

Public Sector ETHICS SURVEY 2024

Ethics Survey of National, Provincial
and Local Government

January 2025



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

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Public Sector Ethics Survey 2024

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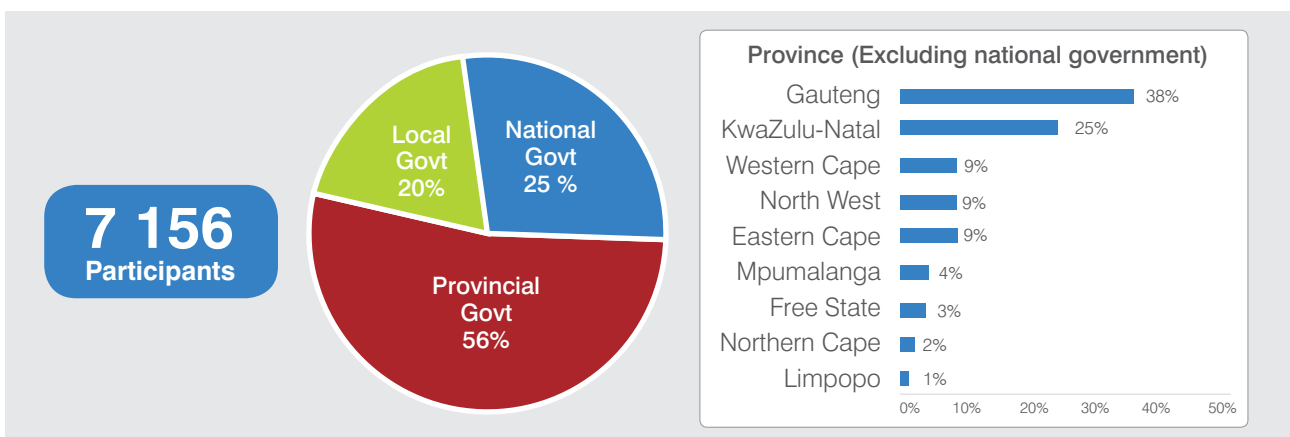
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Executive Summary

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 fourth iteration of the survey was conducted between 2 September and 15 October 2024.

The survey is conducted by The Ethics Institute 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



Top ethical culture concerns

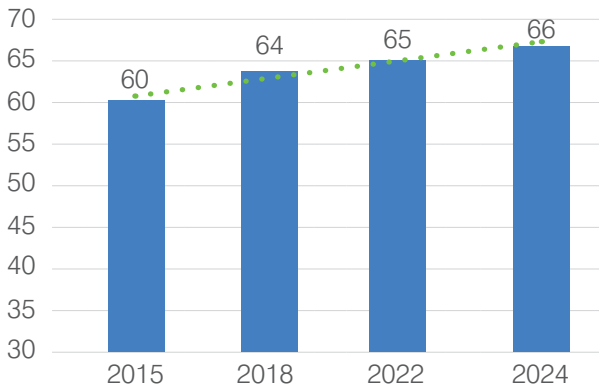
1. Fear of speaking up
2. Lack of fairness to staff
3. Lack of appreciation of staff

Top ethical behaviour concerns

1. Poor and inconsistent application of discipline
2. Victimisation of employees who differ with managers
3. Abuse of time

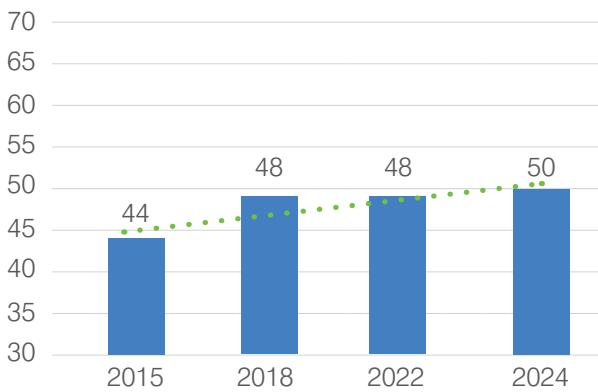
Over the years

Awareness of ethics initiatives



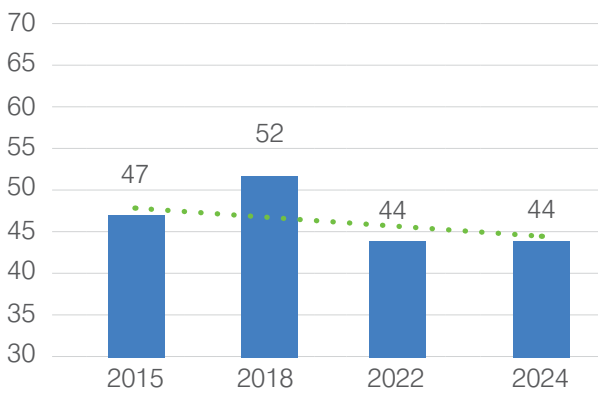
Higher = better

Supportive ethical culture



Higher = better

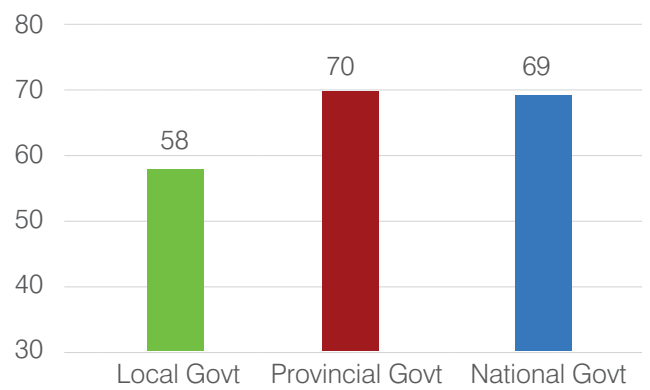
Awareness of unethical conduct



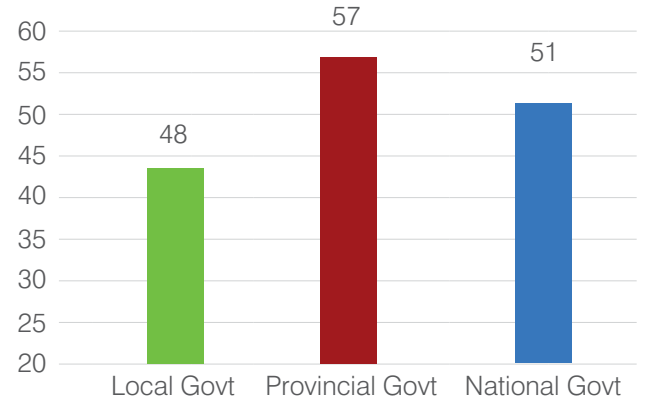
Lower = better

Across the spheres

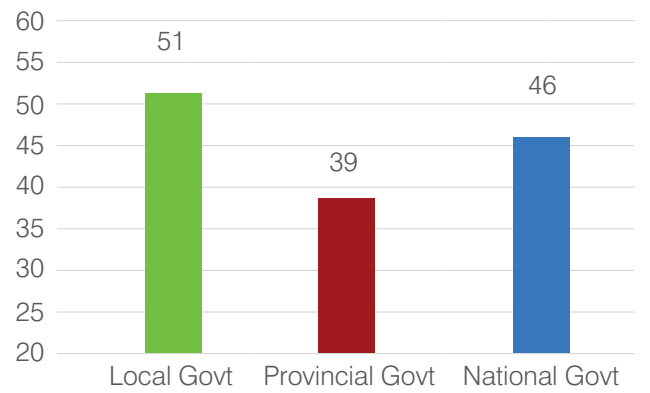
Awareness of ethics initiatives



Supportive ethical culture



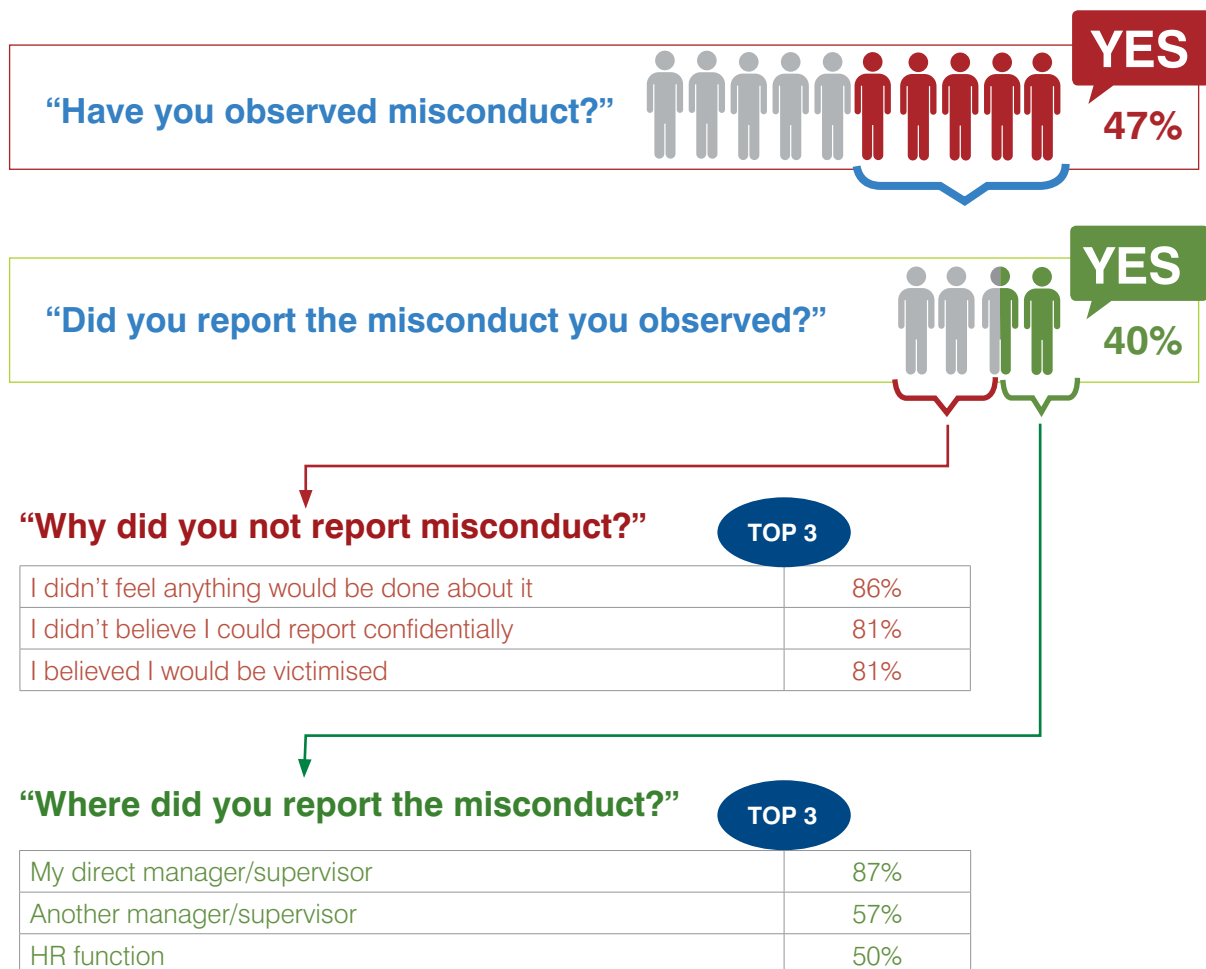
Awareness of unethical conduct



Result differences based on audit outcomes



Reporting misconduct

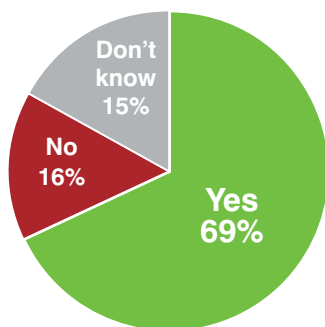


Awareness of ethics management initiatives

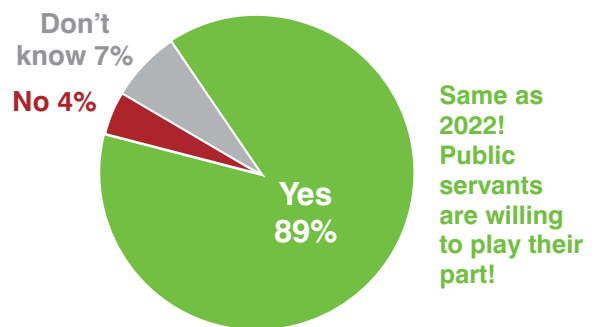
Move from 2022

Aware of the code of conduct		94%	
Know the policy on gifts		81%	
Know the policy on private work		80%	
Know policy on sexual harassment		74%	
Believe all new appointees are screened		67%	
Aware of policy on lifestyle audits		52%	
Received ethics training		50%	
Aware of hotline		47%	
Up 20% from 2015! Aware of 'ethics officer'		47%	

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

**Strong and fair
accountability
(34%)**

"Consequences for unethical actions should apply equally to all, regardless of position."

"Accountability should be visible and enforced, so employees feel confident that standards are upheld."

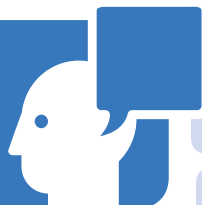
"Without accountability mechanisms, there's no incentive to act ethically."

**More ethics
awareness and
integration
(25%)**

"Promoting culture of Ubuntu, 100% compliance with Batho Pele principles."

"All officials should practice ethical behaviour whether there is an audience or not."

"Annual or biannual training on ethics."

**Ethical
leadership
(21%)**

"Leaders need to demonstrate ethical behaviour consistently so others follow."

"Management should lead by example and show transparency in their decisions."

"Leadership must actively promote and model core ethical values."

**Whistleblower
protection
(10%)**

"Anonymous corruption reporting line or app that can enable the upload of all evidence documentation."

"Confidentiality and protection of whistle blowers."

**More fairness,
less bias
(10%)**

"Appointments on merit and no political interference."

"Get rid of corrupt cadres who work in unison to subvert policies and procedures as instructed, often at the expense of ethical workers who are victimised."

2. Recommendations

(More detail on page 38)

Recommendations are focussed on two main areas:

1. Develop a professional public sector

a) Enable and unlock ethical leadership.

- i. The appointment process for top managers must be reviewed to ensure stable credible leadership.
- ii. The ethics competence of managers needs to be developed through training. This includes the cognitive, behavioural and managerial competence for ethics.

b) Appoint competent and professional staff.

- i. Strong measures are needed to ensure staff competence.

c) Improve accountability.

- i. Interventions are required to ensure strengthened capacity for investigations and disciplinary procedures.
- ii. There should be strengthened oversight of serious misconduct investigations.
- iii. Successes should be communicated to ensure that justice is not only done, but seen to be done.

2. Elevate the strategic importance of ethics

a) Facilitate a national dialogue on ethical leadership in the public sector.

b) Build ethics infrastructure in departments.

- i. Ethics officers, ethics committees and ethics champions should be supported to run ethics programmes that address the strategic issues identified in this survey.
- ii. The efforts to build ethics infrastructure in organisations should be continued and strengthened.

c) Strengthen the focus on 'culture work'.

d) Capacitate organisations to respond to whistleblowing.

- i. The DPSA and CoGTA should monitor the implementation of whistle-blowing response systems in departments and municipalities.
- ii. A public service-wide information management system for reported cases should be considered to improve the transparency of disciplinary matters.

A. Background and purpose

The Public Sector Ethics Survey was first conducted in 2015 as a way of obtaining 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 2021 (concluding in 2022), with this being the fourth iteration.

B. Methodology

As with previous versions of the survey, the 2024 Public Sector Ethics Survey was conducted online. To ensure comparability of data, the questionnaire was largely the same as the one utilised previously, 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 2021/22)
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 Department for Cooperative Governance (DCoG) distributed the link through their network of ethics officers, as well as through the Local Government Anti-Corruption Committee.
- SALGA sent emails directly to mayors and speakers of municipalities requesting participation in municipalities.
- The Ethics Institute also communicated via provincial CoGTAs, requesting them to communicate with municipalities.

The survey was live from 2 September 2024 to 15 October 2024. The closing date was extended once to achieve the targeted response rate.

Anonymity of respondents

Several measures were taken to ensure that respondents remained anonymous.

Respondents were not requested to fill in their names or staff numbers on the questionnaires, nor was it obligatory to provide demographic information. However, since we asked respondents from national and provincial government to indicate their department, which is the first time we have done so, we felt it necessary to further ensure perceptions of anonymity by not asking personal demographic information, besides gender.

The survey was also independently externally hosted to increase confidentiality, and this was communicated to employees upfront.

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

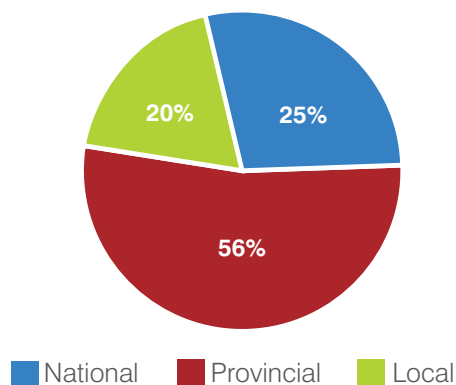
A total of 12 104 responses were received, but many were significantly incomplete. The total number of used responses was 7 156.

4. Demographic data

The following graphs present 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 7 156. The sample size is large enough to enable valid conclusions of the data. It is comparable to that of previous surveys as shown below.

Year of survey	Number of respondents
2015	7 869
2018	8 749
2022	8 803
2024	7 156

Sphere of government

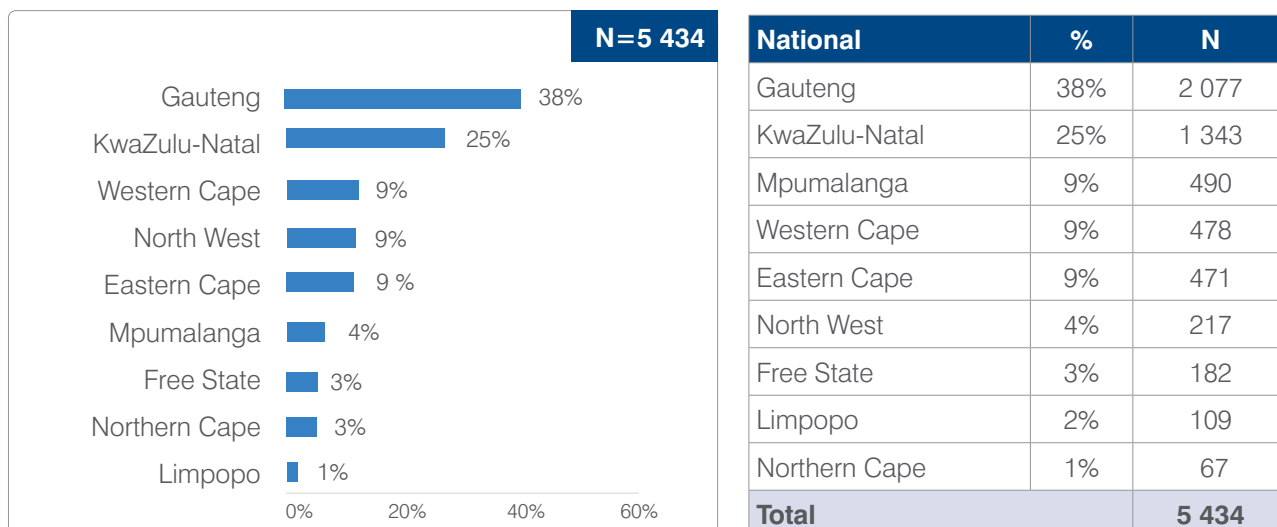


National	%	N
National government	25%	1 724
Provincial government	56%	3 932
Local government	20%	1 392
Total	100%	7058

It should be noted that although there is a large local government sample, the state of ethics in individual municipalities may vary significantly. The findings may therefore be more influenced by the ethics in the individual municipalities that participated.

Province – Excluding responses from national government

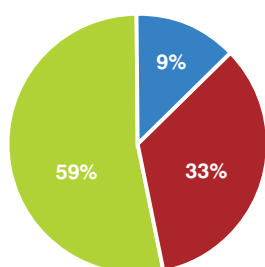
Since most national government respondents are based in Gauteng, the data from national government is excluded to give a more accurate indication of provincial representation.



There is a fairly good distribution among the provinces, but Gauteng and KZN (which are the larger provinces) have significantly more respondents.

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

Job level

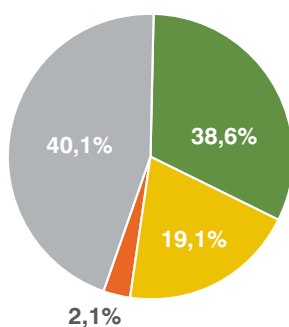


■ Senior Management
 ■ Middle Management
 ■ Employee

Category	%	N
Senior Management	9%	623
Middle Management	33%	2 305
Employee	59%	4 150
Total	100%	7 078

The distribution among management levels is fairly representative of what one would expect in a typical organisational structure, with far fewer senior managers than employees.

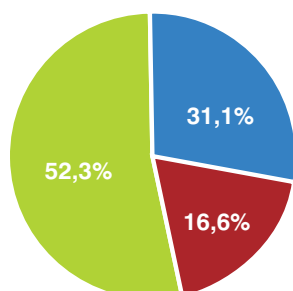
Outcome of your organisation's last audit report



Category	%	N
Unqualified (Clean audit)	38,6%	2 751
Qualified	19,1%	1 361
Adverse / disclaimer	2,1%	151
I don't know	40,1%	2 858
Total	100,0%	7 121

■ Unqualified (Clean audit)
 ■ Adverse / disclaimer
 ■ Qualified
 ■ I don't know

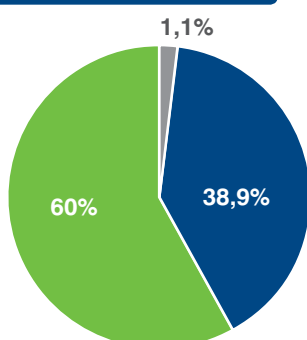
Municipality



Category	%	N
Metro	31,1%	427
District	16,6%	227
Local	52,3%	717
Total	100%	1 371

■ Metro ■ District ■ Local

Gender



Category	%	N
Male	38,9%	2 786
Female	60,0%	4 294
Other / prefer not to answer	1,1%	76
Total	100%	7 156

■ Male ■ Female ■ Other / prefer not to answer

Department

This year, for the first time, we asked respondents from national and provincial government to indicate which department they belong to. This was done in an attempt to make it possible for departments to extract their data to utilise in their own ethics risk assessments rather than go through a separate survey process. Only a small number of departments however have sufficiently high response rates to sensibly extract their reports. One hopes this might change in future.

National Government	Total	1 658
Department	%	N
Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development	1,3%	22
Basic Education	1,1%	18
Centre of Public Service Innovation	0,3%	5
Civilian Secretariat for the Police Service	0,5%	8
Communications and Digital Technologies	0,1%	1
Cooperative Governance	3,0%	49
Correctional Services	4,1%	68
Defence	0,5%	8
Employment and Labour	0,4%	7
Fisheries, Environment and Forestry	0,1%	2
Government Communication and Information System	1,1%	18
Government Printing Works	1,4%	23

Department	%	N
Government Technical Advisory Centre	0,1%	1
Health	4,5%	75
Higher Education and Training	17,1%	283
Home Affairs	0,9%	15
Human Settlements	0,1%	2
Independent Police Investigative Directorate	0,1%	1
International Relations and Cooperation	7,4%	122
Justice and Constitutional Development	9,0%	149
Mineral Resources and Energy	2,8%	47
Municipal Infrastructure Support Agent	0,1%	1
National Prosecuting Authority	0,7%	12
National School of Government	1,0%	16
National Treasury	0,2%	3
Office of the Chief Justice	2,9%	48
Office of the Public Service Commission	0,6%	10
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation	0,4%	6
Police	7,1%	117
Public Enterprises	0,6%	10
Public Service and Administration	5,9%	98
Public Works and Infrastructure	0,2%	4
Science and Innovation	2,9%	48
Small Business Development	0,1%	1
Social Development	1,3%	21
Sport, Arts and Culture	0,1%	1
Statistics South Africa	9,6%	159
The Presidency	0,2%	3
Tourism	0,2%	4
Trade, Industry and Competition	4,9%	81
Transport	2,7%	44
Water and Sanitation	2,2%	37
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities	0,6%	10

Eastern Cape	Total	179
Department	%	N
Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs	22,3%	40
Education	2,2%	4
Health	2,8%	5
Office of the Premier	0,6%	1
Provincial Treasury	0,6%	1
Rural Development and Agrarian Reform	0,6%	1
Safety and Liaison	0,6%	1
Social Development	1,1%	2
Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture	69,3%	124

Free State	Total	112
Department	%	N
Agriculture and Rural Development	2,7%	3
Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs	17,9%	20
Community Safety, Roads and Transport	2,7%	3
Education	13,4%	15
Health	24,1%	27
Human Settlements	0,9%	1
Office of the Premier	0,9%	1
Provincial Treasury	17,9%	20
Public Works & Infrastructure	0,9%	1
Social Development	13,4%	15
Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation	5,4%	6

Gauteng	Total	1 463
Department	%	N
Agriculture and Rural Development	5,6%	93
Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs	2,4%	40
Community Safety	1,2%	20
Cradle of Humankind and Dinokeng	0,4%	6
E-Government	1,1%	18
Economic Development	1,5%	25
Education	9,5%	157
Health	37,8%	627
Human Settlements	1,7%	29
Infrastructure Development	1,5%	25
Office of the Premier	2,4%	40
Provincial Treasury	9,9%	164
Roads and Transport	3,2%	53
Social Development	8,8%	146
Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation	1,2%	20

KwaZulu-Natal	Total	1 151
Department	%	N
Agriculture and Rural Development	6,5%	107
Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs	2,5%	42
Community Safety and Liaison	1,3%	21
Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs	1,6%	27
Education	4,1%	68
Finance (Provincial Treasury)	7,0%	116
Health	8,0%	133
Human Settlements	17,1%	284
Office of the Premier	1,7%	29
Public Works	10,4%	172
Social Development	4,8%	79
Sports, Arts & Culture	1,2%	20
Transport	3,2%	53

Limpopo	Total	66
Department	%	N
Agriculture and Rural Development	0,1%	1
Co-operative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs	0,4%	7
Education	3,0%	50
Health	0,2%	4
Office of the Premier	0,2%	3
Social Development	0,1%	1

Mpumalanga	Total	431
Department	%	N
Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs	0,2%	4
Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs	1,1%	19
Community Safety, Security and Liaison	0,8%	14
Culture, Sport and Recreation	0,5%	8
Economic Development and Tourism	1,7%	29
Education	0,2%	4
Health	0,4%	6
Human Settlements	0,2%	4
Office of the Premier	0,9%	15
Provincial Treasury	17,0%	282
Public Works, Roads and Transport	1,4%	24
Social Development	1,3%	22

Northern Cape	Total	42
Department	%	N
Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform	0,1%	2
Co-operative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs	0,1%	2
Education	0,6%	10
Health	0,1%	2
Office of the Premier	0,2%	4
Roads and Public Works	0,6%	10
Social Development	0,7%	12

North West	Total	129
Department	%	N
Agriculture and Rural Development	0,1%	1
Community Safety and Transport Management	0,2%	3
Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs	0,1%	2
Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism	0,2%	4
Education	0,1%	2
Health	6,5%	107
Human Settlements	0,1%	1
Office of the Premier	0,1%	1
Public Works and Roads	0,4%	6
Social Development	0,1%	2

Western Cape	Total	319
Department	%	N
Agriculture	4,3%	71
Cultural Affairs and Sport	4,2%	70
Economic Development and Tourism	0,1%	1
Education	1,4%	24
Environmental Affairs and Development Planning	4,2%	69
Health and Wellness	0,4%	7
Local Government	1,3%	22
Police Oversight and Community Safety	1,7%	28
Provincial Treasury	0,6%	10
Social Development	0,3%	5
The Premier	0,7%	12

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 gain 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 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 vice versa.

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 table below presents an overview of the 'ethical behaviour risk' component of the survey.

Indicator		PSES 2024
1	Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline	56
2	Victimisation of employees who differ with managers	55
3	Abuse of time	55
4	No consequences for unethical behaviour	52
5	Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed	51
6	Jobs being given to family members and friends	50
7	People being at work, but not working	50
8	Abuse of resources for personal matters	50
9	Political interference	49
10	Abuse of "cadre deployment"	49
11	Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees	48
12	Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures	48
13	Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individuals	47
14	Private work interfering with official duties	38
15	Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks	36
16	Cheating on claims / allowances	35
17	Disrespectful treatment of the public	30
18	Inappropriate acceptance of gifts	24
19	Sextortion	24
20	Sexual harassment	23
AVERAGE		44

Comment:

- From the 20 items, none fall in the severe risk category, which is a positive. Seven are in the high-risk category, nine in the moderate risk category, and four in the low risk category.
- Ethics failures at the management level are at the top of the high-risk category. This includes:
 - Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline (this remains as a high risk)
 - Victimization of employees who differ with managers (remains as a high risk)
 - No consequences for unethical behaviour
 - Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed
- 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 following point to high risks related to appointments which will have a negative impact on the culture of organisations.
 - Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed
 - Jobs being given to family members and friends (new as a high risk category)
- The remaining two issues in the high-risk category point to counterproductive work behaviours by employees, which is indicative of low levels of staff engagement and an unprofessional work environment:
 - Abuse of time (this was on the increase as compared to 2022).
 - People being at work, but not working (this was a new high area of risk as compared to the 2022 survey).
- Included in the moderate risk category are abuse of power behaviours displayed by those in management/ in authority. These include:
 - Political interference
 - Abuse of “cadre deployment”
 - Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees
 - Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures
- Other counterproductive work behaviours, that lean more to misconduct than simply unprofessional behaviour, are less frequently observed in the workplace. These include:
 - Abuse of resources for personal matters
 - Giving contracts to family, friends or ‘connected’ individuals
 - Private work interfering with official duties
 - Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks
 - Cheating on claims / allowances
- Given the public service emphasis on the Batho Pele principles, it is interesting to note that not many people observed the disrespectful treatment of the public.
- The public service has a strong track record of managing gifts to avoid conflicts of interest. It is therefore noteworthy that few 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 the least observed behaviours on the list. It should however be kept in mind that approximately 1 in 5 employees say that they observe these behaviours frequently or very frequently. (These numbers are slightly higher for female respondents male. See the separate gender report for more detail.) Considering the high-impact nature of these behaviours, this should still be considered too high.

1.2. Ethical behaviour risk: Per audit outcomes

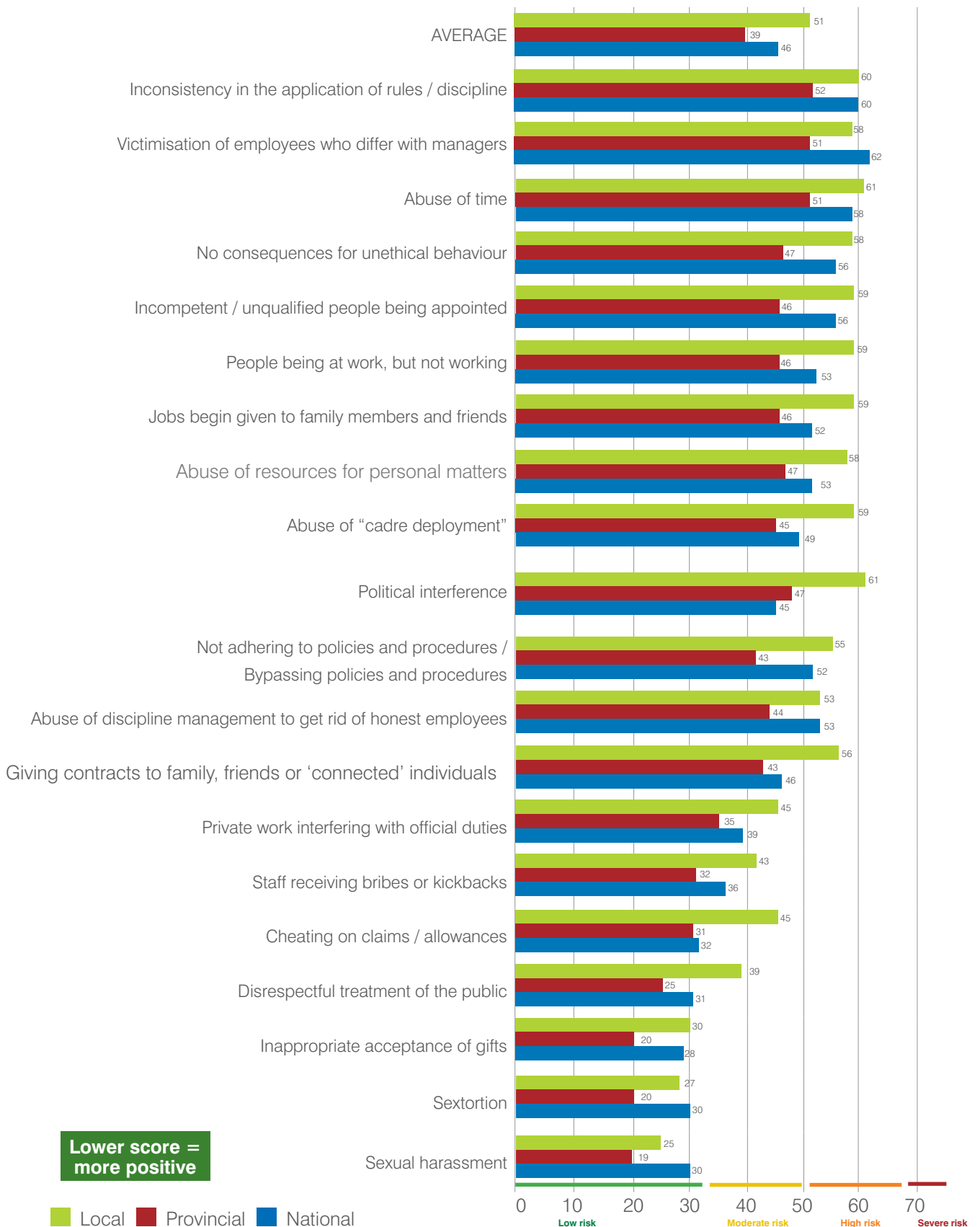
The following table shows the comparison between the ethical behaviour risk rating of public sector organisations that achieved unqualified audit outcomes, and those that achieved qualified or disclaimer audit outcomes. This is taken to be a proxy (if not a perfect one) for distinguishing between better 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	
Disrespectful treatment of the public	25	-9	34
Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individuals	40	-8	49
Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed	46	-8	54
Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures	44	-7	50
Jobs being given to family members and friends	46	-6	53
Political interference	47	-6	53
Cheating on claims / allowances	32	-6	38
No consequences for unethical behaviour	48	-6	54
Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees	44	-5	49
Staff receiving bribes or kickbacks	33	-5	38
Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline	53	-5	58
Abuse of resources for personal matters	48	-4	52
People being at work, but not working	49	-4	53
Abuse of "cadre deployment"	48	-4	52
Private work interfering with official duties	36	-4	40
Inappropriate acceptance of gifts	24	-3	27
Abuse of time	54	-3	57
Sextortion	23	-3	26
Victimisation of employees who differ with managers	53	-2	55
Sexual harassment	24	1	23
		Most positive	
AVERAGE	41	-5	46

Comment:

- Organisations with qualified or disclaimer audits show higher levels of unethical behaviour on most indicators than those with clean (unqualified) audits. The only exception is for sexual harassment.
- The top issues that set these organisations apart relate to disrespectful treatment of the public. It therefore appears that there is a link between audit outcomes and service delivery, making audit outcomes a good proxy for organisational performance.
- Following on this is an indicator relating to corruption:
 - Giving contracts to family, friends or 'connected' individualsIt 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:
 - Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed
 - Not adhering to policies and procedures / Bypassing policies and procedures
 - Jobs being given to family members and friends
 - Political interference
 - Cheating on claims / allowances
 - 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 national and then provincial government.
- It is however interesting to note certain themes that emerge when looking at which types of behaviours are more frequently observed in each level of government.

National government – Themes emerge around abuse of power by managers.

- Victimization of employees who differ with managers
- Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline
- Abuse of discipline management to get rid of honest employees

Local government – Themes emerge around the politicisation of the organisation, professional performance, consequence management and appointments.

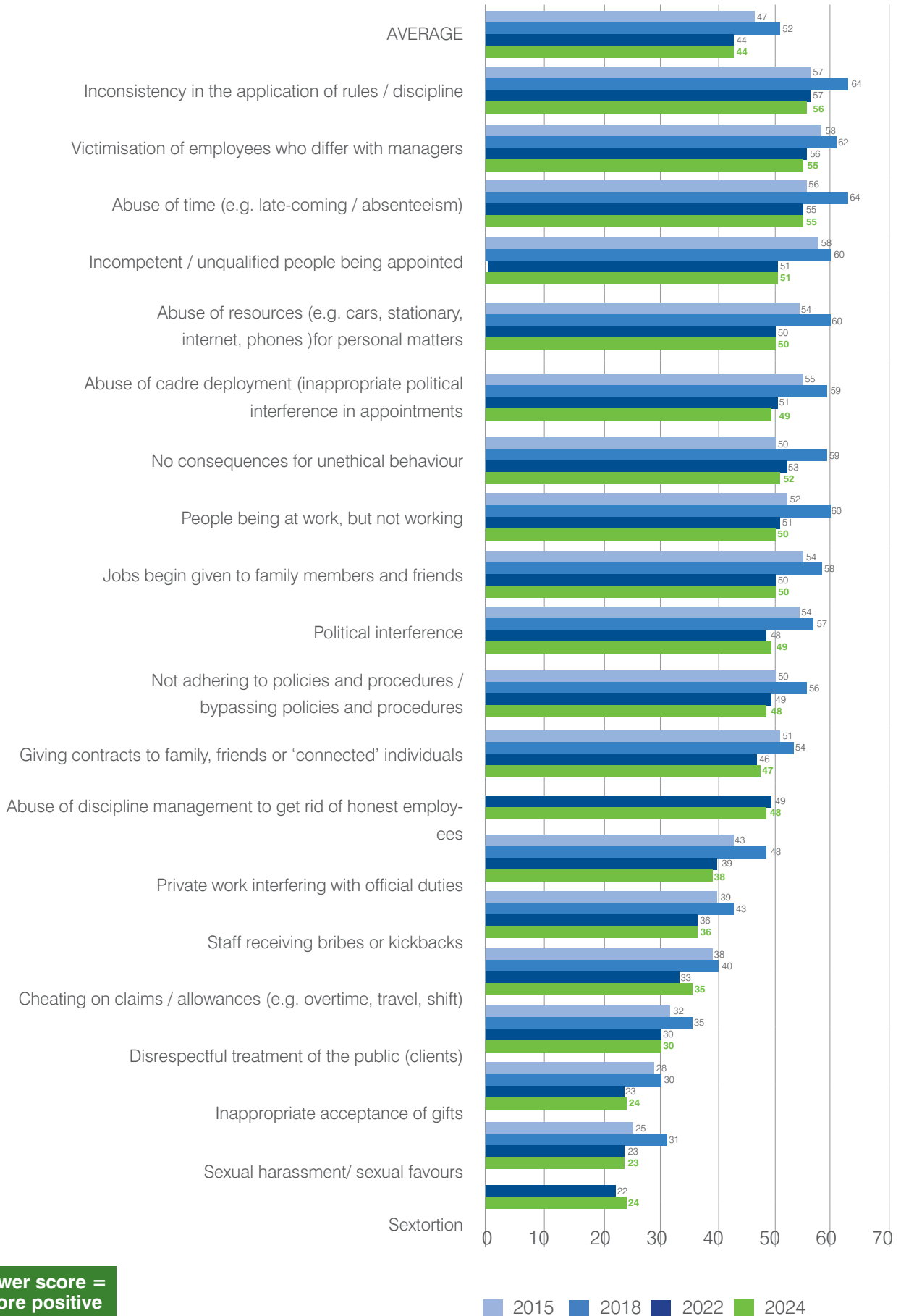
- Political Interference
- Abuse of time
- Inconsistency in the application of rules / discipline
- Incompetent / unqualified people being appointed

1.4. Ethical behaviour risk: Comparison with previous surveys

The graph on page 21 illustrates the results of the 2024 survey, compared with those from the three preceding surveys. Below the projected comments for further insight.

Comment:

- The results for the 2022 and 2024 surveys are similar. Both are more positive than the results for the 2015 and 2018 surveys. A slight increase was noted in 2024 in terms of the observation of sextortion, cheating in claims/allowances, political interference and giving contracts to friends, family or “connected” individuals.
- The results for the 2018 survey remain consistently the worst on all indicators. The differences might be put down to sampling.
- Due to these consistent differences 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.



Lower score = more positive

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.

Ethical culture indicator		RISK
1	People can report unethical practices without fear of retaliation	38
2	Decisions affecting people are made fairly	42
3	People are comfortable approaching their managers with ethical matters	42
4	People are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors	43
5	People are appreciated	43
6	Peoples' rights are considered	47
7	Senior managers (levels 13 and above) are held accountable if they break ethical rules	47
8	People know how to report unethical behaviour	47

Ethical culture indicator		RISK
9	There is respect for people	49
10	Senior management deal with unethical behaviour effectively	49
11	Senior management set a good example of honest and responsible behaviour	50
12	There is sufficient separation of powers between the political and administrative heads	51
13	Middle managers can be trusted to keep their promises	51
14	Senior management support employees who behave ethically	51
15	It is easy to talk about ethics	52
16	Non-managerial staff consider ethics when making decisions	53
17	Non-managerial staff take ethics seriously	54
18	Middle managers set a good example of honest and responsible behaviour	54
19	Middle managers (level 9 to 12) are held accountable if they break ethical rules	54
20	Middle managers are prepared to listen to peoples' opinions on ethics	54
21	People know that unethical behaviour is dealt with	55
22	Non-managerial staff adhere to policies	56
23	Non-managerial staff are professional	58
24	We are doing well in terms of service delivery	58
25	Middle managers encourage people to do the right thing	59
26	Senior management encourage people to do the right thing	60
27	Non-managerial staff are dedicated	60
28	Non-managerial staff (level 8 and below) are held accountable if they break ethical rules	60
29	People are familiar with the code of ethics/conduct	60
30	People know what is expected of them in terms of ethical behaviour	61
31	People often talk about what is right and wrong	61
32	Management expects that employees will do what is right for the public	70
33	Ordinary public servants like me can make a difference in building a stronger ethical culture	77

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 department 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 seem to show a sense of fear for speaking up:
 - People can report unethical practices without fear of retaliation
 - People are comfortable approaching their managers with ethical matters
 - People are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors
- The next cluster relates to staff not being valued or respected. There is disagreement that:
 - People are appreciated
 - Peoples' rights are considered
 - There is respect for people
- The final theme to emerge from the high risk category relates to a lack of consistent accountability:
 - Senior managers (levels 13 and above) are held accountable if they break ethical rules
 - Senior management deal with unethical behaviour effectively
- On the positive side, despite management being seen as not being fair to staff, they are seen to expect that employees should do what is right for the public.
- An added positive aspect is that most public servants believe that they can make a difference in building a stronger ethical culture.

2.2. 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 indicator	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
		Most negative	
Middle managers (level 9 to 12) are held accountable if they break ethical rules	60	-8	52
Non-managerial staff (level 8 and below) are held accountable if they break ethical rules	65	-8	57
We are doing well in terms of service delivery	63	-7	56
People know that unethical behaviour is dealt with	59	-7	52
People know what is expected of them in terms of ethical behaviour	65	-7	59

Ethical culture risk indicator	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
		Most negative	
People are familiar with the code of ethics/conduct	65	-6	59
Non-managerial staff adhere to policies	60	-6	54
Non-managerial staff take ethics seriously	57	-6	51
There is sufficient separation of powers between the political and administrative heads	54	-6	49
People know how to report unethical behaviour	53	-6	47
Middle managers can be trusted to keep their promises	56	-6	51
Non-managerial staff consider ethics when making decisions	57	-6	51
Senior managers (levels 13 and above) are held accountable if they break ethical rules	51	-6	46
Non-managerial staff are dedicated	63	-5	58
Middle managers set a good example of honest and responsible behaviour	58	-5	54
It is easy to talk about ethics	57	-4	52
Senior management deal with unethical behaviour effectively	53	-4	49
Non-managerial staff are professional	61	-4	57
Peoples' rights are considered	51	-4	47
Decisions affecting people are made fairly	46	-4	42
Management expects that employees will do what is right for the public	73	-4	69
Senior management support employees who behave ethically	55	-4	52
Middle managers are prepared to listen to peoples' opinions on ethics	59	-3	55
Ordinary public servants like me can make a difference in building a stronger ethical culture	80	-3	77
Senior management set a good example of honest and responsible behaviour	54	-3	51
Senior management encourage people to do the right thing	63	-3	60
People are appreciated	47	-3	43
Middle managers encourage people to do the right thing	62	-3	59

Ethical Culture Risk	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
There is respect for people	52	-3	49
People can report unethical practices without fear of retaliation	42	-3	39
People are comfortable approaching their managers with ethical matters	45	-2	43
People often talk about what is right and wrong	63	-2	62
People are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors	45	-2	44
		Most positive	
AVERAGE	57	-5	53

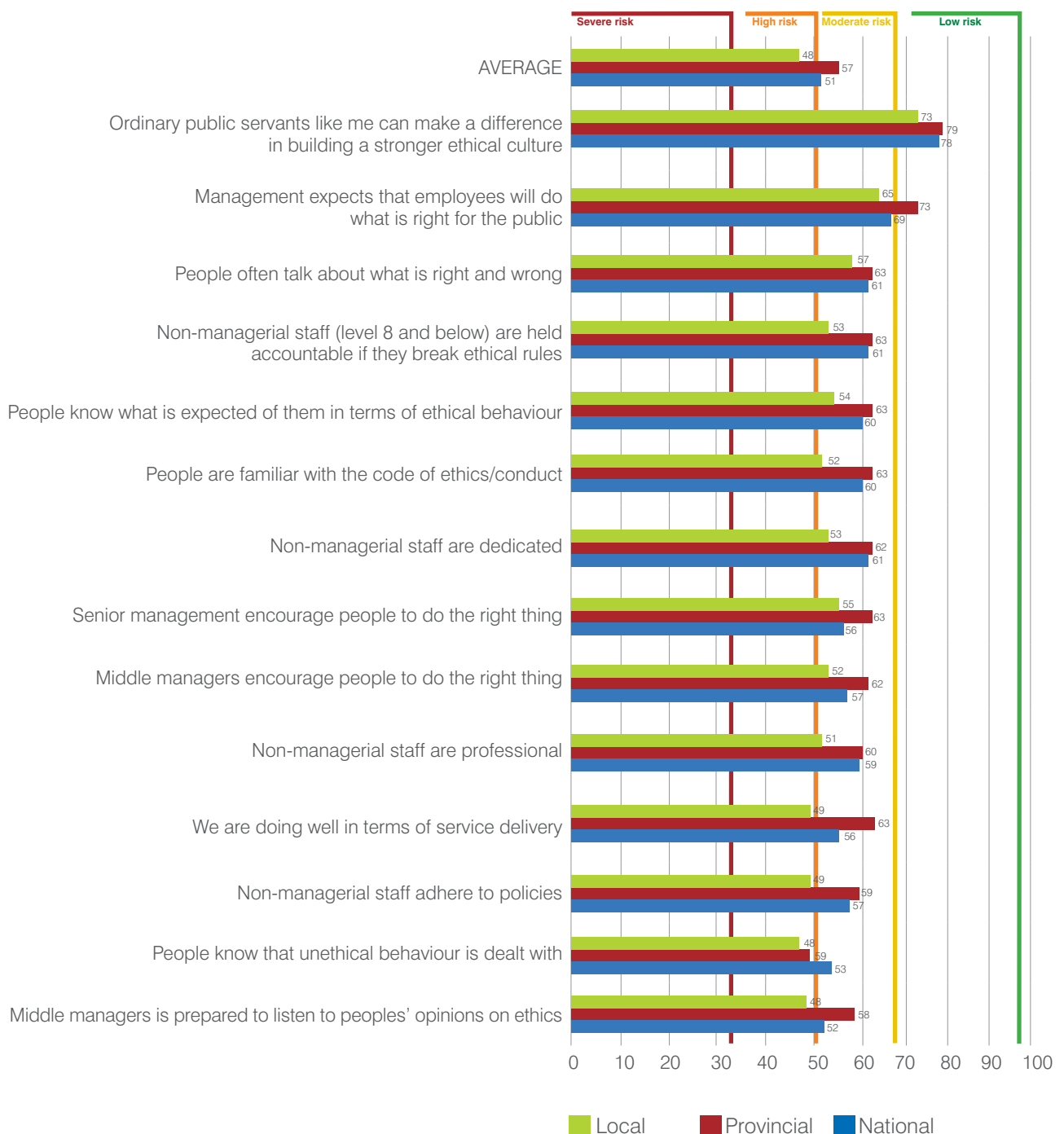
Comment:

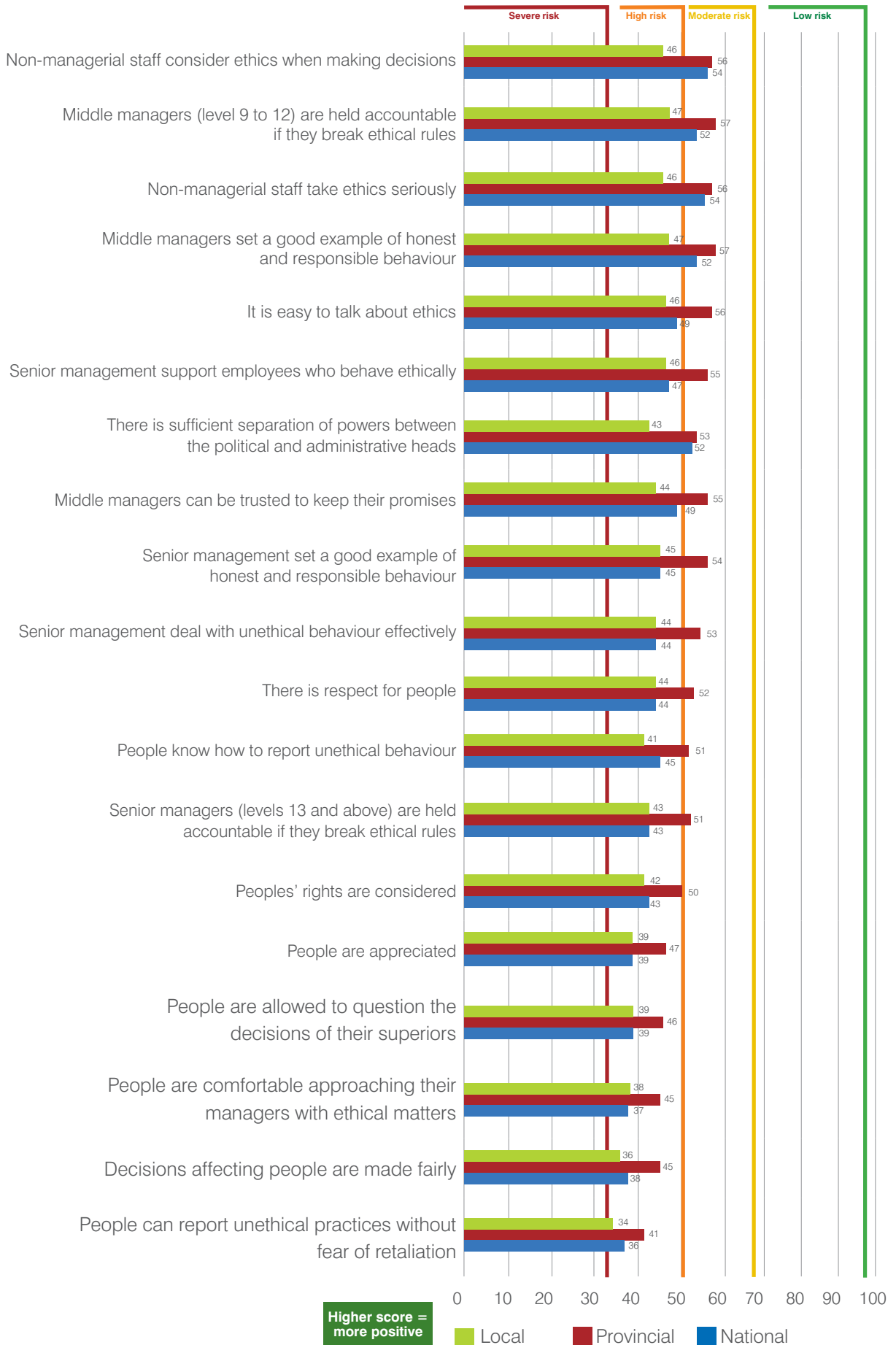
- Organisations with qualified / disclaimer audits perform worse than organisations with unqualified (clean) audits on all ethical culture indicators.
- Indicators that most set these organisations apart relate to low levels of accountability:
 - *Middle managers (level 9 to 12) are held accountable if they break ethical rules*
 - *Non-managerial staff (level 8 and below) are held accountable if they break ethical rules*
 - *People know that unethical behaviour is dealt with*

Low accountability seems to be the most distinguishing aspect, and could potentially be causal to the other issues.
- This is followed by a cluster of indicators that relate to low levels of ethics awareness and adherence:
 - *People know what is expected of them in terms of ethical behaviour*
 - *People are familiar with the code of ethics/conduct*
 - *Non-managerial staff adhere to policies*
 - *Non-managerial staff take ethics seriously*
- It seems that the lack of accountability and the lack of professionalism translates into perceptions of poor service delivery by the organisation, as shown by the following indicator which rates very low.
 - *We are doing well in terms of service delivery*
- In organisations with qualified/disclaimer audits there is also a stronger sense of abuse of power by seniors including people not being able to question the decision of their superiors but also lower levels of accountability in that senior managers are not held accountable if they break ethical rules. It appears that the leadership tone in these organisations is poor especially at the level of senior management.
- There is also an evident theme in organisations with qualified/disclaimer audits of employees not being treated fairly, not being appreciated, not being respected and people's rights not being considered. There is also strong disagreement in these organisations that there is a separation of powers between the political and administrative heads of the organisation pointing to politicisation of the organisation. These aspects together with the perceptions around the abuse of power show that leadership are not setting the tone for ethics in their organisations.

- Organisations with qualified/disclaimer audits are likely to have higher levels of criminality and incidences of corruption. It is therefore concerning that in these organisations, the biggest risk is that people feel that they can't report misconduct without fear of retaliation (risk rating of 39). Furthermore, they are less knowledgeable on how to report and are also less comfortable to approach their managers on ethical matters. This collectively means that even though people are aware of wrongdoing in their organisations, they are less likely to report. In instances of poor ethical culture, people are less likely to report wrongdoing due to concerns for their safety, not being invested in the culture and not believing that anything will be done.

2.3. Ethical culture risk: Comparison between spheres of government



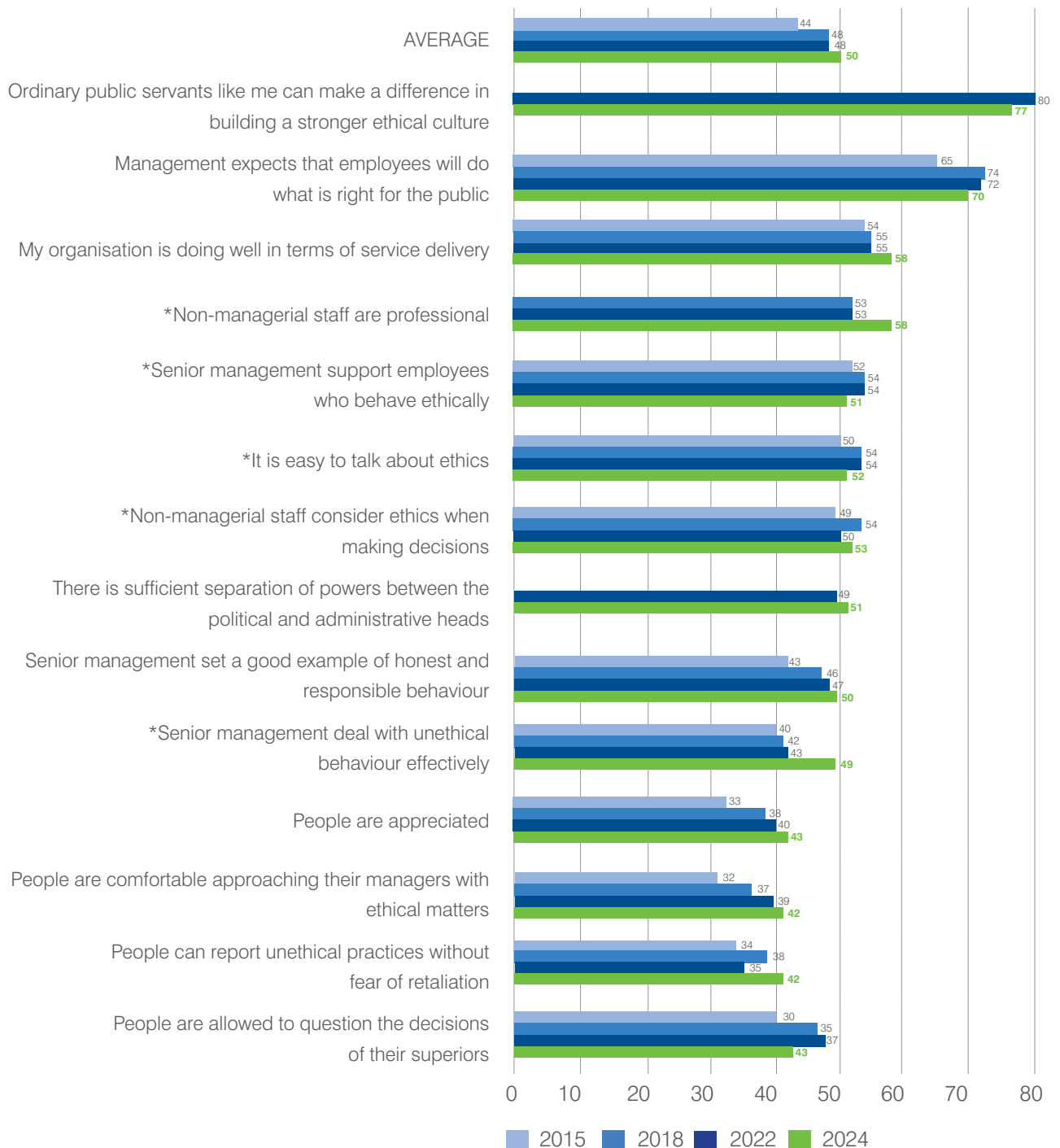


Comment:

- On average, local government seems to have a less supportive ethical culture than national and provincial government. This was also reflected in the 2022 survey.
- On average, the ethical culture in provincial government seems to be significantly better than that in national and local government. It should be kept in mind that the sampling is skewed towards Gauteng and KZN provinces.

2.4. Ethical culture risk: Comparison with previous surveys

The following graph shows the results from the 2024 survey in comparison with those of the previous three surveys.



Comment:

- On average, the ethical culture score is slightly more positive (with two percentage points) than in 2022, and even more so (six percentage points) than in 2015.
- Indicators that stand out as more positive in 2024 as compared to previous years is the perception that senior managers deal with unethical behaviour effectively and that people are allowed to question the decisions of their superiors. Thus, while these are problematic areas, they appear to be improving.

3. Ethics management initiatives

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 the proportion of respondents who 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%

3.1. Ethics management awareness: Overview

Ethics management interventions		Yes
1	Aware of hotline	47%
2	Aware of 'ethics officer'	47%
3	Received ethics training in the last two years	50%
4	Know organisation's policy on lifestyle audits	52%
5	Organisation does pre-employment screening	67%
6	Know organisation's policy on sexual harassment	74%
7	Know organisation's policy on private work	80%
8	Know organisation's policy on receiving gifts	81%
9	Aware of organisation's Code of Ethics / Conduct	94%
AVERAGE		66%

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 are still worryingly low, and might be correlated to low levels of ethics training.

3.2. Ethics management awareness: Per audit outcomes

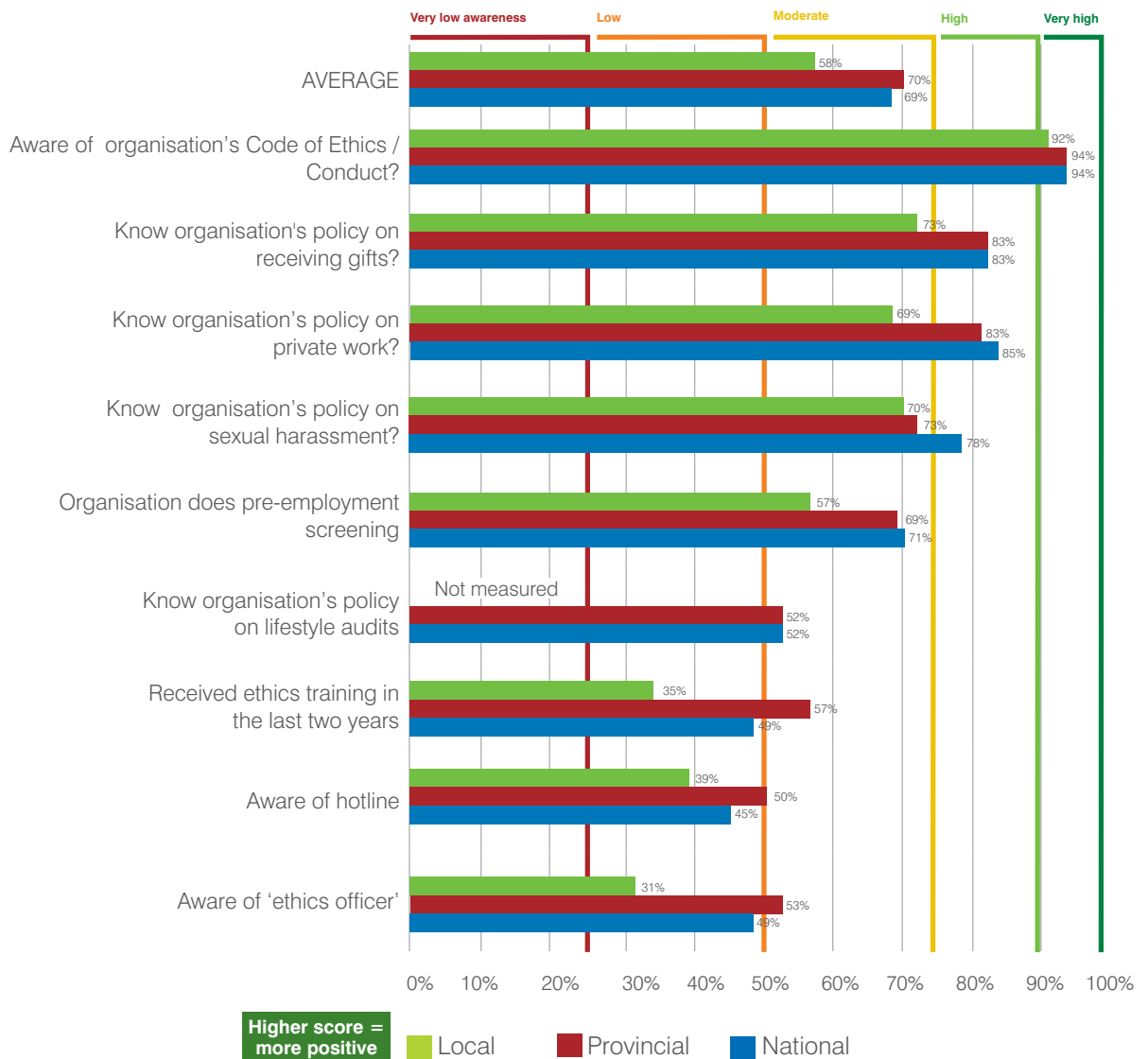
The following table shows the comparison between the ethics management awareness in public sector organisations that achieved unqualified audit outcomes, and those that achieved qualified or disclaimer audit outcomes. This is taken to be a proxy (if not a perfect one) for distinguishing between better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

Ethics management intervention	Unqualified Audit	Difference	Qualified / Disclaimer Audit
		Most negative	
Aware of 'ethics officer'	62%	-13%	48%
Know organisation's policy on receiving gifts	90%	-10%	80%
Aware of hotline	56%	-9%	47%
Organisation does pre-employment screening	76%	-9%	67%
Received ethics training in the last two years	58%	-8%	50%
Know organisation's policy on private work	88%	-7%	81%
Know organisation's policy on sexual harassment	79%	-2%	76%
Aware of organisation's Code of Ethics / Conduct	96%	-1%	95%
Know organisation's policy on lifestyle audits	57%	0%	57%
		Most positive	
AVERAGE	74%	-7%	67%

Comment:

- In organisations with a clean audit (unqualified) there are significantly higher levels of awareness of an ethics officer as well as the gift policy and the hotline.
- These organisations also tend to do better at preventative ethics initiatives such as pre-employment screening and ethics training.
- Overall, the levels of ethics awareness are higher in organisations with clean audits on all areas of ethics interventions, except for knowing the policy on lifestyle audits, which is the same.

3.3. Ethics management awareness: Comparison between spheres of government

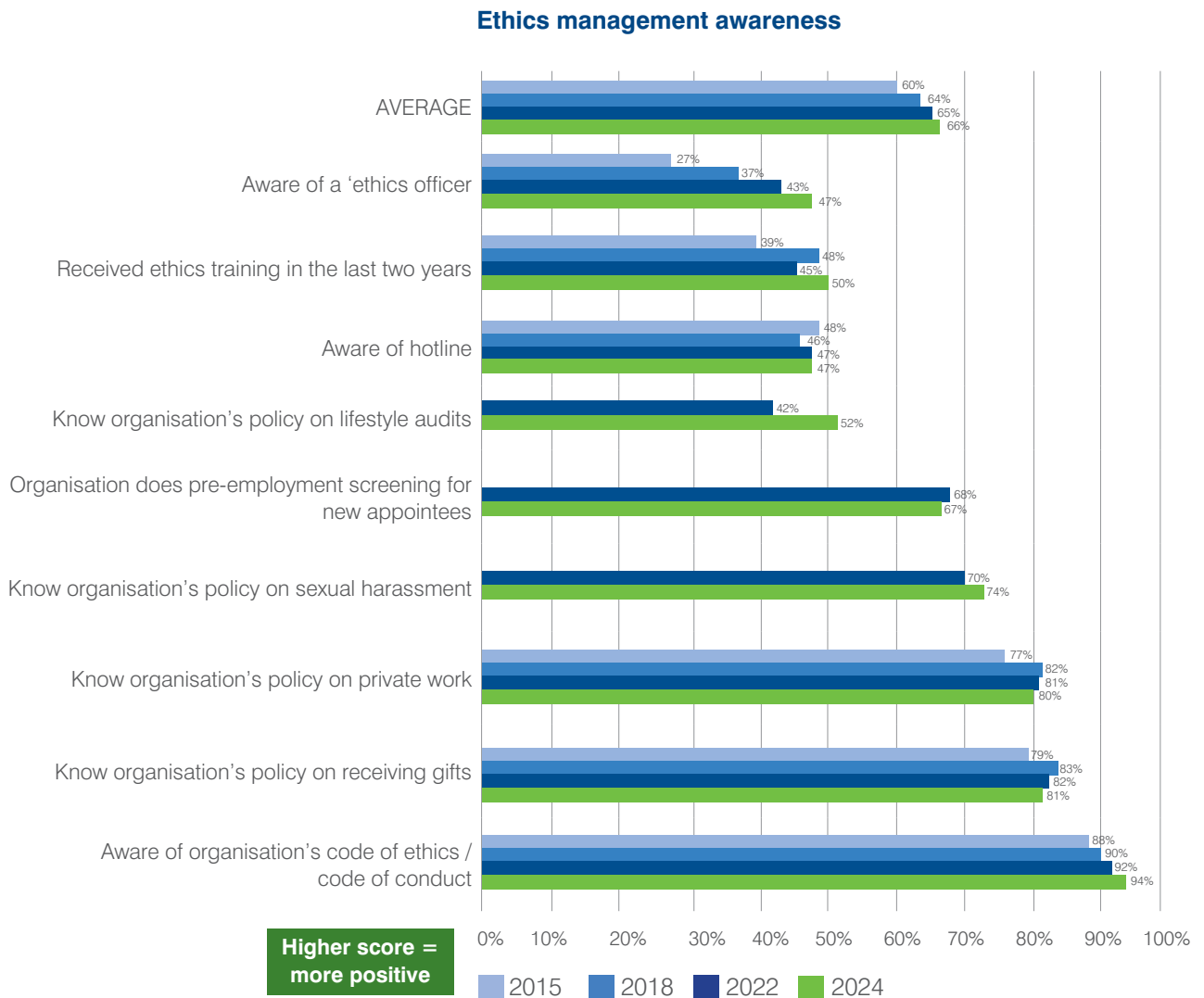


Comment:

- The levels of ethics awareness at local government level is the lowest. Ethics awareness at national government is slightly lower than at provincial government level.
- The most significant areas where awareness is lower in local government are awareness of an ethics officer, whether people have had ethics training as well as awareness of a hotline. The role of ethics officer is central to raising ethics awareness and conducting 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, 2022 and 2024 surveys. The values for each year indicate the 'Yes' responses to the indicators.



Comment:

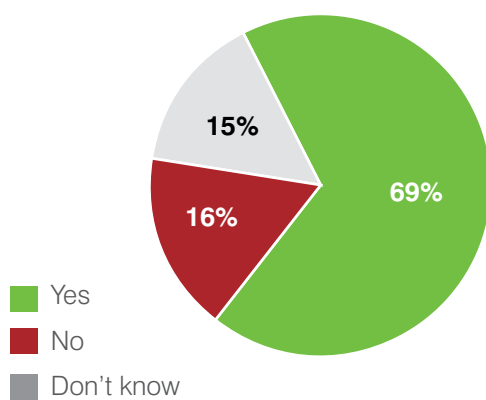
- There is a noticeable 6% increase in ethics awareness from 2015 to 2024, which is positive.
- As compared to 2015, there are now 20% more staff members aware of the existence of an ethics officer. Whilst the improvement is significant, this level remains below 50%.
- There is a noticeable 10% increase in awareness on lifestyle audits as compared to 2022 and a 5% increase in receiving ethics training.

3.5. Lifestyle audits

Given the increased prominence of lifestyle audits, questions related to perception on lifestyle audits were introduced in the 2022 survey.

Respondents were 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?

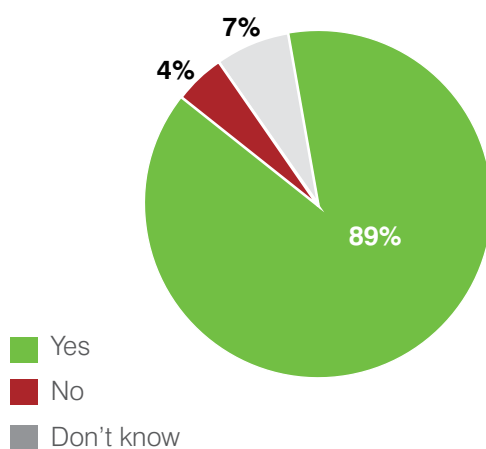


Comment:

- The majority of respondents (69%) believe that lifestyle audits will be effective. This was a 1% increase as compared to 2022.

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

Would you be open to undergo a lifestyle audit?



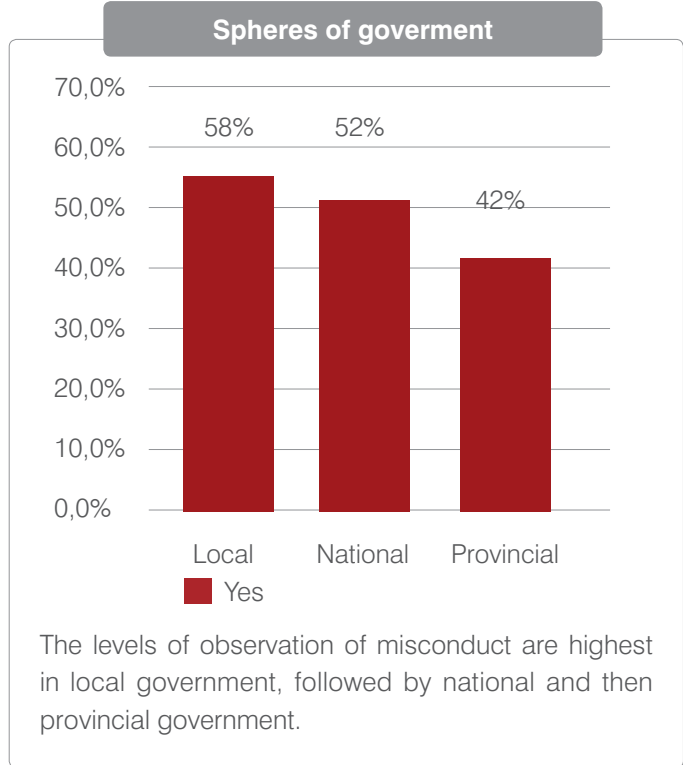
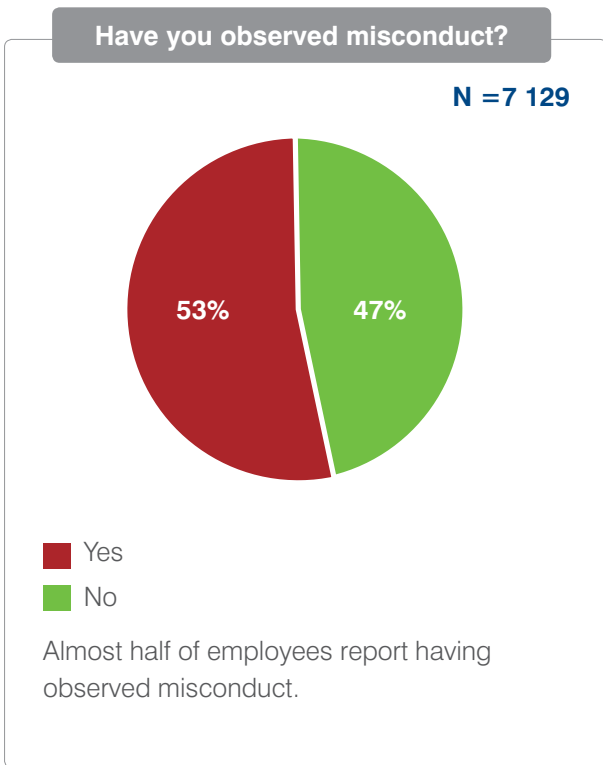
Comment:

- 89% of respondents indicated that they would be open to undergo a lifestyle audit. This was the same as 2022 and strongly reflects that public servants want to contribute towards combatting corruption.
- 4% of respondents said that they would not be open to undergoing a lifestyle audit. This was 1% lower than 2022.
- 7% of respondents indicated that they did not know if they would be open to undergoing a lifestyle audit. This may also be due to lack of understanding of what the process entails and implications thereof.

4. Whistleblowing / Reporting of misconduct

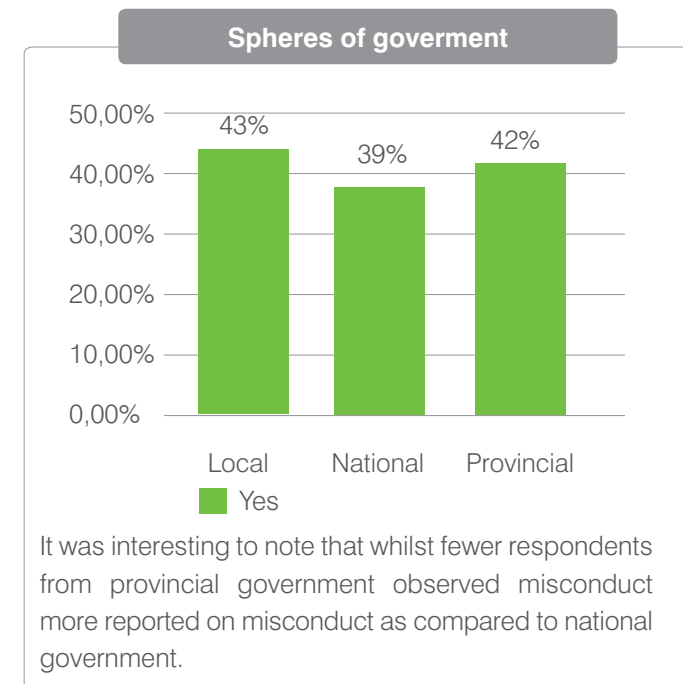
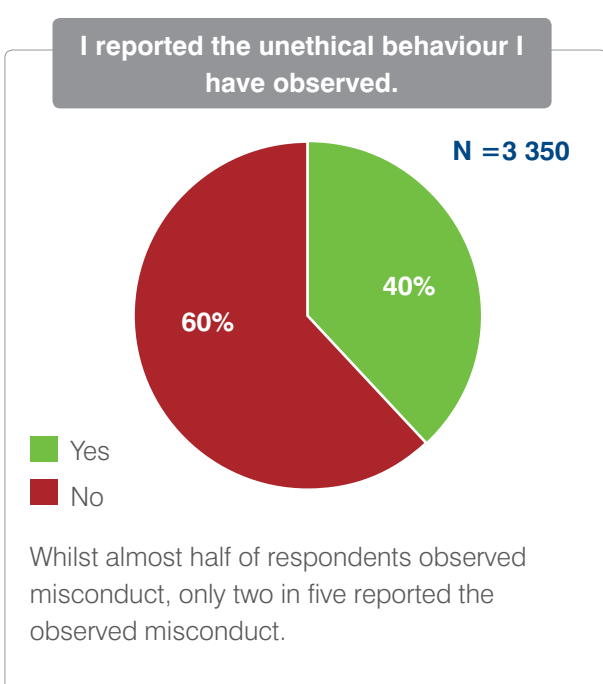
4.1. Observing misconduct

Have you observed misconduct while working at your organisation?



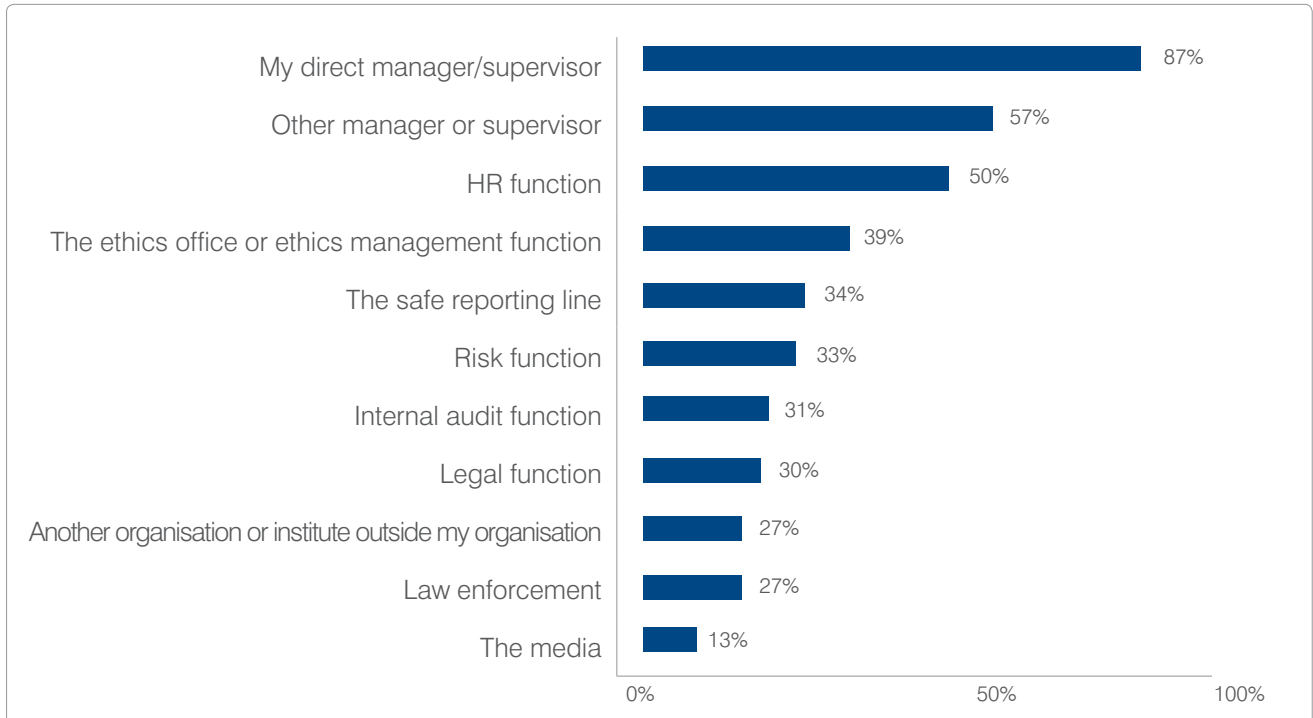
4.2. Reporting misconduct

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



4.3. Where did people report misconduct

Respondents who had reported misconduct were asked, who they reported to. Their responses are reflected below:



Comment:

- People are most likely to go to their direct manager or supervisor (87%) followed by another managers or supervisor (57%). This was interesting to note given the mixed perception of management not setting the tone for ethics. This emphasises the importance of managers setting the tone for ethics as well as being trained on how to deal with and support staff when they report misconduct.
- After that people are more likely to report to the HR function (50%) which was surprising and an increase from the previous survey.
- It is noteworthy that people would prefer to report to the HR Function (50%) over the ethics function (39%) despite the preference for reporting to the ethics function increasing by 10%.
- 34% of respondents would report to the safe reporting line. This was significantly lower than the 2022 survey where the hotline was the avenue most utilised for reporting and is indicative of decreased levels of trust in the anonymous hotline. This correlates with the findings above of people not reporting because they don't believe anything will be done as well as not trusting the reporting mechanism and fear for personal safety.

4.4. Reasons for not reporting misconduct

Respondents were also asked a set of questions related to their perceptions of their organisation's ability to respond to misconduct.

Question	Agreement score
If I were to report sexual harassment or sextortion in my organisation, I believe that something will be done about it	58
My organisation has the ability to respond to reports of sexual harassment / sextortion	58
My organisation has the ability to manage discipline	52
My organisation has the ability to manage ethics and integrity	52

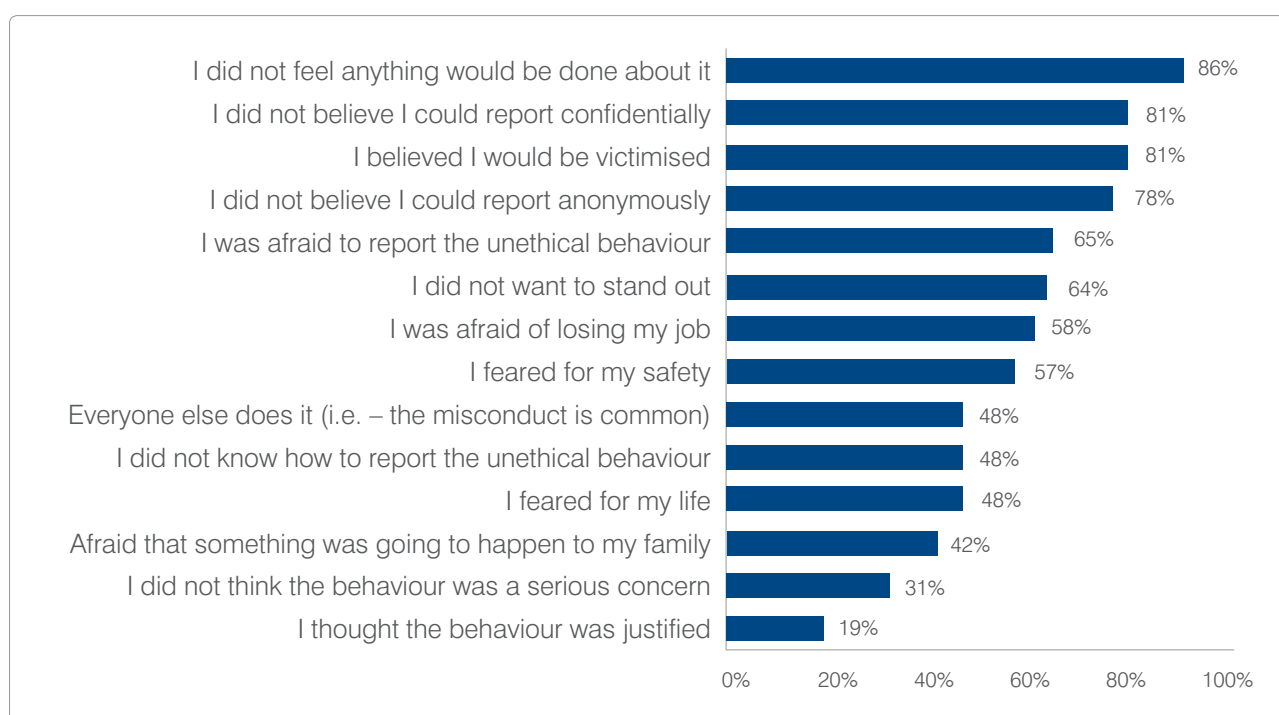
Comment:

- As compared to the 2022 survey, there was a 2 point increase in the perception of respondents regarding their organisations ability to respond to reports of sexual harassment and sextortion (agreement score of 58). This is however higher than the perception of the organisation's ability to manage discipline (agreement score of 52) and ethics and integrity (agreement score of 52).
- It is worth noting that there has been a 3 point increase in the perception of the organisation's ability to manage both discipline as well as ethics and integrity, as compared to 2022, which is positive.

4.5. Reasons for not reporting misconduct

In a separate question, respondents who said that they did not report misconduct were asked why they did not report.

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



Comment:

- The biggest reason for not reporting relate to respondents feeling that nothing would be done about it (85%).
- This was then followed by perceptions of low levels of trust in the confidentiality of the reporting systems. People did not believe they could report confidentially (81%) and did not believe they could report anonymously (78%).
- Respondents also displayed concerns for their safety, including fear of victimisation (81%), fear for personal safety (57%), and not wanting to stand out (64%).
- In addition to personal safety, respondents were also concerned about losing their jobs (58%)
- It was evident that respondents had low levels of trust in available reporting mechanisms, did not believe that anything would be done if they reported and were concerned about their personal safety as well as losing their jobs.

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 5327 unique responses received were thematically analysed. In total 6400 different mentions of themes emerged as some respondents mentioned more than one theme. The responses were categorised into the themes below. The weight of each theme is indicated as a percentage of overall responses.

5.1. Summary of Themes

Theme	Frequency (%)	Estimated Number of Mentions
Strong and fair accountability	34%	2182
Ethics awareness and values integration	25%	1598
Ethical leadership	21%	1342
Whistleblower protection and reporting	10%	639
More fairness, less bias	10%	639

Question: What is the one thing that will improve the ethical culture in the public sector?

1. Strong and fair accountability

Description: Accountability focuses on systems and mechanisms that ensure individuals, including leaders, are held responsible for their actions, particularly when those actions violate ethical standards. Accountability mechanisms may involve formal processes, policies, and clear consequences for unethical conduct. It is important to ensure policy clarity, but more so the consistent and transparent application of policies.

Frequency: ~34% of comments

Sub-themes:

- **Consequences for unethical behaviour:** Establishing and enforcing repercussions for misconduct to deter unethical actions and reinforce organisational standards.
- **Transparency in consequence management:** Ensuring that the process of addressing unethical behaviour is transparent, so employees trust that accountability measures are applied consistently.
- **Policy clarity:** Ensuring that ethical policies are well-defined and understandable.

Representative comments:

- “Transparent and fair application of policies will improve ethical culture in the public sector.”
- “Without accountability mechanisms, there’s no incentive to act ethically.”
- “Consequences for unethical actions should apply equally to all, regardless of position.”
- “Accountability should be visible and enforced, so employees feel confident that standards are upheld.”

2. Ethics awareness and values integration

Description: Ongoing ethics training is highlighted as essential for instilling a shared understanding of ethical standards across the organisation.

Frequency: ~25% of comments

Sub-themes:

- **Regular ethics training:** Providing mandatory, regular training sessions to reinforce ethical standards.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Campaigns to raise awareness about ethics in daily work.
- **Values-driven culture:** Emphasising core values as central to the workplace culture.
- **Recognition of ethical behaviour:** Acknowledging and rewarding ethical actions.

Representative comments:

- “Annual or biannual training on ethics.”
- “All officials should practice ethical behaviour whether there is an audience or not.”
- “Promoting culture of Ubuntu, 100% compliance with Batho Pele principles.”
- “Ethical conduct of interview panels at promotional post interviews.”

3. Ethical leadership

Description: This theme centred on the role of leaders in setting the tone for ethical behaviour, establishing clear expectations, and acting as role models. Ethical leadership involves demonstrating integrity, transparency, and a commitment to ethical principles, which influences the behaviour of teams and the broader organisational culture.

Frequency: ~21 % of comments

Sub-Themes:

- **Ethical role modelling:** Leaders should act as examples of ethical conduct, displaying integrity in decision-making, communication, and actions.
- **Supportive and inclusive leadership:** Emphasising that leaders should foster a supportive, respectful, and inclusive environment where employees feel valued and heard.
- **Clear ethical vision:** Leaders should communicate a clear ethical vision that guides the organisational culture and aligns with core values.

Representative Comments:

- “Leaders need to demonstrate ethical behaviour consistently so others follow.”
- “Management should lead by example and show transparency in their decisions.”
- “Leadership must actively promote and model core ethical values.”

4. Whistleblower Protection and Reporting Mechanisms

Description: Emphasises the need for secure, anonymous ways to report unethical conduct without fear of retaliation.

Frequency: ~10% of comments

Sub-themes:

- **Secure reporting channels:** Establishing safe and anonymous channels for reporting.
- **Protection from retaliation:** Legal or organisational protections for whistleblowers.
- **Encouragement to report misconduct:** Cultivating a culture where reporting unethical behaviour is supported.

Representative Comments:

- “Protection to whistle blowers.”
- “Anonymous corruption reporting line or APP that can enable the upload of all evidence documentation.”
- “Confidentiality and protection of whistle blowers.”

5. More fairness, less favouritism

Description: Respondents called for impartiality and fairness in decisions, reducing nepotism and bias in the public sector.

Frequency: ~10% of comments

Sub-themes:

- **Reducing nepotism and bias:** Minimising favouritism and nepotism in decision-making processes.
- **Objective criteria for decisions:** Ensuring that decisions are based on objective, unbiased criteria.
- **Equal opportunity and fair treatment:** Promoting fair treatment and equal opportunities for all employees.

Representative Comments:

- “Treating employees the same, without favouritism.”
- “Appointments on merit and no political interference.”
- “Appointments of suitable qualified candidates, not in terms of gender (females only) and young people.”

D. Key findings and root causes

The Public Sector Ethics Survey provides much 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.

Given that this is the fourth iteration of the survey, it is also important to reflect on any trends and improvements that are evident

With regard to the ethics behaviour risks, the most prominent risks relate to the tone that is set by management in terms of abuse of power, victimisation of employees who differ with managers, and the inconsistency in the application of consequence management, rules and discipline. The unprofessional conduct of staff and counter-productive behaviour are also evident ethics behaviour risk which appear to be on the increase as compared to the 2022 survey.

Compared to the 2022 survey, concerns around the appointment of staff remain an ethics risk. Whilst the appointment of incompetent / unqualified people appear as a consistent ethics risk, jobs being given to family members and friends has emerged as a higher ethics risk compared to previous years. These collectively point to lack of ethics at management level which then negatively impacts on the culture of the organisation. Despite efforts at building an ethical culture and ethics management, these predominant ethics risks remain. There is an urgent need to invest in the soft skills training and development of managers, with an emphasis on the critical role which they play in shaping the ethical culture of their organisations.

With regard to the ethical culture indicators, whilst we see an evident increase in the perception of an ethical culture in this survey (50) as compared to 44 in 2015, the predominant concerns around an ethical culture remain. The data suggests that the ethical culture in the provincial departments is more supportive (57) as compared to National Government (51) and local government (48). The provincial departments also appear to be doing better in terms of their ethics management initiative which may contribute to the perceived improvement in ethical culture.

Despite the perceived increase in a supportive ethical culture, the predominant ethical culture concerns remain with little change as compared to previous years. The indicators continue to point to a prevailing culture of fear in the public sector. Employees are afraid to report misconduct, feel that their seniors abuse their powers and that they can't question the decisions of their superiors or talk to them about their ethical concerns. In addition, staff don't feel that they are treated fairly, and neither are they appreciated. These together with inappropriate appointments, collectively contribute towards low staff morale and staff feeling demoralised and disengaged. This correlates with the findings of increased unprofessional conduct and counterproductive behaviour evident in the ethics risks highlighted above.

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 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. The awareness raising linked to the typical compliance work appears to perform better as compared to efforts to build ethical culture such as ethics training.

The 2016 Public Service Regulations introduced ethics officers into the public sector, and there was subsequently a huge jump in awareness of ethics officers between the 2015 and 2018 surveys. In the 2022 survey the awareness went up to 43% and in 2024 to 47% which remains relatively low. This is especially concerning given all of the efforts in the public sector to encourage departments to appoint/delegate ethics officers.

This may also suggest that whilst departments have ethics officers, their focus is largely on the compliance work as opposed to the culture work such as ethics training.

The levels of awareness of the ethics hotline also remains worryingly low. This may correlate to low levels of ethics training. The levels of mistrust in the reporting processes are extremely high with people being concerned for their safety, fearing victimisation and losing their jobs.

There is still substantial mistrust in processes for reporting misconduct and acting on such reports, with 59% of people who observed misconduct not reporting it. This is 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 it is also the main area of improvement that verbatim comments (with clear despondency and frustration) suggest for improving ethics in the public sector.

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.

The 2022 survey introduced the section on lifestyle audits. Both the 2022 and 2024 survey findings reflect that most respondents believe that lifestyle audits will help to reduce corruption, and are willing to voluntarily undergo a lifestyle audit themselves. This shows that public servants are tired of corruption, want to see a change and are willing to play their part in reducing corruption.

The role of ethics officers in departments is critical in terms of driving the ethical culture and proactively bringing about positive change in departments.

D. Recommendations

In this fourth iteration of the Public Sector Ethics Survey, similar patterns from the previous three surveys continue to emerge. It is evident that much still needs to be done to improve the ethical culture and behaviour in the public sector.

In looking at the data and trying to understand the context, the central question, almost 10 years since the first survey, remains: what is key to building an ethical public sector?

The 2015, 2018 and 2022 surveys have made a range of recommendations to improve ethical public sector. However, the pace of implementing these has been slow.

As we conclude on the 2024 survey, it is important to take stock of the recommendations from the previous surveys, assess progress and examine what needs to be done to bring about change. This is summarised in the table below.

Recommendations PSES				
	2015	2018	2022	2024 – where are we?
Political Administrative Interface	There is a need to develop a professional public sector with greater separation between political and administrative cadres.			The political-administrative interface remains a concern with an increase in observed incidences of political interference.
Local Government	A national process should be facilitated to develop principles for ethical governance at the local government level.			The Code for Ethical Leadership in Local Government, launched on 1 March 2024, has developed principles for ethical governance. The focus is now on the implementation of the Code.
Appointment of staff	Urgent interventions are required to ensure the appointment of appropriate (i.e. competent and qualified) candidates . This might include conducting psychometric assessments of capabilities prior to appointments, and ensuring a high standard of pre-employment screening throughout the public sector. There should also be a public sector-wide qualifications audit.	Even stronger measures are needed to ensure staff competence . This should entail strict requirements for relevant qualifications and experience, as well as competency testing (at appropriate levels). The latter should be non-negotiable – especially at top-management levels. An assessment should also be considered for existing top managers.	Appointment of competent staff was a critical concern.	The need to appoint competent professional staff remains a priority as highlighted in this survey.
Managerial Competence	There should be a focus on developing managerial competence as well as other skill sets required in the public sector.	Managers should be trained in practical soft skills application. This is especially important to empower them to have constructive performance and disciplinary conversations, and to promote open communication.		The need for managers to develop their ethics competence is critical. This includes cognitive competence (ethical reasoning), behavioural competence (ethical sensitivity) as well as managerial competency for ethics. The emphasis needs to be on the role which managers play in shaping ethical culture.

Recommendations PSES				
	2015	2018	2022	2024 – where are we?
Leadership			Appointment processes for top managers be reviewed to ensure stable, capable, and ethical leadership.	The need for ethical leaders who set the tone and drive the ethics performance of the organisation is critical. This requires the appointment of ethical and competent leaders.
Public sector ethics focus on service delivery	The above should go hand in hand with developing a professional public sector ethos that focuses on service delivery through sound administration.			This remains as a theme in this survey
Elevate strategic importance of ethics		Issues of ethics and organisational integrity should be elevated to the level of strategic importance that they require in the public sector. This requires strong and consistent political support. A national dialogue on ethical leadership in the public sector should be considered. This is especially urgent in the local-government environment, where the tensions between political and administrative leaders are most prominent.		This remains as a theme in this survey
Capacity for investigation and discipline	Interventions are required to ensure strengthened capacity for investigations and disciplinary procedures . This should include improved oversight to ensure accountability.	There should be strengthened oversight of serious misconduct investigations. Successes should be communicated to ensure that justice is not only done, but seen to be done.	Need for discipline management and accountability was emphasised	The need to strengthen the capacity for investigation and discipline management as well as the need to ensure accountability remain critical concerns.
Compliance Work	Emerging programmes focusing on managing conflicts of interest, external remunerative work and gifts should be strengthened as these form part of good governance.			The compliance work aspects have seemingly matured over time

Recommendations PSES				
	2015	2018	2022	2024 – where are we?
Ethics Infrastructure	Ethics officers, ethics committees and ethics champions should be supported to run ethics programmes that address the strategic issues identified in this survey. A strong community of practitioners should be developed through training and forums for knowledge exchange.	The efforts to build ethics infrastructure in organisations should be continued and strengthened. The focus should be on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacitating ethics officers and ethics committees. • Building a community of practitioners. • Facilitating ongoing ethics conversations in organisations. 		Whilst there have been efforts to build ethics infrastructure, levels of awareness around ethics officers are low. Ethics Officers and Ethics Committees need to be capacitated around their roles in shaping an ethical culture.
Hotline		Rebranding and promoting hotlines as a reporting avenue for all ethical concerns, not just fraud and corruption.	Low levels of awareness of hotlines and low trust in reporting avenues.	Whilst there has been awareness around hotlines as an avenue for reporting ethical concerns, levels of trust in the hotlines are low. This needs to be addressed

Based on the above and the data from the 2024 survey, it is evident that building an ethical culture in the public sector requires an integrated approach which takes time and requires certain key building blocks to be in place. The outcome of an ethical culture will not be realised until such time as we reach maturity on these fundamental blocking blocks.

These building blocks are:

- A common purpose, i.e. the constitutional values and principles which set out the vision for a professional public sector. (Whilst these values and principles are in place, their realization has been lacking.)
- Stable, capable and credible leadership
- Professional and competent staff
- Direction and Accountability

There are essentially two key recommendations from this survey for building an ethical culture in the public service:

- 1. Focus on the development of a professional public sector; and**
- 2. Elevate the strategic importance of ethics.**

Each of these recommendations are elaborated on below.

Recommendations to build an ethical culture in the public sector	
1. Develop a professional public sector	2. Elevate the strategic importance of ethics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Enable and unlock ethical leadership b) Appoint competent and professional staff c) Improve accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Facilitate a national dialogue on ethical leadership in the public sector. b) Build ethics infrastructure in departments c) Strengthen the focus on 'culture work'. d) Capacitate organisations to respond to whistleblowing

1. Develop a professional public sector

The focus on building a professional public sector should be emphasized through all spheres of government.

The Framework for the Professionalisation of the Public Sector emphasizes that professionalisation requires a non-partisan approach which embraces the merit-based principles in all staffing practices. For this to be realised, the public sector must be non-partisan by insulating it from the politics of political parties. The Framework makes a series of recommendations which are underway.

Efforts to build an ethical culture must build on these initiatives together with the broader national framework as set out in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy as well as the Public Service Regulations, 2016 as amended.

In order to develop a professional public sector, the data shows that the following needs to be done:

1.1. Enable and unlock ethical leadership

A professional public service needs professional and ethical leaders to set the tone.

a) The appointment process for top managers must be reviewed to ensure stable credible leadership.

- Candidates who apply for leadership positions must be subjected to appropriate competency and integrity testing.
- The composition of appointment committees should be reviewed in line with the recommendations made in the National Development Plan, Professionalisation Framework and National Anti-Corruption Strategy.

b) The ethics competence of managers needs to be developed through training. This includes the cognitive, behavioural and managerial competence for ethics.

- Managers should be trained in practical soft skills application. This is especially important to empower them to have constructive performance and disciplinary conversations, and to promote open communication.
- Leaders at all levels within the public sector must undergo compulsory training on their role in ethics.
- There should be a focus on developing managerial competence as well as other skill sets required in the public sector.

1.2. Appoint competent and professional staff

A professional public service needs competent, professional and ethical staff.

a) Strong measures are needed to ensure staff competence.

- This should entail strict requirements for relevant qualifications and experience, as well as technical, role-specific competency testing (at appropriate levels). The latter should be non-negotiable – especially at top-management levels.
- An assessment should also be considered for existing top managers.

1.3. Improve accountability

Accountability and discipline management must improve in order to improve the perception around the safety of whistleblowing mechanisms.

- a) **Interventions are required to ensure strengthened capacity for investigations and disciplinary procedures.**
- b) **There should be strengthened oversight of serious misconduct investigations.**
- c) **Successes should be communicated to ensure that justice is not only done, but seen to be done.**

2. Elevate the strategic importance of ethics

Issues of ethics and organisational integrity should be elevated to the level of strategic importance that they require in the public sector. This requires strong and consistent political support.

Elevating the strategic importance of ethics remains a key priority and should be done by political and administrative leadership at the Presidency, the DPSA, CoGTA, SALGA and other key government role-players.

2.1. Facilitate a national dialogue on ethical leadership in the public sector.

This has, to an extent, been done in local government through the Local Government Ethical Leadership Initiative. This work should be continued.

There is however also a need for the dialogue on the role of leaders in the public service towards building ethical cultures. The focus should not merely be on compliance matters, but on showing the link between improved ethics and improved service delivery.

2.2. Build ethics infrastructure in departments

- a) **Ethics officers, ethics committees and ethics champions should be supported to run ethics programmes that address the strategic issues identified in this survey.**

- A strong community of practitioners should be developed through training and forums for knowledge exchange. (This is in progress through the Ethics Officer Learning Forum organized by the DPSA.)

- b) **The efforts to build ethics infrastructure in organisations should be continued and strengthened.**

The focus should be on:

- Capacitating ethics officers and ethics committees. (In progress by the DPSA.)
- Facilitating ongoing ethics conversations in organisations. This needs to be driven in departments.

2.3. Strengthen the focus on 'culture work'.

The role of ethics officers in departments is critical in terms of driving the ethical culture and proactively bringing about positive change in the departments. While compliance work is being performed relatively well, the **focus should now shift to 'culture work' in the form of training and the facilitation of ethics conversations.**

2.4 Capacitate organisations to respond to whistleblowing

The whistle-blowing system suffers from low trust. This trust will not be regained while 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. However as shown above, this too is dependent on ethical and professional leaders driving the processes.

As a starting point it is recommended that:

- a) The DPSA and CoGTA should monitor the implementation of whistle-blowing response systems in departments and municipalities.**
- b) A Public Service-wide information management system for reported cases should be considered to improve the transparency of disciplinary matters.**

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