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Evaluating Perceptions of Ethics Risk in a South African Government Organisation

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Abstract: Unethical behaviour in South African (SA) government organisations is often highlighted in government reports as a root cause to impeding good governance and promoting integrity. **Objectives** Unethical behaviour in South African (SA) government organisations is often highlighted in government reports as a root cause to impeding good governance and promoting integrity. To address the problem, the study's primary objective was to evaluate perceptions of ethics risk in a SA government organisation. Theoretical and empirical objectives were identified in order to assist in achieving the primary objective. **Prior Work** In this article, we examine the perceptions of ethics risk in a SA government organisation, using a combined leadership approach aimed at building an ethical and effective public service. **Approach** The survey focused on three main areas, which include (1) Ethical culture – How well the organisational culture supports ethical behaviour; (2) Ethics behaviour/conduct – Specific behaviour or practices that the government organisation may be subjected to and (3) Ethics management – Respondents' awareness of the ethics management interventions and the perceived effectiveness of the interventions. **Results** The results reflect the findings according to the themes of ethical culture, behaviour and ethics management factors, thus providing knowledge of factors that contribute to unethical conduct and how they can be avoided. **Implications** The results of the findings provided knowledge of factors that contribute to unethical conduct and how they can be avoided. **Value** The key contribution of this study was to provide insight into effective ethics management in government organisations, and to support further improvements.

Keywords: Ethics; risk management; leadership; corporate governance; public sector

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1. Introduction

Unethical behaviour in South African (SA) government organisations is often highlighted in government reports as a root cause to impeding good governance and promoting integrity. A 2017 State of the Public Service report revealed that only a limited number of departments had established and applied ethics management strategies to prevent and discourage unethical conduct and acts of corruption (Public Service Commission, 2017, p. 4). Similarly, reports by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA) identified several distinct challenges in the Public Service Sector (PSS), particularly on the implementation of ethical and anti-corruption measures, and compliance with legislation.

According to Cockcroft (2014), there is a genuine belief that failure to implement effective ethics management will frustrate developmental efforts, impose heavy costs and make it difficult for the government to reduce poverty (Cockcroft, 2014, p. 231). Internally, it may also result in loss of productivity by employees and loss of respect for the leadership. To have effective ethics management in South African government organisations, there is a need to conduct an ethics risk assessment. This will assist organisations to identify, assess, manage and monitor any ethics risk exposures. In the absence of effective ethics management in the PSS, there arises a risk of reputation to the image of government and increased unethical behaviours in the workplace.

The SA government has put comprehensive ethics and anti-corruption legislation, including the Public Service Act and Regulations, in place that prescribe specific behavioural standards. Amongst these legislations, the Public Service Amendment Act 30 of 2007 has empowered the Minister for Public Service Administration to counter ethical dilemmas such as weak enforcement mechanism and non-compliance with legislation (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2013, 3, pp. 8-9). The Act requires the Minister to determine norms and standards on integrity, ethics, conduct and anti-corruption in the public service (Public Service Commission, 2013). Similarly, the introduction of the Public Service Integrity Management Framework (PSIMF) in 2013 by the Department of Public Service Administration intends to bolster measures for managing unethical conduct and promoting integrity in the PSS (DPSA, 2013, p. 4).

The framework compels all national and provincial government departments to establish ethics committees that oversee their ethics programmes. The committees

would provide strategic direction and oversight to the ethics programmes. For this reason, a need arises for the ethics committees to obtain regular reports to assess the state of ethics in the departments. Effective implementation of the framework by departments depends on the establishment or improvement of the ethics function within departments (DPSA, 2016, p. 32). The legislative interventions aforementioned imply that people must adhere to the rules given, either by law or by their superiors. This, in turn, will allow departments to bring efficiency in their ethics and compliance programmes.

Although legislative and regulatory responsibilities place the duty on employees to behave ethically, there is a lack of enforcement and inadequate implementation of some aspects of these regulatory frameworks. Similarly, a report by the Public Protector in 2016 indicates that there has been little to no change in the ethical behaviours and conduct of officials in the PSS, specifically those in leadership positions (Office of the Public Protector, 2016, p. 29).

Previous studies by Agarwal & Chaudhary (2013a, 28; 2013b, 151), Rossouw & Van Vuuren (2010) and Podger et al. (2018) also indicate that despite departments having had codes of ethics and ethics programmes, mere reliance on these is not sufficient to safeguard departments against serious ethical failures. The corporate ethics programmes, organisational culture and the role-model behaviour of top management may all have a significant influence on ethical employee conduct (Wolmarans, 2014:28). However, it has become apparent that most of the SA organisations do not endeavour to create an ethical culture (Van Zyl & Boshoff, 2010). Even so, Drajat (2014, pp. 79-90) believes that the public sector is under pressure to improve service delivery and should develop a culture of strong leadership to become a more effective functioning organisation (Metswamere, 2017, p. 60).

Ardichvili, Mitchell and Jondle (2009, p. 5) assert that principled business culture is based on consistent value-based ethical behaviour of top management. This sentiment is supported by Mafunisa (2000, p. 26) who believes that the major influencers of ethical conduct in the public service are its leaders. Given that people can influence the ethical culture of a department, the lack of good leadership will undermine the ethical culture of the department (Podger et al, 2018, p. 374).

In support of this statement, the Auditor General of South Africa has highlighted that management, executive- and oversight structures did not react with the required

determination to the auditor's directives about tackling risks and improving internal controls (AGSA, 2017, p. 160).

The lack of effective ethics management in the PSS has become a topic of debate due to poor ethical leadership and an increasing frequency of corruption and unethical actions (Schoeman, 2012). While SA is often praised for having far-reaching ethics legislation in place to reduce chances for corruption, the effective execution of ethics management programmes seems to be lacking (Bernard, 2012, p. 2). Although professional ethics is expected of every public service official, there is a worsening perception of public sector ethics and specifically of its senior managers and how they assume their role as ethical leaders (Institute of Business Ethics, 2011; Schoeman, 2012). To address the problem, the study evaluated perceptions of ethics risk in a SA government organisation. This will assist SA government organisations to assess ethical risks by measuring the ethics culture, behaviour and management as perceived by their key stakeholders. SA government organisations would be better able to implement effective ethics management, as well as manage and monitor ethics risk exposures.

1.2. Literature Review

A review of literature on the relevant theories formed part of the body of knowledge and was an integral part of this research. This study reviewed the literature relating to ethics management, leadership and governance. In their study Francis & Armstrong (2003) addresses the connection of ethics to risk management and argues that there are compelling reasons to consider good ethical practice to be an essential part of such risk management. The absence of risk management in an organisation has often resulted in increased mishaps and scandals. The findings from Francis & Armstrong (2003) confirm that effective risk management contribute towards the identification of potential ethics problems, prevention of fraud, and preservation of the organisational reputation.

The SA government has put comprehensive ethics and anti-corruption legislation, such as the Public Service Act and Regulations, in place that prescribe specific behavioural standards. Amongst these legislations, the Public Service Amendment Act 30 of 2013 has empowered the Minister for Public Service Administration to counter ethical dilemmas such as non-compliance with legislation and weak enforcement mechanisms (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2013, pp. 3, 8-9). The Act requires the Minister to establish norms and standards in respect of integrity, ethics, conduct and anti-corruption in the public service (Public Service

Commission, 2013). Similarly, the introduction of the Public Service Integrity Management Framework (PSIMF) in 2013 by the Department of Public Service Administration aims to strengthen measures for managing unethical conduct and promoting integrity in the PSS (DPSA, 2013, p. 4).

The framework requires all government departments on national and provincial levels to have ethics committees in place to oversee their ethics programmes. The committees would provide oversight and give strategic direction to the ethics programmes. As such, there is a need for the ethics committees to receive regular reports to assess the state of ethics in the departments. Effective implementation of the framework by departments depends on the establishment or improvement of the ethics function within departments (DPSA, 2016, p. 32). The legislative interventions aforementioned imply that people must adhere to the rules given, either by law or by their superiors. This, in turn, will allow organisations to bring effectiveness in their ethics and compliance programmes. The survey results not only reveal that ethics programmes influence management practices, but also suggest that employees are positively affected and increasingly empowered to act ethically in the government organisation.

Although legislative and regulatory responsibilities place the duty on employees to behave ethically, there is a lack of enforcement and unsatisfactory implementation of certain aspects of these regulatory frameworks. Similarly, a report by the Public Protector in 2016 indicates that there has been little to no effect on the ethical behaviours and conduct of officials in the PSS, specifically those in leadership positions (Office of the Public Protector, 2016, p. 29).

Previous research by Agarwal & Chaudhary (2013a:28; 2013b:151), Rossouw & Van Vuuren (2010) and Podger et al. (2018) also indicate that despite departments having had codes of ethics and ethics programmes, mere reliance on these is not sufficient to safeguard departments against serious ethical failures. The organisational culture, corporate ethics programmes and the role-model behaviour of top management may all have a significant influence on ethical employee conduct (Wolmarans, 2014, p. 28). However, it has become clear that the majority of SA organisations do not attempt to create an ethical culture (Van Zyl & Boshoff, 2010). Even so, Drajat (2014, pp. 79-90) believes that the public sector is under pressure to improve service delivery and should develop a culture of strong leadership to become a more effective functioning organisation.

Various public sector reform programmes, such as recommendations from internal and external auditors, seek to augment the capacity of government to address present-day internal control challenges but produced unsatisfactory results. In support to this statement, the Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA) has highlighted that management, executive- and oversight structures did not respond with the required urgency to the auditor's messages about addressing risks and improving internal controls (AGSA, 2017, p. 160).

1.3. Research Methodology

In this article, we examine the perceptions of ethics risk in a SA government organisation. To address the need for ethical and effective leadership in government organisations, this study proposed a unified approach that combines three positive leadership theories (i.e., ethical leadership, servant leadership, and situational leadership) that promote ethical conduct in the government organisations. While scholars have noted the conceptual overlap between ethics and leadership, there has been an inadequate investigation of the empirical relationships between ethics and risk management, using a combined leadership approach to build an ethical and effective public service.

This study made use of both a literature review and an empirical study, using secondary data. For the empirical analysis, a statistical analysis was carried out using the latest version of IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS) version 25, as well as Microsoft Excel. Factor analysis was used to regroup variables into limited sets of clusters based on shared variance. The target population consisted of 765 officials in the government organisation, both general staff and managers. The questionnaire was administered electronically from the 01st February 2016 to the 30th June 2016, and secondary data was obtained from the government organization. Ultimately, the final sample size consisted of 277 respondents, which was considered sufficient. Since participation was voluntary, there was no element of control over the number of responses data was drawn from those respondents. Information received from the 277 respondents provided the researcher with sufficient data to make conclusions about the findings related to the research project.

The questionnaire used in the primary study comprised of closed-ended questions, which provided for a particular set of answers from the respondents. A six-point Likert-scale was used for the closed-ended questions to show the respondents' level of agreement with a certain statement by choosing from six possible options. The

scale ranged from one to six, with one being “Strongly disagree”, six being “Strongly agree” and an additional option being “Don’t know”. The responses were summed up with percentages and frequency counts. The quantitative data from the questionnaire was interpreted in terms of a risk rating scale. This method uses agreement scores to present the ethics risks and the ethical culture risks that the organisation may be exposed to. The agreement scores were calculated based on the distribution of respondents’ answers. In addition, the risk index was used to assess perceived ethics risks in a South African government organisation. Overall index scores were calculated based on a risk rating scale and summarised for the categories used to measure the ethics risks.

Before the EFA was performed, suitability tests were conducted on the data, as well as intercorrelation by conducting the Kaiser- Meyer- Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The KMO was used to test for sampling adequacy using the following scales for the measurement of KMO values: inadequate (less than 0.5), average (0.5-0.7), good (0.7-0.8), great (0.8-0.9), and superb (greater than 0.9). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.903, which falls into the range of being great to superb (i.e., 0.9-greater than 0.9) and the Bartlett test of sphericity was found to be highly significant ($p < .000$), suggesting that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

In the study, the Cronbach’s alpha values calculation was performed to confirm the internal consistency reliability scale of all factors. The ethical risk behaviour scale was aimed at measuring the participants’ opinions on the ethical behaviour the government organisation may be subjected to. The ethical risk behaviour scale produced a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.95 and 0.98 for the ethical culture scale, indicating very good internal consistency.

1.4. Results and Findings

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the questionnaire items and the findings presented. CFA was employed to validate the factor structure of a set of observed variables. The results from the descriptive statistics conducted on the ethical risk behaviour section indicate that ethical risk such as irregularities in recruitment (i.e. jobs given to family members and friends) were somewhat likely to occur in the government organisation. Furthermore, officials perceived a lack of career progression in the organisation as external people were perceived to be given preference. The results revealed that there was a concern not only about

inconsistency in the application of discipline but also the lack of consequences for unethical action. This indicated that respondents somewhat agreed that there might be a risk of discrimination or unfair and inconsistent treatment in the management of staff performance. This meant that employees felt that they were somehow being unfairly treated in the performance of their duties and could use that to rationalise unethical conduct. Furthermore, officials did not trust the performance management systems in the organisation, and perceived salary levels to be unfair. Management should take this into account to ensure that salary levels were consistent, and that performance management is fair and consistent across all levels. Ethical risks such as abuse of the organisation's resources, cheating on claims and misrepresentation of performance appraisals were unlikely to occur in the government organisation.

Based on Table 1.1, mean scores were recorded for accountability (3.35), independence (3.09), social responsibility (3.03) and transparency (3.01), respectively. The scores indicated that the organisation has competent and professional staff and is a well-governed organisation in terms of its fiscal discipline and performance. Risks of governance failures were perceived to somewhat unlikely occur in the government organisation, as the organisation embarked on pro-active ethics initiatives. The results indicate that there were no risks in the severe risk category (67%-100%). This is a positive result for the organisation and indicates that the existence of codes of conduct and ethics guidelines has helped provide council to the officials. Furthermore, the absence of large-scale ethics failures such as fraud and corruption indicate increased compliance with the standards of conducts in the government organisation. Also, results displayed no statistical difference in how participants perceive ethics risk behaviour in the government organisation, based on gender, job levels or the number of years they worked in the government organisation.

Table 1.1. Mean Scores of Ethical Risk Behaviours

Accountability	3.35
Independence	3.09
Social responsibility	3.03
Transparency	3.01

Based on Table 1.2, the results across the ethics risk behaviour items indicate negative correlations, with an overall moderate correlation coefficient of -0.409. This indicates a significant negative relationship between total ethics risk behaviour and ethics culture ($r = -0.409$, $p < 0.001$). The results indicate that there is some relationship between ethics risk behaviour and ethics culture. However, there is to

an extent some unpredictability influencing one or both variables. Furthermore, the results also indicate that there may be other variables that have an impact on the two variables, so the direct association is not strong but is observable. Lastly, the results indicate that the more ethics risk behaviours participants perceive in the government organisation, the weaker they perceive the ethical culture to be.

Table 1.2. Correlations between Ethics Risk behaviour and Ethics Culture

Ethics risk behaviour	Ethics Culture	
Discipline	Correlation coefficient	-.352**
	Sig	0,000
	N	236
Transparency	Correlation coefficient	-.427**
	Sig	0,000
	N	229
Accountability	Correlation coefficient	-.357**
	Sig	0,000
	N	208
Responsibility	Correlation coefficient	-.405**
	Sig	0,000
	N	243
Fairness	Correlation coefficient	-.405**
	Sig	0,000
	N	243
Social responsibility	Correlation coefficient	-.419**
	Sig	0,000
	N	240
Misuse of resources	Correlation coefficient	-.419**
	Sig	0,000
	N	240
Total ethics risk behaviour	Correlation coefficient	-.409**
	Sig	0,000
	N	256
**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)		

According to Table 1.3, the results between ethics management and ethics culture indicated overall positive correlations, which were significant for all items ($p < 0.01$). The results used a two-tailed significant level at 0.01 and showed a positive linear association amongst the variables. However, based on the results, weak correlations were also observed. Weak correlations were detected for the following items:

- I am familiar with the content of the Code (.215);
- The Code is clear on what is acceptable and what is not (.245);

- Ethics training has made me more aware of ethical issues in my work (.279);
- If I observed misconduct, I would report it to the hotline (.230);
- This division (ethics office) is accessible (.291); and
- This communication makes me think about ethics in my work (.367).

Moderate coefficients were obtained for the following items:

- This division (ethics office) is trusted (.453);
- I would be comfortable to approach this division (ethics office) for ethics-related advice (.476);
- Employees consider the code when they make decisions (.542); and
- How do the organisation's ethics standards compare with that of public sector organisations (e.g. other departments) you previously worked for? (.451).

Table 1.3. Correlations between Ethics Management and Ethics Culture

Ethics Management	Ethics culture	
I am familiar with the content of the Code	Correlation coefficient	.215**
	Sig	0,00
	N	230,00
The Code is clear on what is acceptable and what is not	Correlation coefficient	.245**
	Sig	0,000
	N	208
Employees consider the code when they make decisions	Correlation coefficient	.542**
	Sig	0,000
	N	181
Ethics training has made me more aware of ethical issues in my work	Correlation coefficient	.279**
	Sig	0,001
	N	144
This division (ethics office) is accessible	Correlation coefficient	.291**
	Sig	0,002
	N	113
This division (ethics office) is trusted	Correlation coefficient	.453**
	Sig	0,000
	N	96

I would be comfortable to approach this division (ethics office) for ethics-related advice	Correlation coefficient	.476**
	Sig	0,000
	N	117
This communication makes me think about ethics in my work	Correlation coefficient	.367**
	Sig	0,000
	N	125
If I observed misconduct, I would report it to the hotline.	Correlation coefficient	.230**
	Sig	0,007
	N	135
How do the organisation's ethics standards compare with that of public sector organisations (e.g. other departments) you previously worked for?	Correlation coefficient	.451**
	Sig	0,000
	N	60
**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)		

The positive correlation indicates that when participants perceive an increase in the ethical culture when there is increased ethics management. Put differently, ethics management influences the ethical culture of the organisation. Overall indexes were used to evaluate the perceptions of ethics risks through aggregate indicators of the categories. For Section 1 of the questionnaire, the risk rating scale (Table 1.4) was used to measure ethical behaviour risks.

Table 1.4. Risk Rating Scale

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

Source: *The Ethics Institute (2016, p. 35)*

The overall ethics behaviour risk score was 53.94 percent, indicating a high ethical risk score for the government organisation. As per the risk rating, the high score represents a key risk for the organisation. The organisation should consider putting high-level control interventions to address the risks associated with ethical behaviour in the organisation. In line with the National Treasury's PSRMF (2010), this study categorised the various levels of ethics risk in high, moderate (also called medium) and low. Both high and moderate risks indicate unacceptable levels of risk. High risks require a high level of control interventions to achieve acceptable levels of residual risk, whilst, medium risks require a moderate level of control interventions to attain tolerable levels of residual risk.

Figure 1.1 provides the overall risk awareness index score for the Ethics management section. The value obtained of 60 percent indicates overall moderate awareness levels of ethics management in the organisation. Moderate awareness levels may indicate internal limitations with regards to the management of ethics. The organisation should consider potential sources of risk resulting from the moderate awareness levels, as well as the opportunities to reinforce existing ethics initiatives. Increased awareness levels will guide officials' ethical behaviour in the organisation and discourage unethical behaviour. Additionally, follow up questions were requested to measure the respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of the already existing ethics initiatives. The results of the evaluation indicate which aspects of the ethics programmes, namely initiatives and interventions, should be continued or discontinued and which aspects may require adaptation (Michie & Abraham, 2004).

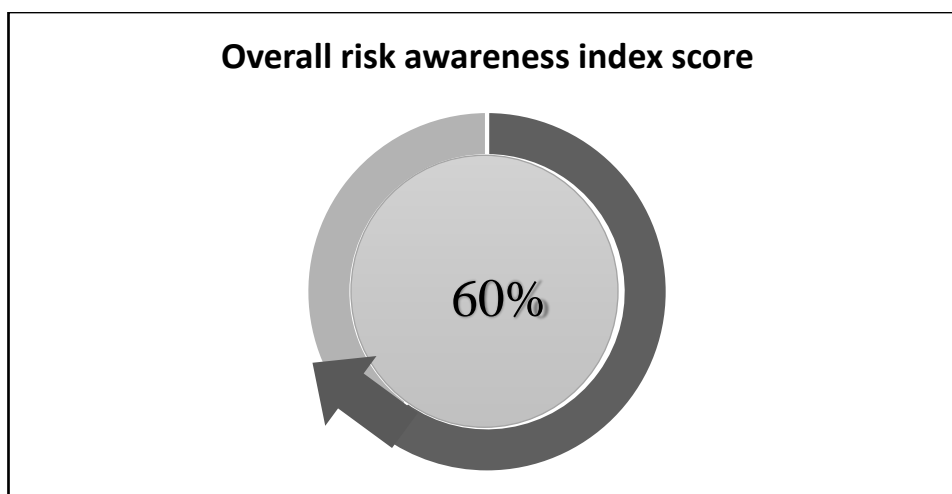


Figure 1.1. Overall Risk Awareness Index Score –Ethics Management

With regards to the effectiveness of ethics initiatives, good results were recorded for the organisation as existing ethics programmes were perceived to be effective. The organisation should continue with ethics training and constant communication on ethics matters in the organisation. However, officials did not fully trust the current ethics office, indicating their unwillingness to approach this division for ethics-related advice. In summary, the ethics training that employees received seems to be perceived as quite effective. There was reasonable familiarity with the code and employees believed that it was clear on what was acceptable and what was not. It was however not widely taken into consideration when making decisions. This

indicated that the code had not become institutionalised. It might also be that other policies and procedures were seen as more important when employees took decisions. It was found that some employees seemed to trust the hotline and were willing to report to it.

The results revealed that there were no ethical culture risks in the severe risk category (>67), which was positive. Despite the absence of severe ethical risks, it was found that the organisation had items in the high ethical risks' category. High-risk areas show issues (or behaviours) where respondents agree or strongly agree that these issues are prevalent in (or relevant to) the organisation. The following issues emerged from the high-risk areas:

There was a concern about the inconsistent application of discipline and a lack of consequences for unethical action. The results showed that people do not think honest and responsible behaviour is acknowledged. The management of the organisation needed to embark on immediate action to address this risk, as both discipline and recognition are important aspects of creating a professional environment. Furthermore, the results revealed that there is concern about various aspects of the relationship between managers and employees. Employees are comfortable to talk to their managers about ethical issues or concerns, where they perceive them to be fair, responsibility, honest and of high integrity. Therefore, to improve the culture in the organisation, the organisation should appreciate employees who are honest and responsible, instead of protecting perpetrators; take action against unethical behaviour and encourage a sense of unity through the promotion of respect amongst all officials in the organisation.

Lastly, it was found that the government organisation was perceived to be well-governed. This is a positive sign for the organisation. Also, it was found that the organisation had competent and professional staff, thereby setting a good example for other departments. The organisation must maintain its good reputation to be a trusted custodian with its stakeholders. Another positive indicator was the finding that employees in the organisation will do what is right for the public. This is very important, as it is expected of every public service official. Ethics is essential to one's work in the civil service (Svara, 2015, p. 1). Thus, public officials must do what is right in discharging their obligations in the public service, and promote the common good (Aldemir, 2010; Svara, 2015).

This study extends the international efforts by risk management scholars and practitioners to support an assessment process that allows public service

organizations to evaluate ethics risks in their overall assessment of organizational risks.

The results and findings of this study were interpreted in line with the parameters defined by the research proposal and the associated research questions. The quantitative data from the questionnaire was interpreted in terms of a risk rating scale (see Table 1.4). The scale used agreement scores to present the ethics risks and the ethical culture risks that the organisation may be exposed to. The agreement scores were calculated based on the distribution of respondents' answers.

The results reflect the findings according to the themes of ethical culture, behaviour and ethics management factors, thus providing knowledge of factors that contribute to unethical conduct and how they can be avoided.

1.5. Recommendations

From the research findings, recommendations for future research are proposed to enhance ethics management in the Public Sector. Three areas for improvement identified for possible future research involves: Firstly, to conduct research on larger sample sizes, including other national, provincial, and local government organisations. Secondly, the findings of the study suggest that risk assessments in government organisations have been mostly focused on strategic and operational risks, so it is essential to conduct a study on organisational risk assessment methodologies, including processes for ethics risk assessments. Lastly, although this study explored the King Reports' requirements on ethics management, there is a need to evaluate SA government organisations' compliance with the King IV guidelines. These studies should afford added insights into the implementation of ethics management across all the levels of government, with a view to create a shared approach on ethics. This could influence government's awareness and response planning with regards to ethics.

2. Conclusion

A review of literature on the relevant theories formed part of the body of knowledge and was an integral part of this research. There are numerous theories on leadership, however, this study focused on three, namely the situational-, ethical-, and servant - leadership theories. This study aimed to encapsulate a multidimensional approach to

leadership to achieve effective ethics management in government organisations. The literature review comprised the theoretical literature to help explain ethics-, risk - management, and leadership and governance in a SA government organisation, and the Public Sector in general.

The literature review also provided insight to improve the leadership ability of leaders and managers for effective ethics management in the government organisation. Based on the questionnaire, the researcher was able to obtain data which were analysed and used to advise the government organisation on possible ethics risks. It provided a scientific indication of how the organisation's stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of ethics management programmes, particularly in the context of a SA government organisation.

The literature review found that, since the implementation of ethics programmes, the government organisation has taken several measures to improve regulatory and supervisory oversight of ethics governance within the organisation, including identified inadequacies in its control environment, as well as proposals for improvement.

Since the results revealed that there was concern about the inconsistent application of discipline and the lack of consequences for unethical action, management of the organisation needs to embark on immediate action to address these risks, as discipline is an important aspect of creating a professional environment. It is unlikely that organisations will acquire ethics mindsets or ethical cultures if their leaders display a lack of commitment or fail to demonstrate the required ethical beliefs, practices and conduct. By necessity, an organisation's values are representative of its leadership's personal behaviour in such a manner as to reinforce acceptable behaviour for the organisation's employees and various stakeholders (Brown & Trevino, 2006:117-134; Van Heerden, 2015). Therefore, the most critical aspect of creating an ethical workplace is the behaviour of leaders, both senior executives and managers. Numerous studies indicate that leaders in an organisation play a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining ethical behaviour (Barnard, 2012; Du Preez, 2016; Labuschagne, 2016). It is necessary then, that ethical leadership exists to create and build on an ethical culture (Paharia & Singh, 2016, p. 2).

Recommendations in this article can be used as a guideline for leaders and managers within the government organisations. Professional ethical behaviour in the public service must be promoted and maintained. Since the results revealed that there was concern about the inconsistent application of discipline and the lack of consequences

for unethical action, management of the organisation needs to embark on immediate action to address these risks, as discipline is an important aspect of creating a professional environment. Leaders and managers in government organisations must equip themselves with principles from the leadership theories discussed in this study, to empower them to be able to manage ethics more effectively.

The literature review also provided insight to improve the leadership ability of leaders and managers for effective ethics management in the government organisation. The literature suggests that the effectiveness of ethics programmes needs to be supported by commitment and action from the role players. The literature review found that, since the implementation of ethics programmes, the government organisation has taken several measures to improve regulatory and supervisory oversight of ethics governance within the organisation, including identified inadequacies in its control environment, as well as proposals for improvement. Ethics risks also need to be identified, assessed and monitored on a continuous basis. The literature also suggests that government organisations face serious challenges relating to effective ethics management, due to perceptions of unethical conduct and corruption.

From the research findings, recommendations for future research are proposed to enhance ethics management in the Public Sector. Three areas for improvement identified for possible future research involves: Firstly, to conduct research on larger sample sizes, including other national, provincial, and local government organisations. Secondly, the findings of the study suggest that risk assessments in government organisations have been mostly focused on strategic and operational risks, so it is essential to conduct a study on organisational risk assessment methodologies, including processes for ethics risk assessments. Lastly, although this study explored the King Reports' requirements on ethics management, there is a need to evaluate SA government organisations' compliance with the King IV guidelines. These studies should afford added insights into the implementation of ethics management across all the levels of government, with a view to create a shared approach on ethics. This could influence government's awareness and response planning with regards to ethics.

With regards to corporate governance, the ethical integrity of government organisations is constantly subject to question due to perceived failures of corporate governance and ethics. This has increased the urgency of enhanced ethical frameworks and governance in the public sector. The key principles of good corporate governance as recommended by the King II report have strengthened the

relationship between corporate governance and ethics and has played an important role in enhancing the ethical governance frameworks in the public sector.

To summarise, this article shows that there are growing indications (PSR, 2016) of the public sector taking their ethical responsibilities more seriously, and of these issues becoming more critical in the government's agenda. Thus, encourages key principles of the King II report on corporate governance adopted into government's ethics framework. This includes the ethics and integrity of leaders, transparency and accountability in decision-making, and fairness and responsibility in addressing ethical matters, such that an ethical culture can be imbedded, and government can be seen as ethical in the society.

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