This makes sense, as ethics officers should generally be the ones conducting ethics training.

3.4. Ethics management awareness: Comparison with previous surveys

The following graph shows the difference between the awareness levels of ethics management interventions between the 2015, 2018, and 2022 surveys. The values for each year indicate the 'Yes' responses to the indicators.



Comment:

- On average the awareness levels of ethics interventions seem to have gone up quite a bit between 2015 and 2018, but stayed relatively consistent from there.
- It is notable that awareness of ethics officers has significantly increased with each survey, and that there is now 16% more staff members aware of the existence of an ethics officer than in 2015. This level is however still below 50%.

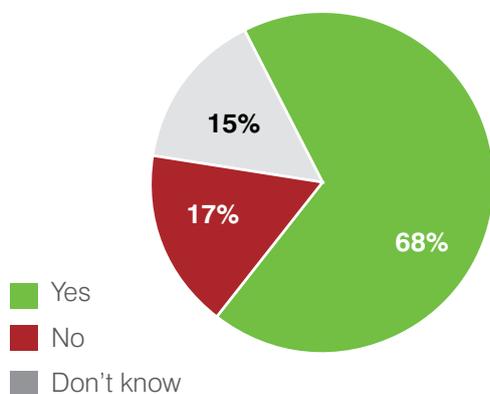
3.5. Lifestyle audits

Since lifestyle audits are a new policy area that is being explored, all respondents were asked the following questions pertaining to this area.

The concept was first clarified by saying that 'lifestyle audits are assessment conducted on a person' assets to detect wrongdoing / unexplained wealth'.

They were then asked whether they think lifestyle audits will be effective in reducing corruption in the public sector.

Do you think lifestyle audits will be effective in reducing corruption?

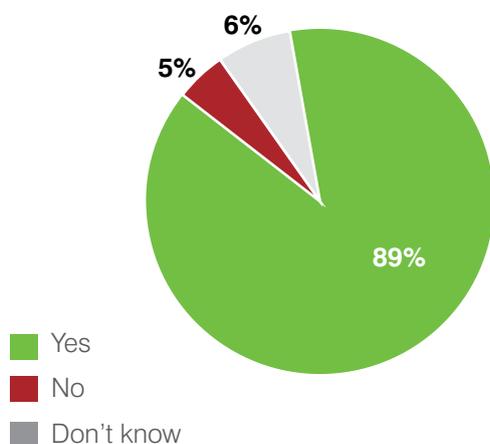


Comment:

- The majority of respondents (68%) believe that lifestyle audits will be effective.

All respondents were then asked whether they would be open to undergo a lifestyle audit.

Would you be open to undergo a lifestyle audit?



Comment:

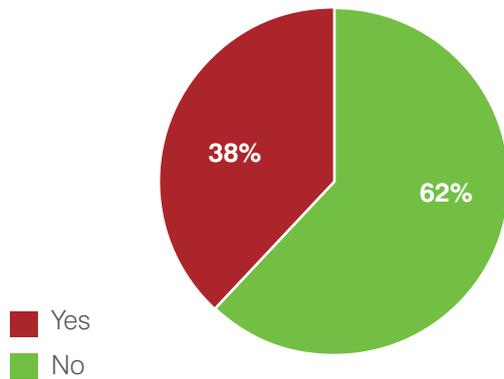
- Almost nine out of every 10 respondents indicated that they would be open to undergo a lifestyle audit, with only 5% indicating that they would not. This is significant as lifestyle audits have always been a contentious issue with some arguing that it infringes on rights to privacy. This might also indicate that the majority of public servants are willing to do their bit to contribute to combating corruption.

4. Whistleblowing / Reporting of misconduct

4.1. Observing misconduct

Respondents were asked whether they had observed misconduct in the past year.

Have you observed misconduct?

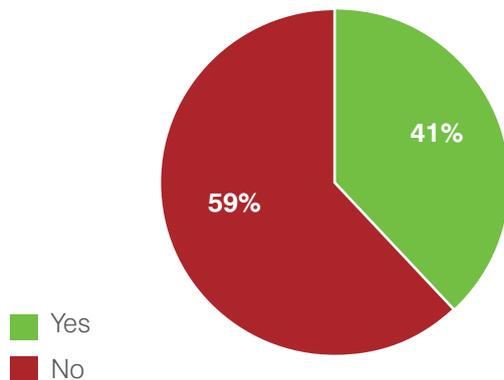


Almost two out of every five employees said that they had observed misconduct.

4.2. Reporting misconduct

Those that had observed misconduct were then asked whether they had reported the misconduct.

Have you observed misconduct?



Less than half of those who observe misconduct report it.

4.3. Reasons for not reporting misconduct

In a separate question, all respondents were asked why they would not report misconduct if they observed it. Only 39% of respondents indicated that this was not applicable to them, and that they would report misconduct if they observed it.

Of the remainder the following reasons were selected for not reporting misconduct. (Participants could select more than one option.)

Why would you not report misconduct that you observed?	Marked
I am afraid that I may be victimised at work	51%
I don't believe that anything will be done about my report	44%
I fear for my safety	37%
I do not believe I can report anonymously	19%
I am afraid that a colleague may be victimised at work	13%
I don't know who to contact	10%
Other	6%
Someone else will report it	4%
I do not want to report a co-worker or fellow employee	3%
I think the misconduct was justified	2%

Comment:

- The biggest reasons for not reporting relate to fear. This was either fear of victimisation (51%), or of personal safety (37%).
- After the fear concern people do not seem to think that anything will be done about their reports.
- Clearly many respondents feel that there is risk related to reporting misconduct, and if this risk is not rewarded with action and consequences, there is little incentive to report.

4.4. Where would people report misconduct

All respondents were asked to whom they would report misconduct if they observed it. Interestingly only 12% said they would not be comfortable to report misconduct at all.

The remainder indicated that they would report to the following avenues:

Where / to whom would you be more comfortable to report misconduct if you observed it?	Marked
Whistle-blowing hotline / facility (Anonymously)	55%
My manager	38%
The person responsible for ethics (Ethics Officer)	29%
Risk Management	15%
Human Resources (HR)	15%
Internal Audit	9%
Other (please specify)	8%
Whistle-blowing hotline / facility (Not anonymous)	8%
Another manager	8%

Comment:

- The avenue that will be most utilised is the anonymous hotline. (This is all the more reason to ensure that more employees become aware that there are hotlines available. According to the awareness section, only 47% of employees are aware of such hotlines.)
- After that most people are likely to go to their managers (38%) or to the ethics officer (29%).

Respondents were then asked which hotline they would trust most.

Which of the following hotlines would you trust if you wanted to report misconduct?	Marked
National Anti-Corruption Hotline (Public Service Commission)	36%
Public Protector	26%
Special Investigation Unit	23%
My organisation's own hotline	20%
Presidential Hotline	20%
DPSA Public Administration Ethics, Integrity and Disciplinary Technical Assistance Unit	19%
My Province's hotline	15%
Auditor General of South Africa	15%
None of the above	14%
SARS	7%
Other	3%

Comment:

- The most trusted hotline seems to be the Public Service Commission's National Anti-Corruption Hotline (36%), followed by the Public Protector (26%) and then the Special Investigation Unit (23%). None of these numbers are particularly high.

4.5. Response to misconduct reports

Respondents were also asked some questions related to their organisation's ability to respond to sexual harassment and misconduct.

Question	Risk
My organisation has the ability to respond to reports of sexual harassment / sextortion	56
If I were to report sexual harassment or sextortion in my organisation, I believe that something will be done about it	56
My organisation has the ability to manage discipline	49

Comment:

- Overall, respondents seem to have limited faith in the ability of their organisations to respond to misconduct.
- There is slightly higher trust in the inclination and ability to respond to reports of sexual harassment and sextortion (agreement scores of 56) than there is for the organisation to manage general discipline (49%).

5. Respondents' suggestions for improvement

Respondents were posed the following open-ended question where they could type their answers.

“What is the one thing that will improve the ethical culture in the public sector?”

The 5 229 responses received were categorised into the themes below. The weight of each theme is indicated as a percentage of overall responses.

		% of overall responses
1	Strengthen accountability and governance	27%
a	Consequence management, disciplinary action	10%
b	Addressing accountability; corruption & nepotism	6%
c	Consistent implementation, monitoring & enforcement	4%
d	Audits, processes, systems, structures, governance	4%
e	Transparency	3%
2	Improve ethical leadership and management competence	18%
a	Competent, ethical & exemplary management; not abusing authority	7%
b	Separation of political & administration; cadre deployment	6%
c	Ethical, exemplary & visionary leadership	5%
3	Higher ethical standards	16%
a	Honesty & integrity	7%
b	Personal responsibility, compliance, dedication, attitude & values	5%
c	Public and customer service; follow Batho Pele principles	3%
d	Teamwork	1%
4	Improve treatment of employees	14%
a	Communication, openness, engagement, consulting with employees	4%
b	Fair & equal treatment and application, no favouritism	3%
c	Better remuneration & career path, working conditions & provision of resources	3%
d	Recognition & appreciation; positive work environment	3%
e	Tackling racism & discrimination; diversity and EE/BEE practices	1%
5	Ethics awareness and training and ethics infrastructure	16%
a	Ethics training, education, and workshops	7%
b	Creating and promoting ethics awareness; institutionalisation	4%
c	Establish and strengthen hotlines; support/protection for reporting, stop victimization	3%
d	Appointing an ethics office/r, committee; codes, orientation and induction	2%
6	Recruit on merit to promote professionalism	8%
a	Recruiting, appointing & promoting on merit & qualifications	7%
b	Professionalism	2%
		100%

The following gives a synopsis of each of the themes.

1. Strengthen accountability and governance

This theme expressed the belief, usually in emphatic terms, that consequence management and/or disciplinary action – more of it and more visibility of it – would improve the ethical culture in the public sector. Consequence

management can be understood within the broader context of accountability. Accountability requires both transparency and consistency in implementing, monitoring and enforcing processes, systems, structures and governance in order to eliminate corruption. These may include specifics such as lifestyle audits, rotating staff and revamping tender policies.

2. Improve ethical leadership and management competence

This theme centred on the belief that ethical and exemplary leaders in general, and management in particular, could improve the ethical culture in the public sector. This included calls for leaders and managers who are competent and do not abuse their powers. Political interference and cadre deployment are seen as the main impediments to ethical and exemplary leadership and management.

3. Higher ethical standards

This theme focused on the individual and their personal values and beliefs rather than the organisation – in this case the public sector – which would then improve the ethical culture of the public sector. The individual needed to take personal responsibility for the public sector's ethical culture through their own dedication, attitude and adherence to its policies and principles. Values such as honesty and integrity were singled out, as was a commitment to public and customer service as contained in the Batho Pele principles.

4. Improve treatment of employees

This theme centred around the well-being, care for, and improved treatment of the employee. The respondents wanted fairness and equality; and improved communication which requires more openness, engagement, and consultation with employees. It also means better remuneration, working conditions, resources and career development. Recognition, appreciation and rewards for good work and ethical behaviour together with a positive work environment were also cited as things that would improve the ethical culture in the public sector.

5. Ethics awareness and training, and ethics infrastructure

This theme focused on the promotion of ethics through training, education, workshops, awareness, and institutionalisation. The need for ethics infrastructure such as an ethics office/r, committee and codes were also highlighted as well as the inclusion of ethics training and awareness in orientation and induction. An important subtheme raised the issue of establishing and strengthening reporting/whistleblowing hotlines, together with the need to support and protect those reporting illegal and unethical behaviour. There was a palpable sense of fear conveyed in the plea to stop victimization and intimidation.

6. Recruit on merit to promote professionalism

This theme expressed the belief that without professionalism in the public sector, ethics would never improve. Key to achieving this was recruiting, appointing and promoting people, including management and leadership, based on suitable qualifications, skills and experience. This could be aided through adequate vetting and screening.

D. Key findings and root causes

The 2022 Public Sector Ethics Survey gives a great deal of data about the state of ethics in the public sector, dealing with ethical culture, ethical behaviours, ethics management and the reporting of misconduct. The challenge is to read the patterns in the data and extract the key messages that will assist most in improving the state of ethics.

With regard to the ethical culture indicators, more than half of respondents indicate concern about factors that indicate an unsupportive ethical culture. The most negative indicators all seem to suggest a culture of fear in the public sector. Employees don't feel they can report misconduct, they don't feel they can question the decisions of their superiors, and they don't even feel they can talk to their managers about their ethical concerns. It suggests an authoritarian system, but not one where the authority is applied to instil discipline or achieve objectives. Most employees don't think that things are made difficult for unethical people, or that action is taken against unethical behaviour. And many employees also believe that the organisation is not doing well in terms of service delivery. The authority therefore seems to be abused and not used for improved discipline or service delivery.

There is an adage in management studies that one builds a culture by who you hire, who you fire and who you promote. This would be because organisational staffing and management is done to achieve specific organisational objectives. The data however indicates that inappropriate people are appointed (going together with an abuse of deployment practices), honest and responsible people are not the ones who are promoted, and action is not taken against unethical behaviours. It is clear from verbatim comments that public servants would prefer to work in an environment that hires and promotes for professionalism, and instils discipline.

With the above in mind it is not surprising that there are a number of indicators showing counterproductive work behaviours. This includes abuse of time, being at work but not working, and the abuse of resources for personal matters. The extent of these behaviours is definitely cause for concern, but they likely stem from the hiring and management practices that do not place sufficient value on professionalism.

In terms of ethics management interventions, there are relatively high levels of awareness of the Code of Ethics as well as policies regulating gifts and conflicts of interest. More substantive interventions aimed at culture change, such as ethics training, however remain at low levels. The 2016 Public Service Regulations introduced ethics officers into the public sector, and there was subsequently a huge jump in awareness of them between the 2015 and 2018 surveys. In the 2022 survey the awareness has gone up further but remains at a low 43%.

There is low awareness (47%) of a hotline to report unethical behaviour anonymously. This is worrying since more than half of respondents indicate that they would prefer to report misconduct anonymously. There is still a large mistrust in processes for reporting misconduct and acting on such reports. 59% of people who observed misconduct did not report it, mainly because they fear being victimised, and they don't think anything will be done about it. This lack of discipline management and accountability is reiterated across all parts of the survey and is the main area of improvement that the verbatim comments (with clear despondency and frustration) suggest for improving ethics in the public sector.

The second most prominent area of improvement that is suggested by the verbatim comments is the appointment

of ethical and competent leaders. It seems that this area is too often politicised and there is insufficient focus on appointments that are based on merit and professionalism.

On the positive side, there have been marginal improvements on all three areas of the survey that have historic data (i.e. ethical behaviour, ethical culture, and ethics management). While this might be partially due to differences in sampling, there are also other messages that show the growing positive influence of ethics management over the years. For one, there is a correlation between departments having stronger ethics management, stronger ethical cultures, and less misconduct. This is also linked to improved audit outcomes, and improved service delivery.

A new addition to this year's survey was a section on lifestyle audits. Most respondents believe it will be effective at reducing corruption, and remarkably almost 90% of respondents said that they would be open to undergo a lifestyle audit themselves. This gives us a sense that public servants are willing to play their part in reducing corruption. The work of ethics officers is therefore likely to be welcomed, giving them a better chance of being change agents in their organisations.

E. Recommendations

After three iterations of the survey, with similar patterns emerging, it is clear that there is still much to be done to improve the ethical culture and behaviour in the public sector. With this much data one also gets a sense of which aspects are causal, and which are symptomatic. While there can be a host of recommendations, the focus here is on one issue specifically, which is considered foundational to building an ethical public sector.

Recommendation: Review the appointment processes for top managers to ensure stable, capable, and ethical leadership

A professional public sector requires professional heads of department and top management. The data suggests that the political-administrative interface is challenging, with insufficient distance between the political and administrative heads. Currently heads of department are selected by their political principals and are largely vulnerable to political changes and whims for job security. The National Development Plan makes many suggestions for stabilising the political-administrative interface. Among them is the suggestion that the chair of the Public Service Commission, together with a (yet to be created) administrative head of the public service, convene the selection panels for heads of department and their deputies. A shortlist would be recommended by the panel to the executive authority to decide from. The administrative head would also manage the career progression and disciplinary incidents of these senior public servants. It is also suggested that there be greater job security for heads of department. The intention is clearly to increase the professional considerations in these matters and reduce the instability that goes hand in hand with political terms of office.

These same recommendations are also made in the National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service, prepared by the National School of Government in 2020, and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, 2020 – 2030, indicating alignment between various studies and strategies. The only thing lacking is implementation.

There are a number of other issues to be addressed and a number of other interventions that should be promoted. Most urgent among these is improving accountability. Verbatim comments however indicate that inappropriate leaders aren't capable of holding those below them to account, or that political rather than professional considerations frequently trump in matters of accountability, all of which leads to perceptions of impunity. For fair and professional accountability to become part of the system, one would need to ensure fair and professional top management.

The whistle-blowing system is another area that suffers from low trust. As a starting point it is recommended that the DPSA and CoGTA monitor the implementation of whistle-blowing response systems in departments and municipalities. ¹ Additionally a Public Service-wide information management system for reported cases should be considered to improve the transparency of disciplinary matters. However, trust in the whistle-blowing system will not be regained as long as people fear that they will be victimised, and that nothing will be done about their reports. Should accountability and discipline management improve, these perceptions would also improve. But as shown above, this too is dependent on ethical and professional leaders driving the processes.

Ensuring stable, capable, and ethical leadership in the public sector is central to building a professional culture and should be addressed with urgency.

¹ Detailed guidance on systems to be implemented is given in the 'Guide on the Reporting of Unethical Conduct, Corruption and Non-Compliance to the Public Service Act, 1994 and Public Service Regulations, 2016'



building an
ethical
SOCIETY

The Ethics Institute is an independent institute producing original thought leadership and offering a range of organisational ethics-related products and services.

All original research work produced by The Ethics Institute is freely available on our website: www.tei.org.za.