The impact of ethics on the organisational culture of a government department in South Africa

(Research study)

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Business Administration to the Faculty of Commerce, Law, and Management, University of the Witwatersrand

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DECLARATION

I Gonasagrie Munsami Perumal declare that this research report entitled”The impact of ethics on the organisational culture of a government department in South Africa” is my own unaided work. I have acknowledged, attributed and referenced all ideas sourced elsewhere. I am hereby submitting it in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I have not submitted this report before for any other degree or examination to any other institution.

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ABSTRACT

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South Africa has witnessed an increase in corruption in recent years, despite the President's commitment to "building an ethical state in which there is no place for corruption". This study sought to determine the factors that contribute to unethical behaviour, the attitudes and behaviours to unethical behaviour, and the impact thereof on the organisational culture. The research paper deliberated on whether leadership encouraged ethical behaviour.

The study was carried out in the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic). A sample of 12 respondents who have worked at the dtic for longer than a year was selected using a cross-sectional selection sample. A qualitative research methodology was employed, using semi-structured interviews to obtain the information, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the information.

The main study findings were that there were many opportunities for unethical behaviour, exacerbated by lack of trust in leadership and inconsistent, irrational and sometimes non-transparent decision-making. Attitudes and behaviour of leadership to unethical behaviour and consequences for unethical behaviours applied only to junior staff and not management, creating an environment of distrust. Leadership generally did not encourage ethical behaviour, the mechanisms were insufficient to prevent unethical behaviour, and such unethical behaviours impacted on the culture of the organisation, hence ethics and mainly unethical behaviour has a direct impact on the organisational culture.

Key Words: Ethics, Organisational Culture, Corruption, Tone at the Top, Mechanisms

Johannesburg, April 2021

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I give this thesis as an offering to the Supreme Lord of the Universe, Lord Sri Krishna, for giving me the intellect to complete this thesis.

Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita verse 15.15 “I am seated in everyone’s heart, and from Me come remembrance, knowledge, and forgetfulness”. Verse 13.18 states “He is knowledge, He is the objective of knowledge, and He is the goal of knowledge.”

I give thanks to my family for their unwavering support and patience during this period of my study. I am truly honoured to have you in my life.

I thank my employer, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, for affording me the opportunity to pursue these studies and to make available the resources for my case study.

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Bribery: Giving or receiving an unearned reward to influence someone's behaviour.

Corruption: Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery.

Extortion: The practice of obtaining something, especially money, through force or threats.

Ethics: A moral philosophy, concerned with the moral standards by which people must behave.

Favouritism: When a person (usually a manager) demonstrates preferential treatment to one person over all other employees for reasons unrelated to performance.

Kickback: An illicit payment made to someone in return for facilitating a transaction or appointment.

Nepotism: The practice among those with power or influence of favouring relatives or friends, especially by giving them jobs.

Organisational culture: The customs, rituals and values shared by the members of an organisation. It defines how people behave in an organisation.

Self-enrichment: The act or process of increasing one's intellectual or spiritual resources.

Self-interest: One's personal interest or advantage, especially when pursued without regard for others.

Unethical behaviour: An action that falls outside of what is considered morally right or proper for a person, a profession or an industry.

Whistle-blower: A person who informs on a person or organisation regarded as engaging in an unlawful or immoral activity.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Background and context

This research is designed to analyse the specific factors that contribute to ethical or unethical behaviour in the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic), that is to say, the factors that influence or impact its ethical culture.

1.1.1 Ethics and unethical behaviour

"In law a man is guilty when he violates the rights of others. In ethics he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so." — Immanuel Kant

What is ethics? The Encyclopaedia Britannica (2020) states that ethics, also called moral philosophy, considers what is morally good or bad and right or wrong, also referring to values or principles. King IV (2016) defines ethics as treating others as one would like to be treated, and the consideration of what is right for oneself and others.

Ethical values in decision-making, the conduct of management and employees, and the relationship between companies, their stakeholders and the society at large is what is referred to with regard to ethics in organisations. The Executive Members' Ethics Act and Executive Ethics Code specifically require the executive to use its powers in the best interests of the public and to avoid conflicts of interest. It explicitly calls on members of the Executive to not abuse their positions for private gain (Rossouw, 2014).

If a person is given an opportunity to be unethical, in the majority of the cases he will be unethical if he is to gain something at the expense of someone else (Soman, 2018; McVenn, 1919). Unethical behaviour starts with insignificant unethical acts, from stealing at the workplace, be it a pen, and coming late to work (stealing time from your employer) to using the photocopy machine to copy personal information. If left unaddressed, unethical acts will seem attractive and become bigger and bolder, eventually involving large amounts of money (Scott & Steinberg, 2009).

1.1.2. Ethics in Public Service

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) demands that politicians, and the Cabinet especially, act with the utmost moral and ethical responsibility, hence they have a responsibility not to misuse their official capacity for self-enrichment. This is referred to in the Executive Members' Ethics Act (1998), which is also applicable to the President as a member of the Cabinet. In addition, the Constitution covers conflict of interest between personal and official responsibilities, hence there is a serious breach of the Constitution if nothing else (Rossouw, 2014). Raga and Taylor (2005) stated that ethics exists as long as mankind does, and has to do with the character, conduct and values of human beings.

Gildenhuys (2004) stated that political power attracts corruption. Media reports, supported by the history of politics not just in South Africa but worldwide, reveal that many politicians have no principles, are opportunistic and power hungry. They have been found to lie and have no integrity. The cleaning up must start with public servants as they set the example and when they are corrupt the entire society will tend to be corrupt.

Corruption is reported in the media almost daily. Officials justify why they are acting in a certain way, albeit unethically. Detection matters only when you are an unknown and have no ties with the rich and famous, more so with associates or family members of politicians. Compounded with the many recent cases of political corruption, this clearly indicates that unethical activities are becoming systemically embedded in our society (Punt, 2005).

1.1.3. Ethics in the Public Service in South Africa

Notable legislations govern the behaviour of public officials, viz. the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the Public Service Act (1994), the Public Service Regulations (2016), the Public Service Code of Conduct (1999), and the Public Administration Management Act (2014), with the objective to promote ethical behaviour in the public service; prevent unethical conduct, fraud and corruption; and support ethics, integrity management and anti-corruption. The Constitution of the Republic of South

Africa (1996) requires a high standard of professional ethics in the public service. Ethical conduct and organisational integrity are key to eradicating fraud and corruption in the public service and administration. It is therefore imperative that public servants act with the utmost integrity and trust.

1.1.4. The dtic, its ethics mandate and culture

The dtic is a government department with the mandate to accelerate transformation of the economy, encourage the participation of previously marginalised sectors, encourage development in industries, attract investments, facilitate trade and stimulate economic growth.

The annual report of the Department of Trade and Industry (2018) stated that, in respect of ethics, an ethics committee was in place and meetings were held quarterly; awareness and training around ethics was conducted for all levels of the department; public service corporate governance prescripts were adopted; frameworks for compulsory training were rolled out; and the department ensured no conflict of interest as all managers and officials disclosed their financial interests as per the requirement of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA).

The structure of positions at the dtic are: Executive management, senior management, middle management, administration and support.

1.2. Research conceptualisation

1.2.1. The research problem statement

The President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, announced his commitment to building an ethical state in which there is no place for corruption (Ramaphosa, 2020). The President also announced that a poor culture riddled with "corruption, nepotism and patronage" would not be tolerated and that action would be taken against those public servants who abused their power or stole public money.

In addition, in the State of the Nation address (Ramaphosa, 2019), the President announced the creation of the Ethics, Integrity and Disciplinary Technical Assistance Unit, the role of which would be to strengthen the management of ethics and anti-corruption, and ensure consequence management for any breach of government processes. Furthermore, Ramaphosa (2018) announced the building of a capable, ethical and developmental state in which there would be zero tolerance for corruption, patronage and theft of public monies.

The pledge year after year by the President of a state free of corruption, patronage and theft of public money seems to be just talk, as high levels of corruption and lack of consequences – viz. charges, monies recovered and being fired from public service – are the order of the day. Reported cases stem from former President Jacob Zuma and other parliamentarians, who were found guilty of acts of corruption and other unethical behaviours, but remained in the employ of the Government.

1.2.2. The thesis problem

Even though many problems exist in the Government of the country, as detailed above, this thesis will focus only on one government department, i.e. the dtic. It will respond only to the problem of unethical behaviour in the department itself, i.e. the factors that result in unethical behaviour and the impact on the culture of the department.

1.2.3. The research purpose (aim and objectives) statement

The purpose of this research is to determine the factors that shape the ethical culture of the dtic, by asking a range of players within the department about their perceptions of various aspects of ethical behaviour and the institutional framework in which this takes place. It is evident that unethical behaviour and corruption is rife. For many years, it has been evident that the system of governance has been affected by corruption, and there is existing evidence that this is prevalent in emerging and developing economies (Peyton & Belasen, 2012).

The research is envisaged to determine if there are factors in the organisation that contribute to an unethical environment and, if so, what impact these factors would have on the culture of the organisation. Once determined, these contributing factors would have to be eliminated to ensure that public servants act in the most ethical and upright manner so as to achieve a conducive organisational culture that would encourage trust, good work ethic and excellent service delivery to the public.

The aim would also be to determine what the culture of the organisation would be should there be no opportunities to act unethically and, furthermore, whether the tone at the top encourages ethical behaviour or the leadership itself is acting unethically.

1.2.4. The research questions

Question 1: What factors are perceived to have encouraged the ethical or unethical behaviour?

Question 2: What are the attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour?

Question 3: Does leadership encourage ethical behaviour?

Question 4: What controls and measures are in place to identify and address unethical behaviours?

1.3 Delimitations and assumptions of the research study

The public entities and regional offices of the dtic would be excluded from the study. The public entities have autonomy from the dtic and the relationship of each entity is different from the next.

1.4 Significance of the research study

Should the problem of unethical and corrupt behaviour and actions not be addressed, it would result in an increase in crime and vigilantism, and extreme distrust in the government (Bovaird & Loffler, 2001), and this could lead to a civil uprising or the government being overthrown and mass anarchy in the country. This untenable situation would lead to severe penalties from the global economy, the International Monetary Fund and South Africa’s trade partners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Ethics philosophy

Boone (2017) stated that ethics is also called moral philosophy, which is concerned with the moral standards by which people must behave, and seeks to decipher and make sense of the reasons why people should behave in an ethical way, and what factors contribute to such behaviour. It also seeks to understand what makes behaviours good or bad.

The fathers of ethics and philosophy, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, were famous Greek philosophers who coined the terminology “ethics”. They came up with the method of how to tackle philosophy and ethics. This was supported by MacIntyre (2003).

Boone (2017) discussed the importance of ethics in life, society and religious practices, which require ethical behaviour. Kaptein (2011) provided clarity on ethics culture and that it relates directly to unethical behaviour in the workplace. Beekun et al. (2005) discussed the importance of the Utilitarian Theory of Ethics, which refers to people acting in such a way that their actions benefit the good of many, not just oneself, with relevance to the improvement of society. Schein (1996) defined culture as shared beliefs, values and norms. In their study of ethical climate and ethical culture, Trevino and Weaver (2003) found that there is a direct and strong relationship between ethical leaders who walk the talk and encourage ethical conduct, and an organisation that is compliant and values its staff and society at large.

2.2. Research problem analysis

2.2.1. Root causes

Leaders who formulate legislation do not practise what they preach and transgress these legislation and frameworks. There is a lack of political will on the part of leaders to prevent corrupt actions, as they themselves are guilty of such. Sebola (2018) stated that while government proclaims that the highest authority is the Constitution, there is little to no evidence that the politicians themselves uphold the Constitution. Rossouw (2014) wrote that numerous legislation are in existence, however, the Public Prosecutor’s Nkandla report (2014) stated that President Zuma had not breached legislation but the code of conduct, and hence could not be prosecuted and no action could be taken against him. This gave way for the flock to follow, as it had been proven that no action would be taken against unethical behaviour. Sebola (2018) supported the fact that the legislative frameworks to prevent unethical behaviour are ineffective as they are undermined by the very people who have to implement them. He further stated that public officials continue to act unethically as if there were no legislation.

Leaders behave in an immoral way, setting a negative precedence and example for the rest of the public officials, who view the lack of consequences for unethical conduct as an opportunity to act unethically. Sweden’s Council of Basic Values of the Government (n.d.) inferred that employees observe the personal actions and behaviours of politicians at various levels and then follow their example. Beeri et al. (2013, p.62) reported to the contrary that research suggested “employees more willingly commit to and accept the consequences of decisions they were involved in”.

There is a lack of political will of leaders to prevent corrupt actions as they themselves are guilty of such, and when found to be guilty there is neither remorse nor payback. Rossouw (2014) noted that with regard to the Nkandla investigation, the President should have acknowledged his transgression and apologised or made an effort to repent or repay some of the State monies as an act of good faith, but neither was done, except to deny the allegations. Gildenhuys (2004) noted an uproar around allegations of a R43-billion arms deal, where all recommendations by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts were ignored and the guilty parties let off scot-free.

When there is alleged unethical conduct, the Public Prosecutor investigates the allegations and submits a report to the President for action. The President analyses the findings and reports to the National Assembly. There is, however, no process or guidelines for when the sitting President is himself accused of unethical behaviour, as the investigation report would go to him for action (Rossouw, 2014). The sitting President cannot be both player and referee.

Poor management of public affairs, together with politicians escaping any form of consequence or repercussion for unethical conduct, is rife. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2000) confirmed the valid concerns of “poor, dishonest management of public affairs and corruption (immoral acts)” (UNDESA, 2000, p.1) and that “in the bureaucracy, corrupt tendencies in routine course of government business can become entrenched” (UNDESA, 2000, p. 29)”. It further stated that there is a serious lack of follow-through where there is wrongdoing (UNDESA, 2000). Unethical actions continue in the absence of stringent actions or punishments. The Minister of Communications, Telecommunications and Postal Services, Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams, is a classic example. The following unethical behaviours were reported in 2020 alone. In January 2020, Ndabeni-Abrahams travelled to Switzerland and France with her spouse, apparently for their wedding anniversary celebrations, without obtaining approval from the President. This cost the taxpayer R76 719 (Wa Afrika & Ngoepe, 2020). In April 2020, Ndabeni-Abrahams was fined R1 000 for a lockdown violation (Cilliers, 2020) and, in August 2020, the husband of Ndabeni-Abrahams was allegedly involved in the COVID-19 grant saga. There were inconsistencies in different people’s testimonies (*Cape Times*, 2020) and nothing came of this issue. *Financial Mail* (2020) reported that Ndabeni-Abrahams meddled at the post office, resulting in an organisation that had been improving descending into “shambolic dysfunction”; she also ignored Parliament and appointed councillors at ICAS, and continually interfered at the SABC.

A survey conducted by Sweden’s Council of Basic Values (n.d., p. 14), concluded that basic values would be weak in workplaces where there is an attitude of tolerance to unethical behaviour. Gildenhuys (2004) stated that senior government officials, such as Ministers and Directors-General, shift responsibility to junior staff when things go wrong. They get away with it and continue to act unethically.

The lack of an independent arm to oversee, investigate and prosecute is another reason for flaws in the system. The Public Service Commission investigates in an advisory capacity and does not have the mandate to prosecute. In some instances, there are inadequate resources, political independence and even interference. This is supported by UNDESA (2000, p. 30). Rossouw (2015) stated that this was also a result of weaknesses in the Executive Members’ Ethics Act, which makes no provision for when the President is under investigation. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (1996) supports this problem by indicating that enforcement must be backed up by “independent and adequately resourced prosecution and investigation services” to ensure credibility by the public. Lack of competency as well as processes and procedures in dealing with irregularities and offences were cited by Sweden’s Council of Basic Values (n.d.).

2.2.2. Trends and symptoms

2.2.2.1. Procurement irregularities

Generally, the vulnerabilities and challenges in the procurement process give rise to unethical behaviour when private individuals and companies wish to influence the decisions of public officials regarding procurement. Sweden’s Council of Basic Values (n.d.) stated that officials in the procurement function are vulnerable as contracts for government work are attractive. Lawton et al. (2013) supported that there are many challenges to procurement decisions, while Gildenhuys (2014) stated that government sometimes puts out tenders not for services or items required, but to negotiate deals with suppliers for personal benefit.

The daily media reports of PPE corruption during the COVID-19 pandemic are a symptom of the weak controls in the system of government procurement. The BBC (2020) reported that the Auditor-General of South Africa, Kimi Makwetu, stated that “frightening findings” had been discovered, and there were cases where personal protective equipment (PPE) had been purchased for more than five times the usual price.

2.2.2.2. Favouritism and nepotism

Recruitment and promotion processes are affected when officials assist family members and friends to secure jobs. This is prevalent in government. These incidents are found via strong ethnic relationships and a payback process (repayment of a favour). This is supported by UNDESA (2000), Lawton et al. (2013), Sweden’s Council of Basic Values (n.d) and Gildenhuys (2004).

Favouritism and nepotism is caused when leadership abuses the discretion bestowed upon it. The perpetrator is not acting in his own interest, but in the interest of someone linked to the official, be it a friend, family member or affiliate. Nepotism refers to officials hiring a relative for advancing the family interest or the relative (Hubert et al., 2007).

2.2.2.3. Unethical people are rewarded

Most organisations do not reward ethical behaviour, even though they do not condone unethical behaviour. Unethical behaviour is irewarded where the ill-gotten gains and behaviours benefit the organisation, and there are no sanctions for such unethical behaviour. Sometimes the organisation's processes are silent on this, and the legislation contradicts the ethics code of conduct. Lawton et al. (2013, p.40) supported this problem, stating that “the status of the Knight can change if the knavely behaviour seems to be rewarded. Unethical behaviour may be rewarded.” Menzel (2012) stated that the best way to ensure that organisational goals are achieved ethically is to include ethics in the process of managing employee performance.

2.2.2.4. Bribery

Bribes are given to government officials mainly in the form of gifts. The definition of gifts is blurred and so gives rise to bribery. In addition, officials accept small gifts in the performance of their duties, which could constitute bribery. The intention to influence the public official must be questioned or proved at the time of presentation of the gift as it may only become evident later. Bribery of traffic officers, for example, is rife in efforts to prevent traffic fines. This sentiment is supported by Sebola (2018), Sweden’s Council of Basic Values (n.d.), Lawton et al. (2013), Beeri et al. (2013), Gildenhuys (2004), Rossouw (2016), and Hellsten and Larbi (2006).

2.2.3. Consequences

2.2.3.1. Distrust in the government and increase in crime

The majority of South Africa’s citizens do not trust the government. Too many incidents of unethical behaviour have been reported with no effort by government to punish the offenders. The continued unethical actions and corruption that take place at political level and among high-ranking officials has led to the citizens having no trust in the government. Sebola (2018) stated that there is a global outcry that politicians and public officials cannot conduct public administration in an ethical manner, supported by the view of Sweden’s Council of Basic Values (n.d.) that corruption leads to a general deterioration of trust among citizens. This deterioration of trust is supported by Lawson et al. (2013), Beeri et al. (2013), and Hellsten and Larbi (2006). The unemployed turn to organised crime and regard robbing, stealing and looting as necessary for their survival (Gildenhuys, 2004).

2.2.3.2. Service delivery failure and non-development of the country and its people

Service delivery failures and non-development of the country result from unethical behaviour, as monies meant to service the citizens of the country and enable development instead go to the coffers of politicians. This means less or no monies for the citizens (Sweden’s Council of Basic Values, n.d.). Beeri et al. (2013) stated that this issue is undeniable. These causes and consequences could result in the non-payment of taxes and diminishing foreign investments tax, and would hamper democracy (Gildenhuys, 2004). The poor are hurt, and the social and economic development of the country is seriously hampered.

2.3. Research knowledge gap analysis

Beeri et al. (2013) conducted a survey to examine the relationship between ethics and performance in local governance. They tested the effects over time of an ethics programme in an Israeli regional council on the perceptions of employees (awareness of the code of ethics, ethical leadership, inclusion of employees in ethical decision-making [EDM], ethical climate [EC], organisational commitment and quality of work life [QWL], and behaviour [organisational citizenship behaviour]). A longitudinal study of 108 employees was employed, with data from before and after implementation of the ethics programme used to determine its effectiveness. The assessment was done objectively by obtaining managers' evaluations of employees' behaviour.

Main findings: The main findings indicated the effectiveness of the ethics programme, which was positive and therefore effective. This resulted in more awareness of the code of ethics, and an increase in involvement and participation in the ethical decision-making. Beeri et al. (2013) also found that ethical leadership had a positive bearing on the employees' awareness of the code of ethics, together with an increased awareness of the codes. This resulted in an improved ethics culture, more organisational commitment and a better quality of work life for all employees. The importance of an ethics programme was highlighted for fostering and maintaining ethics values within the organisation. The findings affirmed the positive effect of the ethics programme. A year after the implementation of the ethics programme, the variables relating to the ethics culture and process had increased substantially. The study merely affirmed that ethics programmes elevate the ethical culture in organisations.

Knowledge gap: Beeri et al. (2013) found that there was no evidence for a relationship between the resources for ethics and the organisational citizenship behaviour; the gap could be that there was difficulty in aligning the managers' views with those of the employees in terms of the method used, i.e. informal, spontaneous, non-rewarded behaviour, and that asking managers about this behaviour would not have been captured by the study. There was also no control group that was not exposed to the ethics programme. In addition, the authors did not conduct a post-implementation study.

Johnson et al. (2012) examined the relationship between ethical leader behaviour and organisational trust, satisfaction with organisational outcomes, and perceived organisational effectiveness. The study intended to close the gap where there was no evidence that ethical leaders were better off than those who were less ethical.

Main findings: Johnson et al. (2012) conducted the survey with working adults and the study revealed that ethical leaders and their perceptions related to the collective trust of the employees of the organisation. Employees who believed that their leaders acted with integrity and ethics scored the organisation as more competent, transparent and showing concern for employees. They could identify with their managers, were satisfied with the outcomes of the organisation, and rated the effectiveness of the organisation highly. Immediate managers were perceived as more ethical than executives. The study also asserted that ethical leaders were effective leaders.

Knowledge gap: The scope of the investigation was narrow. The study focused only on the relationship between ethical leadership, trust, satisfaction and the effectiveness of the organisation, but the exact natures of the relationships were not determined.

Kalshoven et al. (2012) undertook a study to investigate the validity of ethical leader behaviours as measured with Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW), and included variables relating to ethical leadership that were investigated previously.

Main findings: It was found that there was a positive relationship between ethical leadership and commitment, trust, effectiveness of the leader and job satisfaction. The study also revealed that leaders who were consistent in their behaviour, guided ethical behaviour and clarified work responsibilities were perceived as more effective. In addition, such leadership was aligned with trust. There was a higher correlation between Ethical

Leadership Scale (ELS) and trust, more so than ELW, indicating the importance of leaders who can be trusted.

Other significant findings were that power sharing and fairness were critical for ethical leader behaviour. When employees observe that their direct managers share power, they behave in a responsible way, assist others and engage in the goals of the organisation. Employees reciprocate fair treatment, in line with the social learning theory, which states that if employees are treated fairly by their leaders, they will treat others in the same way.

Knowledge gap: The following gaps were identified with the methodology, data, findings and conclusions. The ELW used the reflective measurement model and hence did not consider the measurements the formative model would have given to develop leadership measures. This measurement was omitted. Research must determine the validity of the ELW scales in different contexts and for different outcomes, expanding the sample. Self-report measures were used, hence there could have been biases in observed relationships. The recommendation is to use multiple sources, e.g. the study could have used supervisor or another more objective performance measure, as only employee views were considered for this study. In addition, participants were from different organisations and leaders had different tasks, which would not be comparable in terms of the performance measures. Multiple ethical leader behaviours should be considered. A cross-functional study must consider different functions and levels. The data for one of the studies was collected using a snowball method. The response rate could therefore not be calculated and the sampling error could have been flawed, by either a positive bias or variance restriction. In addition, employee effectiveness was assessed with two items only. In order to accurately assess the effectiveness of employees, more items must be considered and the effectiveness must be measured using objective data instead of perceptive data. Also not included was the relation of the ELW to other outcome variables, e.g. ethical behaviours of employees.

A study by Oyadare (1998) sought to obtain information from the subjects on issues that touch on professional standards in the civil service. The study covered 18 federal ministries with 300 respondents.

Main findings: Findings from the field revealed that serving civil servants acknowledged that the level of professional conduct in the civil service was low. Observers alleged that for this situation low work ethics was expected, however, that was not the case based on the outcome of this study. The study also revealed that civil servants acknowledged their weaknesses, while scoring their performance high. The Nigerian civil servant was found wanting on all four of Dunsire's taxonomy.

Findings revealed that civil servants were not prompt in coming to the office, absenteeism was rampant, and there was a breach of respect for office rules, diligence and attentiveness. In addition, civil servants were expected to be free of unethical behaviours and attitudes, but the study revealed a complete breach. The study found that Nigerian civil servants were experts at extortion, and when entrusted with public funds were found guilty of financial mismanagement, even though cases were grossly mismanaged. Examples of corruption were reported as fictitious consultancy fee payments, padded contract sums, the deliberate diversion of huge funds into pockets of individuals and over-costing of projects, while the cost of government in Nigeria appeared to bear no relevance to actual activities. In addition, civil servants placed their personal interests above any other consideration, and the relationship between civil servants and political executives involved collusion and non-cooperation. This impacted on service delivery to the public, which was extremely poor.

2.4. Qualitative attributes key to the research

The test in this research will be qualitative as the subject deals with people's behaviours and personalities. The following attributes will be included in the study: Employees' perceptions of leadership; if leadership sets the tone at the top; if employees act ethically; whether there are ethical codes, and if these are adhered to; if measures are in place to curb unethical behaviour; and how unethical behaviour is treated (whether condoned or punished).

2.5. Framework(s) for interpreting research findings

This is an academic study. In the absence of a definitive established framework that is widely referred to and used, many authors have developed frameworks based on their impressive studies. The following frameworks will be considered:

King IV (2016) advised that there are four key pillars by which organisations must be managed, i.e. ethical culture, good performance, effective control and legitimacy.

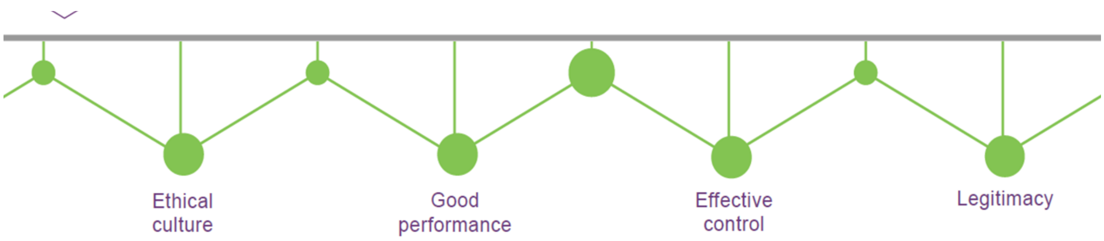

Figure 1: A conceptual framework of corporate and business ethics across organisations: Structures, processes and performance (King IV, 2016)

King IV (2016) outlined three key principles for the management of an ethical organisation: Principle 1 requires ethical and effective leading by the Accounting Officer; Principle 2 requires the Accounting Officer to support the ethical culture; and Principle 7 requires the Accounting Officer to possess the requisite skills and competencies.

For the purposes of an active, robust and leading-edge ethics practice and culture, King IV (2016) recommended a social and ethics committee that carries a greater responsibility than a compliance function; and a higher standard for the committee with the majority of members being non-executive to ensure independent judgement. Members must be competent and act with due care and skill.

It also recommended that the governing Board (Executive Board in the case of the dtic) should set the direction for the approach to the management of ethics; the Board must approve the ethics policies, programmes and codes of conduct.

Svenson and Wood (2007) provided both an external and internal methodology for ethics, which encompasses the entire organisation, the structures to manage ethics, relevant processes, and the performance of the organisation in line with ethics policies and ethos. This is illustrated in the Figure below.

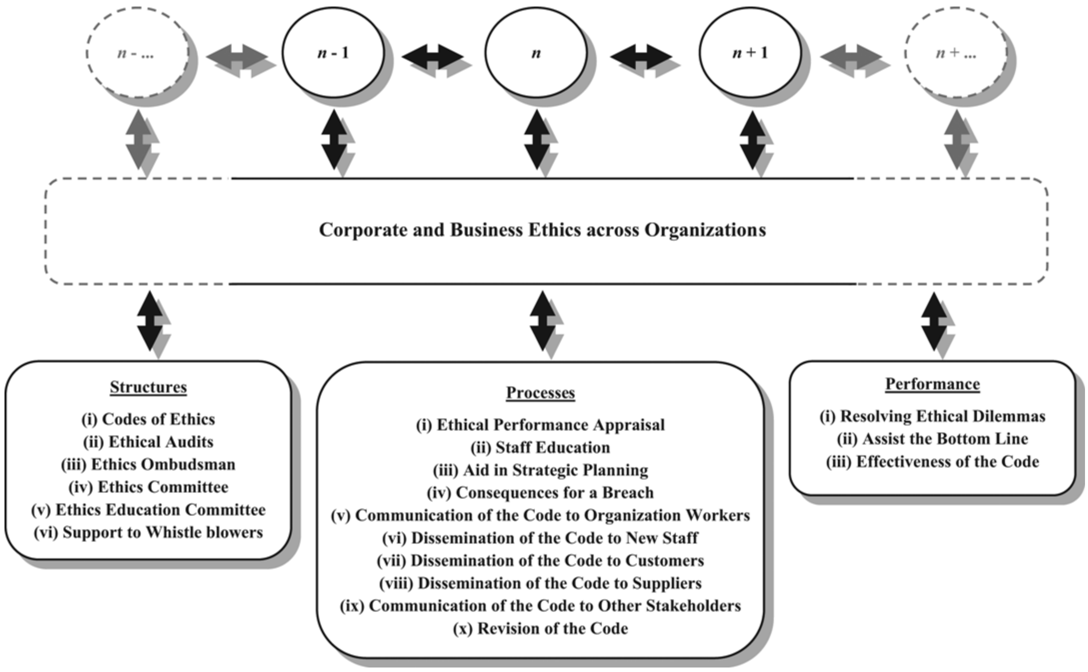

Figure 2: A conceptual framework of corporate and business ethics across organisations: Structures, processes and performance (Svenson & Wood 2007)

This conceptual framework is a continuous and robust process that entails regular revisions and iterations to remain relevant. The success of the ethics programme and effort depends on the “structures” in place (which includes the Ethics Committee, codes of conduct, ethics education, whistle-blowing procedures and ethics audits) that lay the foundation for ethics development, management and monitoring. Commitment will be achieved when an organisation provides protection for whistleblowers (Wood & Rimmer, 2003). The “processes” would be enabled by such supporting structures. “Performance” refers to the monitoring, assessment and sustainability of the organisation-wide ethical actions, behaviours and practices.

2.6. Summary and conclusion

2.6.1 Summary of literature reviewed

The literature states that corruption in the country is ever-present, if not becoming worse. The root cause of such decay is mainly the greed of politicians, who are power hungry, opportunistic and liars (Gildenhuys, 2004). Rossouw (2014) stated that there is no legislation governing investigation and enforcement processes when the sitting President is accused of wrongdoing, and this does not eliminate interference from politicians. The root cause of unethical behaviour is there are no repercussions for unethical behaviour and no follow-ups to reports of unethical or corrupt behaviour. Procurement irregularities are ever-increasing. There is no independent arm to investigate and enforce the actions, as the Public Service Commission plays merely an advisory function and does not have the mandate to enforce. Serious consequences will befall the country unless swift action is taken.

The frameworks by renowned authors on this subject matter recommend obligations and responsibilities of the Accounting Officer in an organisation (national public administration), supportive structures that would enable ethics processes to be implemented and thrive, and to gauge the effectiveness of the programmes.

2.6.2 Proposed research strategy, design, procedure and methods arising from the literature reviewed

The research will follow a qualitative strategy, using a cross-sectional research design for the collection of data. The research data-collection instrument is the interview schedule, which will be used to interview respondents to obtain the required data. The research data-collection instrument will be semi-structured face-to-face-interviews. Convenience/opportunity sampling will be used, owing to the diversity of respondents required to obtain robust and extensive views.

3. RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN, PROCEDURE AND METHODS

3.1. Research strategy

A research strategy introduces the main components of a research project, including the research topic area and focus, research perspective, research design and research methods. It refers to *how* one proposes to answer the research questions set, and *how* one will implement the methodology. The research strategy is based on the theoretical framework and research questions.

There are three research strategies, viz. qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. The qualitative approach involves looking at the characteristics or qualities that cannot be quantified, as it discusses people's opinions, feelings and emotions. Qualitative studies mainly use non-numerical data, e.g. verbal information and visual displays (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

The research strategy is an overarching phase that refers to the collection, analysis and interpretation of interviews, participant observation and document data in order to understand and describe meanings, relationships and patterns (Tracy, 2013).

"Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (Creswell, 2009, p. 37). Cox (2009) stated that qualitative research is about the framework, settings, language and suppositions drawn regarding the nature of social occurrences.

This study used the qualitative approach because the researcher believed that no single reality underlies the research problem as individuals may have different valid realities (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). This topic entails people's perceptions, views and experiences as well as their biases.

Authors who used this research strategy were Beeri et al. (2013), who conducted a qualitative research to demonstrate that a well-devised, well-applied and well-executed ethics programme would result in superior and developed ethical consequences and other organisational outcomes.

3.2. Research design

Research design is the framework for the collection and examination of the data. It tells one how the research will be carried out, including who will be participating in the research. There are five generic research designs for the collection of data (Brymans, 2012), viz. cross-sectional, longitudinal, case study, comparative and experimental.

This study employed the **cross-sectional** study, using questionnaires and some structured interviews for the data collection. Respondents were diverse and the study was at a point in time, not over different periods. People interviewed were in senior, junior, middle management positions and had worked at the department for varying lengths of time. The respondents were drawn from all ethnic groups.

Cox (2015) applied the cross-sectional research design because it maximised range and depth.

. The advantages were the respondents' own assessment of generalisability, the interviewer's own identification of the respondents, and the depth of the studied area showed that there is a universal existence among the group of respondents, which would be indicative of the population.

3.3. Research procedure and methods

3.3.1 Research data and information collection instrument(s)

A research data-collection instrument is the medium and means of collecting the data. This study followed the **interview schedule.** The researcher invited respondents to Ms Team meetings via meeting requests, owing to the impact of COVID and the cautionary around face-to-face interviews. The researcher documented interview questions to obtain responses from the respondents. "Interviews provide opportunities for mutual discovery, understanding, reflection and explanation via a path that is organic, adaptive, and oftentimes energising" (Tracy, 2013, p. 132).

The advantage of interviews is the personal interaction with the respondent, and clarity can be sought immediately to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the respondents. In this way, it removes subjectivity from the respondents. It also allows for the collection of data from a large number of people in a short time. In addition, it is convenient to analyse as the same questions will be posed to all respondents.

Oyadare (1998) used this research data and information-collection instrument to obtain information from subjects on issues of professional standards in the civil service. Eighteen federal ministries with 300 respondents were covered. Interviews and the random sampling method were used. The manner in which the research data is collected in the instrument could be structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

For this study, the researcher used a **semi-structured** data-collection method. Longhurst (2003) stated that semi-structured interviews rely on interactions between the interviewer and interviewee, and focus on obtaining views on complexity in behaviours, peoples' opinions and the emotions they feel, their experiences, thoughts, feelings and perceptions.

Based on the literature review, the researcher sourced questions for the interview schedule from the frameworks by King IV (2016) and Svenson and Wood (2007).

The interview schedule comprised four components. The first entailed screening to ensure that the person qualified to participate in the interview; the second contained their perceptions of ethical leadership, the tone at the top and the trust in the organisation, together with the opportunities that exist in the organisation for unethical behaviour, and their observations of unethical behaviour; the third contained ethical questions of the respondent in terms of how ethical they are and if they have transgressed the ethical principles; and the fourth prompted the controls that are in the department to prevent unethical behaviour. This is in line with the components of the framework.

3.3.2. Research target population and selection of respondents

3.3.2.1 Research target population

The target population refers to the universe of people who will be considered for the study. The target population of this study was: a) employees of the dtic; b) employees from all levels of the organisation, that is, executive, senior management, middle management and junior levels; c) full-time employees and part-time employees/contractors; d) an equal number of male and female employees; e) employees who have been at the dtic for a minimum of one year; and f) a diverse sample by ethnic groups.

The benefit of the target population is to obtain as many responses as possible, and by engaging with employees at different levels, it will be clear at exactly which levels the unethical behaviour is prevalent (if at all). The researcher is employed by the dtic and has access to all staff information and will therefore be able to select as large a number as possible. It will also give the researcher variation.

Kalshoven et al. (2012) undertook a study to investigate the validity of ethical leader behaviours, as measured with Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW), and included variables relating to ethical leadership that were investigated previously using a similar target population, viz. a sample of the total population. The advantage was to obtain as diverse a view to understand the ethical climate of the organisation.

3.3.2.2 Sampling or selecting respondents from the target population

Sampling is the process of selecting units for observation. Good qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling, the data of which they purposefully choose to fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals and purposes (Tracy, 2013).

There are various types of sampling, i.e. random, convenience/opportunity, maximum variation, snowball, theoretical construct, typical instance and critical instance. The researcher utilised convenience/opportunity sampling due to the diversity of sample being selected, i.e. different race, number of years (several to low), different levels (senior to junior) and different divisions, etc. The advantage is that a diverse cross-cutting sample will give a good reflection of the state of ethics organisation-wide.

Cox (2015) chose to select respondents using convenience sampling, as he was attempting to maximise the scope and selection as well as certain rationality. The aim with this selection was to maximise the range and depth of the research.

For this study, the researcher used convenience/opportunity sampling because it is specific to the research and included employees from different branches across the organisation, who had been employed for varying lengths time and were from different ethnic groups.

Sample size is the number of individuals in a sample. The dtic has an establishment of ±1 300 employees. The sample size was to have been 1% of the establishment, i.e. 13 employees. In an effort to obtain as many respondents as possible, 26 emails were sent to secure meetings to conduct interviews, however, only 12 respondents accepted.

3.3.3. Ethical considerations when collecting research data

Ethics considers the moral principles that govern human behaviour and actions. The researcher must consider procedural ethics (human beings), situational and cultural ethics, and relational ethics in carrying out the research (Tracy, 2013).

The researcher has been sponsored by her employer, the dtic, to complete her MBA qualification. The researcher will use the knowledge gained in this qualification to implement good practices at the dtic as she is the Ethics Officer of the department, hence the choice of topic for the thesis, viz. ethics. The practices the researcher will implement (on approval by the employer) will be in line with the request by the President and the anti-corruption initiatives for government. The researcher's sponsor will benefit from the study and the survey.

The researcher's positionality: As the Ethics Officer of the department, the researcher is privy to information about ethics and the organisation. The researcher will, however, not prompt, influence, judge or lead any of the responses. The researcher will accept the responses given by all respondents, even though they may not be correct and may be perceptions.

Ethical Issue: Deception – The researcher will not deceive any respondents, will disclose the reason for the interviews, with the details of the researcher, and make available the consent form.

Ethical Issue: Harm – The researcher will not in any way harm or stress the respondents (physically or developmentally) or drive them to a point of "losing self-esteem".

Ethical Issue: Informed consent – The researcher will not obtain any information without the signed consent form. Participants will be made aware that their participation will be voluntary.

Ethical Issue: Invasion of privacy – The researcher will protect the respondents, including securing the data obtained and not revealing their identity. The data will be encrypted once obtained.

3.3.4 Research data and information-collection process

Research data collection refers to the gathering of data for the answering of the researcher's questions. Information will be collected, analysed and interpreted. The collection of data will be via personal interviews. Due to COVID-19 measures, respondents were not comfortable with face-to-face interviews and, in addition, were approved to work remotely. All interviews were therefore held via MS Teams meetings.

There are four methods of data collection, viz. participant observation or ethnography**,** interviews (face to face, telephonic or internet-based), focus group discussion and documents. For this study, the researcher used **face-to-face interviews** via MS Teams. The current COVID-19 pandemic imposed restrictions whereby respondents did not wish to meet in person.

The researcher recorded and transcribed all interviews, and sent the respondents the transcriptions of their responses. Respondents signed the interview schedule confirming that the transcriptions were a true reflection of their interviews.

The advantage of face-to-face interviews is that participants have the time to express what is on their mind and to answer the questions frankly. The researcher prompted and clarified where questions were not clear or where the respondents required clarity.

The identities and information of all respondents is kept confidential. Only the researcher has access to the information and recordings, which were digitally encrypted. Once the interviews were transcribed, the respondents were given fictional names in the report.

3.3.5 Research data and information processing and analysis

3.3.5.1 Research data and information processing

Research data processing means taking raw data and turning it into information that can be used to make decisions, inputting it into a computer, extracting graphs, and summarising and explaining what the results mean.

Data coding refers to labelling and systematising the data. Coding can be accomplished by using a variety of materials, including an Excel spreadsheet or computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (Tracy, 2013).

Data entry into a computer refers to taking the numerical codes and inputting them into a computer so that the computer can analyse the information. Cox (2015) used a monster grid, a data matrix created in Excel, with the respondents on one axis and the interview questions on the other.

Data cleaning could either be code cleaning (checking for code feasibility and rectifying) or contingency cleaning (cross-checking variables and looking for illogical information). There were no data errors that the researcher had to fix. For single-response questions, the researcher checked for multiple responses, routing and filtering. The respondent could have missed answering questions. The respondents were prompted at the interview to complete all questions.

3.3.5.2 Research data and information analysis

Research data analysis refers to examining and establishing the meaning of the data, and how it relates to the questions and the reason for carrying out the research in the first place. Many methods can be used for the analysis of data, e.g. regression analysis, cluster analysis and content analysis. Nowell et al. (2017) described thematic analysis as analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a data set. The method provides an adaptable methodology and is useful for examining the viewpoints of different research participants, emphasising similarities and differences, and producing unexpected and novel insights. The researcher used the **thematic analysis** to analyse the data. This tool was beneficial as the research involved interviewing respondents, and the responses were qualitative in nature.

3.3.6 Description of the research respondents

The description of the respondents was based on the information from the samples above. Respondents met the screening criteria, i.e. be employed by the dtic. Age did not matter; what mattered was the length of service and level of employment. The ethnic diversity will determine whether there are any biases with the ethical actions of management and leadership. Their roles are not relevant.

3.4 Research strengths – reliability and validity measures applied

Research reliability refers to the stability and reliability of the research results. Golafshani (2003) stated that research reliability refers to the reliability and dependability of the research; that the research is of good quality, generating understanding and probing for a good understanding of the data. Reliable studies can be replicated in the same way, irrespective of who is conducting the studies (Tracy, 2013).

Reliability and validity will determine the honesty, credibility and believability of the research results. It is important to ensure reliability and validity to remove the researcher's subjectivity, which would cloud the interpretation of the data and results. Reliability must align to the intended purpose, and validity can influence the extent to which the researcher can learn something about what is being investigated (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Research validity is when the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings.

There are four main types of validity for a quantitative research strategy, i.e. measurement validity, internal validity, external validity and ecological validity; and four types of validity for a qualitative research strategy, namely credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability.

Gibbs (2007) stated that qualitative validity requires the researcher to check for accurateness of the findings, while reliability refers to the consistency of the researcher's approach across different projects and other researches.

The researcher will measure **reliability and validity** in the research using dependability, transferability and conformability for a qualitative research strategy. The researcher will ensure that the respondents are under no influence to respond in a certain way. The researcher will ensure that the respondents and the responses are trustworthy, that the coding is valid and trustworthy, and that the measures and scoring are done in a consistent manner.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) defined the three types of validity as: 1) internal validity, which ensures conclusions are reached about cause and effect and other relationships between variables; 2) external validity, which gives assurance that the results of the study can be generalised to the larger population or context; and 3) credibility and trustworthiness, viz. all individuals will find the study convincing and reliable.

3.5. Research weaknesses – technical and administrative limitations

Limitations of the research could include senior management and executives being too busy to participate, and it may be a struggle to get all respondents to respond due to the possibility of exhaustion, as issues voiced were perhaps not addressed previously. In addition, civil servants may not have time to partake in the survey since resources have been severely cut by National Treasury. At the dtic, which is the subject of the study, the respondents may not be available due to travel, which is in line with the mandate of the department to stimulate economic growth by attracting investment. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents may not want to have face-to-face personal interactions for the responses.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

Research data analysis refers to examining and establishing the meaning of the data and how it relates to the questions and the reason for carrying out the research in the first place. Thematic analysis was used in this study, by using themes found within the data set that examined the viewpoints of different research participants, emphasised similarities and differences, and produced unexpected and novel insights (Nowell et al., 2017). Causal relationships were explained in the data obtained (Yin, 2003).

The study intends to assist organisations and mainly the public service by unpacking factors that contribute to ethics in an organisation and presenting empirical evidence with the utilisation of interviews and analyses.

The data is presented and analysed based on the following research questions: (1) What factors are perceived to have encouraged ethical or unethical behaviour? (2) What are the attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour? (3) Does leadership encourage ethical behaviour? (4) What mechanisms and measures are in place to identify and address unethical behaviours?

Table 1: Respondent profile

Respondent*	**Job Level**	**Ethnicity**	**Sex**	**Length of service in years**
VCMS	SMS	Coloured	Male	8.5
PIFS	SMS	Indian	Female	19
SCFS	SMS	Coloured	Female	11
AIMM	MMS	Indian	Male	21
JIMM	MMS	Indian	Male	2.5
SBFA	Admin	Black	Female	10
TIFA	Admin	Indian	Female	12
PBFA	Admin	Black	Female	5
AWFP	PA-Support	White	Female	24
RWFP	PA-Support	White	Female	7

Respondent *	Job Level	Ethnicity	Sex	Length of service in years
TWFP	PA-Support	White	Female	13.3

*Pseudonym is used for respondents name. 1st digit is the first letter of the respondent's name.

2nd digit		3rd digit		4th digit	
C	Coloured	M	Male	S	SMS
I	Indian	F	Female	M	MMS
W	White			A	Admin
B	Black			P	Support

Sample selection

A sample of 13 respondents was targeted. Twenty-six meeting requests, inclusive of all criteria as listed in Chapter 3, were sent to potential respondents to participate in the study. Despite reminders and follow-ups, only 12 positive responses were received, as shown below. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and remote working policies at the dtic, all interviews were conducted via MS Teams.

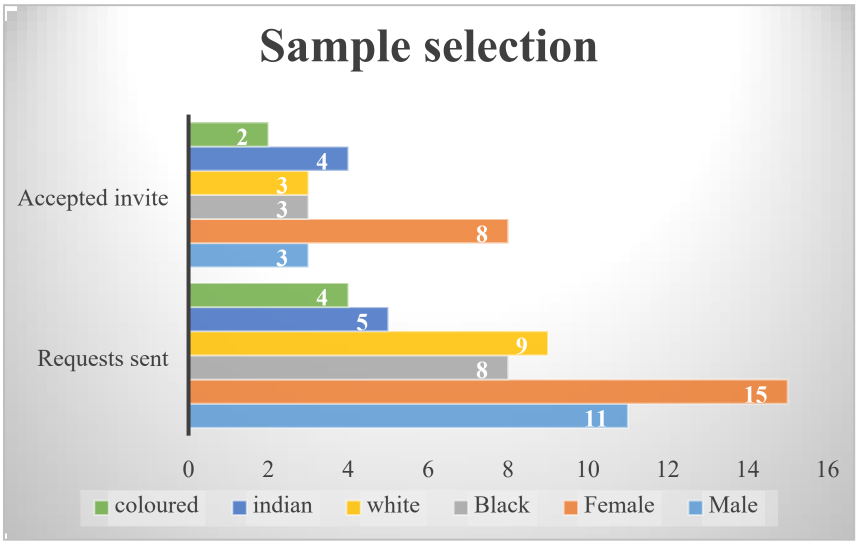

Figure 3: Sample Selection

Of the 26 invitations sent, the acceptance rate was low as indicated above.

Respondents by Ethnicity

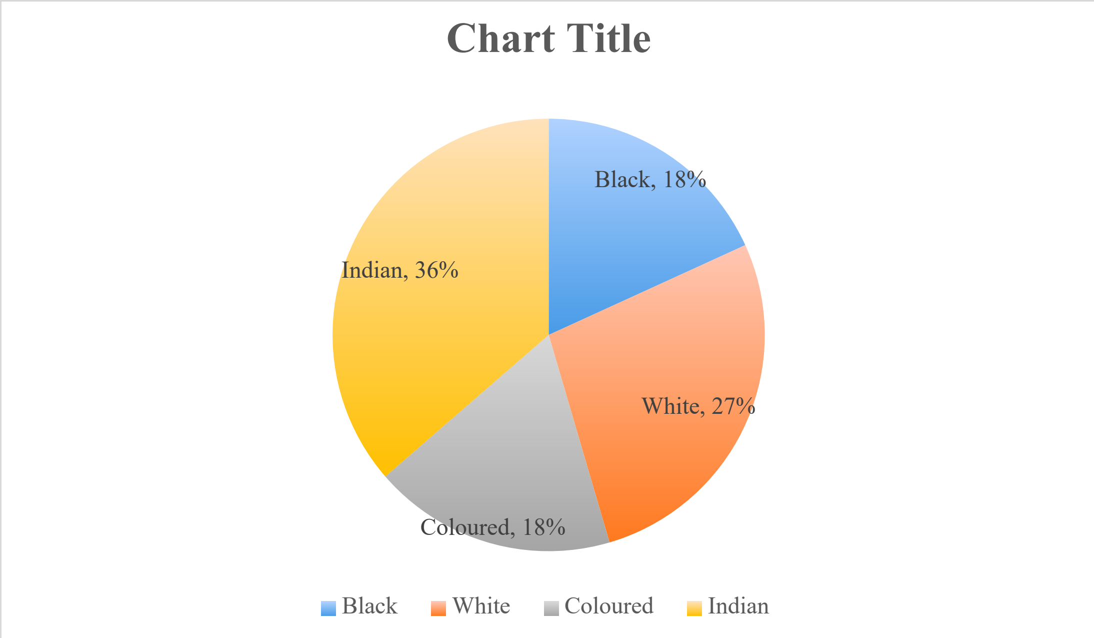

Figure 4: Respondents by ethnicity

Ethnicity was considered for this study in light of the diversity in the South African landscape as well as the public service. Ethnicity would reflect personal experiences in terms of how ethics is perceived in the dynamic and changing political arena, wherein the majority of leaders are black.

Thirty-three per cent of whites and 33% of Indians participated in the survey. Whites and Indians are not the biggest populations at the dtic, but responded most favourably to the invitations sent.

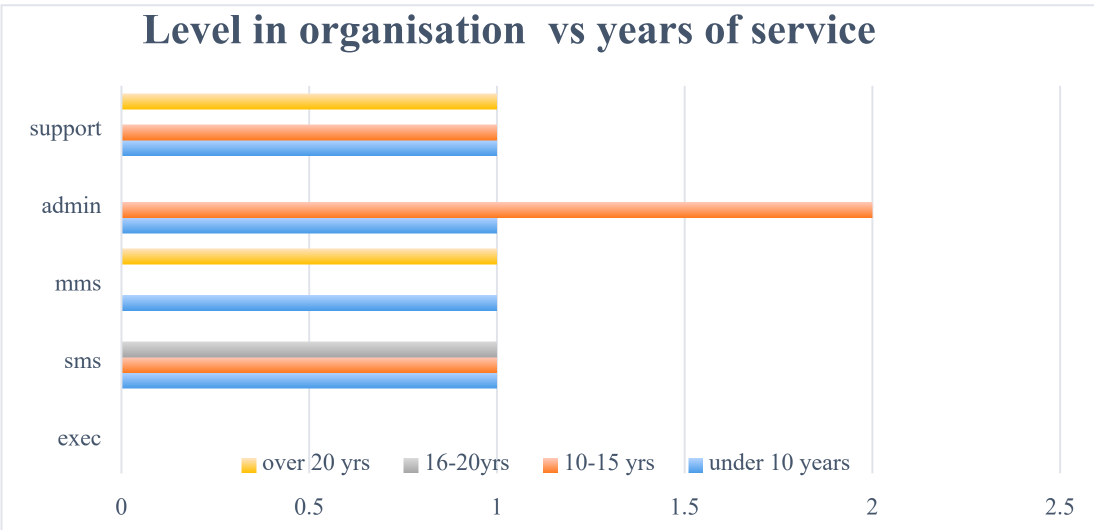

Figure 5: Respondents by level in the organisation

The sample selected was represented by respondents in all categories of length of service.

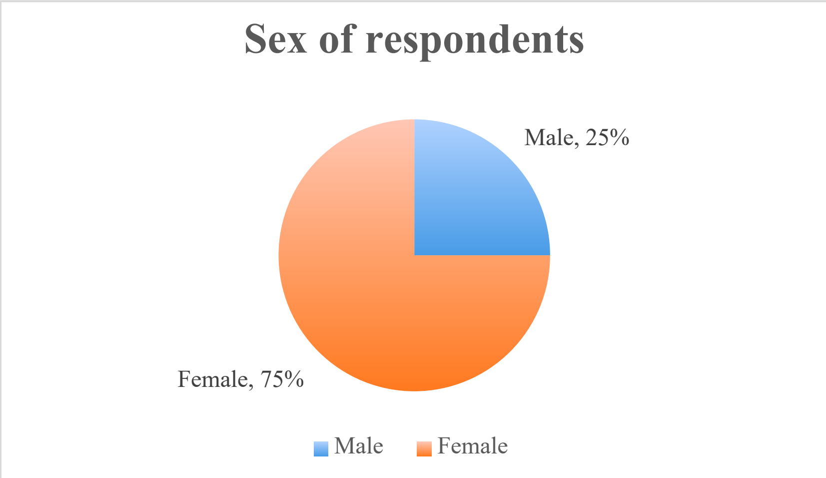

Figure 6: Respondents by sex

The perception of different sexes in terms of how they experience the ethical climate at the department was important to determine the factors that could contribute to the different views.

The majority of the respondents were female. Although 11 requests were sent to male respondents and 15 were sent to female respondents, only three males (25%) responded to the request, as opposed to nine females (75%) who responded.

The research findings are presented based on the responses per each research question below. The responses per question are appended in Appendix G.

4.1. What factors are perceived to encourage unethical behaviour?

Key theme emanating from this research question: Opportunities and contributors to encourage unethical behaviour

4.1.1 Response to research question 1

In answering research question 1, the following findings are presented based on the responses gathered during the interview process.

To the question of what opportunities exist for management and staff to act unethically, respondents were unanimous that there are many. Abuse of power by leadership, procurement irregularities, and collusion by managers with human resources (HR) in the recruitment process were among some of the responses. Respondent VCMS voiced strongly that "senior management and most of leadership feel they are untouchable. Abuse of power exists, people are scared to challenge these people for fear of occupational detriment and loss of job security and that they will be victimised and/or intimidated" and "there is no mechanism to pick up kickbacks".

Similarly, Respondent PIFS said, "Opportunities would exist where there is no common knowledge of what is ethics and how does it apply in the organisation. There are different ethical standards and practices. The problem is that it is not known to all employees."

Respondent AWFP suggested that "lots of work is being given to staff, but they are not getting paid. People may think it's not fair to do all this work and not be paid. Posts are being abolished and staff have to take on extra work and not be paid; this could cause them to act unethically."

4.1.2 Recap of responses to research question 1

The main contributors and opportunities in the department include abuse of power (hence employees fear challenging unethical behaviours), leadership not wanting to walk the talk and set the example, procurement irregularities, collusion in the recruitment processes, the absence of a common understanding of ethics, and staff who are overworked and underpaid may be tempted to act unethically.

4.2. What are the attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour?

Key themes emanating from this research question: Visibility of unethical behaviour, consequences for unethical behaviour

4.2.1 Response to research question 2

Visibility of unethical behaviour

When questioned on whether employees generally act ethically, two respondents stated ‘no’, while the majority were in disagreement and believed there were instances when employees did act unethically and it was known.

Respondent TWFP felt strongly about stealing time from the company, stating: “Not adhering to working hours, one can be unethical if you get to work at 9, have lunch at 1, you know you already late and take three-quarter lunch and leave at 3; they don’t work in the time.” This sentiment was echoed by Respondent VCMS: “During Covid, people are not doing their work; people come late. I came late; I was supposed to be here at 8, but came at 9. Government workers generally tend to not put in their full pound of flesh; I am also guilty of that. Generally, unfortunately in IT, people feel like the dti and government owes them something and they don’t deliver. Not competent, and second they in cruise mode and overstaffed. Twenty per cent of people in IT are unproductive.” Respondent VCMS also stated that 20% of the people employed in his unit could be taking bribes due to their type of work. He said he was offered a bribe, but turned it down.

Respondent TIFA was upset to mention, “I have been asked to act unethically for the audits by management”. Asked if she would act unethically if given the opportunity, she stated, “To get out of situation, it is that you don’t have a choice, to rectify a situation that something we missed; for example, if something needs to be uploaded it required for particular reason, they will upload it even though it is not supposed to have been done now.”

When questioned about recurrences of unethical behaviour (possibly post disciplinary actions taken), Respondent SCFS stated, “Yes, despite the disciplinary process, depends on the level of discipline executed, for example, they behave for six months then they continue the behaviour and the cycle continues, whether the discipline is internalised yes and no."

Respondent SBFA had a different view: "Junior staff, they will not as action is taken, but I doubt actions are taken for senior staff. Junior staff are powerless, but management know how to manoeuvre. Knowing what to do, having power to stand on your leg."

Seven respondents (64%) were of the view that unethical behaviour was highly visible. Respondent VCMS stated, "It's very difficult to address it, as they are good in running around and covering up. So we are using people 30% of their full capacity, thus also a management issue." Where acts were not visible, respondents had heard about them.

Consequences for unethical behaviours/transgressors of the codes

Consequences provided by respondents included dismissal and loss of job opportunities. Respondent SBFA stated, "There are rules and regulations with regard to that. DTI has rules and regulations of how to go about disciplining and what measures to take." Respondent RWFP agreed, "Fair dismissal and even trying to go to the union you will get fired." Respondent AWFP concurred that "you will be penalised and in Govt. they may not fire you, but they can lay you off".

To the question of whether there are visible consequences for managers or staff who are found to have breached the code of conduct or ethics policy, the majority of respondents were of the view that there were visible consequences. Respondent SCFS elaborated, "In terms of disciplinary process that I have instituted it has come out in defence of employer." There were, however, divergent views.

Respondent VCMS agreed that "there are processes, but are too tardy, protracted and not seen through, e.g. an amount should have been recovered, but nothing was done." Respondent SBFA believed that "they will not publicise, never heard of a senior person being disciplined or actions being taken. Sometimes, e.g. reports or petty things, when it's a junior staff who doesn't want to submit verification, etc. vetting stuff with junior staff, it's easier to issue warning or disciplinary, but you will find some management will not submit and no actions are taken.” Respondent PBFA elaborated on this view, saying that “in some instances there is favouritism; depends on who you are and who you know and action will be taken against you; there’s no consistency. Others are favoured.”

The last camp was unsure of consequences or did not know if there were any consequences.

4.2.2 Recap of responses to research question 2

Respondents affirmed that unethical behaviours were visible in the department, for example, coming late to work and not working back the time. Also clear from the responses was the sense of entitlement in government and that people do not work, but sit back and expect to be rewarded. Respondents stated that there were consequences for a breach of the ethics policy and code, however, it was clear that consequence management was applied to junior staff, while senior staff go unpunished.

4.3. Does leadership encourage ethical behaviour?

Key themes emanating from the research question: Actions and behaviours of leadership; trust in leadership; tone at the top (assessment of the HOD/DG); decision-making

4.3.1 Responses to research question 3

Actions and behaviours of leadership

The question of whether respondents believed that the actions of leadership are ethical elicited divergent views. Respondent VCMS believed that there is “blatant abuse of power if they caught out regarding wrongful conduct and influencing other people”. This view was supported by Respondent TWFP, who argued that “rules don’t apply to everybody, not in our organisation though, in dtic everyone are aware of what’s right and what’s wrong; out of the organisation, they know what they are doing is wrong and they are getting away with it.” Respondent PIFS believed that “sometimes there is an element of irrationality‘ one cannot justify or rationalise the decisions and just simple examples in terms of applying one's minds relating to HR or operational management of the organisation, one finds favouritism. One finds nepotism. Favouritism goes beyond considering one person over another, but state resources are being used in ensuring one person is preferred over another, careers with financial benefits or overlooking one ER-related matter." This view was supported by Respondent JIMM, who stated that "nepotism is a key factor", and also evident in the response from Respondent AIMM, who emphasised, "CD [chief director] show favouritism, CDs were not transparent."

Respondent AIMM had a different view of Deputy Directors-General (DDGs). He stated that they "showed good leadership and managerial skills as they sorted out issues, which was factual and transparent".

The other camp suggested that leadership displayed ethical behaviours. For example, Respondent SBFA suggested that "in terms of information, within the dtic with regard to decisions being taken by management, ExBo, its published decisions they took and unions are free to dispute decisions taken". Respondent AWFP supported this view, saying that "they live the values, morals and principles of the dtic and they do what is part of the Batho Pele (dtic's values programme) principles."

Respondents were divided in their views with regard to the question of whether there is trust in leadership. There were three camps with distinct views. Three support staff and one in the administration function were in favour of leadership.

In the second camp, another support staff member (Respondent TWFP) trusted some leaders, but not others, adding, "Yes, I do trust our leadership. There not work with and I keep my distance. I don't feel comfortable around certain people, so I have my red lights, I have the bubble and stay there. There are people higher up who do unethical things." This sentiment was shared by Respondents SBFA and SCFS, who elaborated that "it depends on which camp you are sitting in, e.g. union or bargaining environment appears not a lot of trust from that area on leadership". Other responses were from Respondent AIMM, who said, "60% good, 40% bad".

The third camp believed that leadership could not be trusted. Respondent VCMS believed that "some DDGs are unethical and have no integrity. There is lack of trust with certain individuals and I stood up against them.” Respondent SCFS elaborated on this view, “I think with general manager there is a level of mistrust in leadership whether they are taking the right decisions, making right choices, are they withholding information which the rest of the organisation is not informed of, but for myself, I’m a very trusting person, I will take things at face value and experience a trust relationship with my management. If there is a break in trust, I will discern that.” This view was also apparent in the response from Respondent PIFS, who said, “Leadership does not walk the talk.”

To the question of whether the respondents experienced a lack of trust from leadership, Respondent VCMS stated, “Honesty and integrity doesn’t exist where 1 DDG is involved and they had influenced others in my case.” Respondent PIFS said, “Even though it has not affected me personally, as part of the fabric clearly when one sees these practices it creates lack of trust in leadership.” This view was supported by Respondent PBFA, who had “seen it from a distance”. Respondent AIMM had experienced this lack of trust, stating, “Yes, referring to leaders of our section, in plain sight the correct dti procedure was not followed.”

Tone at the top – assessment of the Head of Department (DG)

To the question of whether the Accounting Officer leads ethically and effectively, the majority of respondents agreed that he does. Respondent VCMS, however, expressed a different view, stating, ”In his subliminal mind he thinks that he does, but when it boils down to certain things then you see a different side of him.” The other respondents did not seem to know or had not come into contact with the DG.

To the question posed as to whether the DG supports the ethics culture, the majority of respondents were not sure or did not know. Respondent PIFS stated, “I don’t know if he supports it, but the ethical culture is not enhanced and it is not apparent.”

To the question of whether the DG has the requisite skills and competencies to manage ethics in the organisation, one respondent believed the DG does not, stating, “No, I don’t know and don’t think so, he’s legally qualified and in his mind wants to do the right thing, but he makes decisions that are bad for the dept and don't follow advice of experts. Implementation is not being adhered to. He's not a best leader." Six of the respondents merely stated "yes", while four were unsure or did not know.

Decision-making by leaders

Respondent PIFS suggested that "there is a lack of consistency in how decisions are made, it's not always transparent in decision-making and in leading the organisation, there are issues of communication, which is very important and it is also a concern as communications from leadership indicate lack of ethical leadership." This view was also apparent in the response from Respondent PFBA, who said, "In some instances, there are inconsistency when they take decisions."

Respondent SCFS suggested that leaders are hesitant to make decisions; "we work in government, there is lots of responsibility and accountability that we have and we need to take ownership of and those levels are accountable and responsible. The requirements are quite harsh and strict in a way. Certain people do not want to make decisions as it may put them in a situation where they must be accountable and answerable." This view was apparent in the response from Respondent PIFS, who stated, "It's not always transparent in decision-making and in leading the organisation."

Respondent SBFA had a different view from the two camps, stating, "50/50 as a junior person who doesn't know what's involved in making decisions, it's a NO, but as I work in the CD's office I know why decisions are made, then it's a yes."

Respondent VCMS thought that the "DG makes decisions that are bad for the department and don't follow advice of experts".

4.3.2 Recap of responses to research question 3

The majority of the respondents stated that the actions and behaviours of leadership are fraught with abuse of power and favouritism in recruitment;

that they do not walk the talk and cannot be trusted; and that decision-making is largely inconsistent, irrational and transparent.

4.4 What mechanisms are there to prevent unethical behaviour?

Key themes emanating from the research question: Key controls and measures; processes have ethics embedded therein and ethics is entrenched in practice; visible solutions for ethical dilemmas

4.4.1 Responses to research question 4

Key controls and measures

There are three camps of differing viewpoints. In the first camp there seemed to be consensus that there are NO controls. Respondent VCMS believed that "there is no mechanism to pick up kickbacks". Respondent AIMM stated that "a client can phone any employee offering a bribe – now only legal services are allowed any inspections, also not 1 person goes for inspection, always 2 or 3. Another – gifts are recorded in gifts register." This sentiment was echoed by Respondent SBFA, who stated, "None, nowadays you even get surveys they are doing, people don't trust if it is not anonymous. At the moment they do surveys, but not about ethics."

In the second camp, respondents believed that mechanisms ARE in place to prevent unethical behaviour. Respondent SCFS stated, "Structures and controls in place – we have good controls in place that guide us in ethical behaviour, guidelines, policies include the necessary principles structures, controls, that guide ethical behaviour, e.g. supply chain function – we know what rules are and policies are, which keep us on an ethical path. There are functional units like IA, which audits performance, functions, financial delegations and other processes as well, which requires us as Govt. officials to disclose matters as well, even to the level of every submission I produced; we have a section that talks to some kind of disclosure of not being advantaged in a certain way by approving or recommending submissions. dtic have done well in putting these structures in place as it derived this path, there is lots of checks and committees in place, e.g. 1 committee and another committee, etc., which is involved. There is also audits, RM. Also declarations, whether on procurement or financial declarations."

Respondent PIFS stated, "Controls in place currently are the gifts and sponsorship register." Respondent TIFA agreed, saying there are "training courses on induction, also open office policy where client was trying to sweet talk me into approval, offering gifts, because of open-door policy it was easy to get advice from managers. Also, our managers bring to our attention that if one is not comfortable we can refer it to them." This view was apparent in the response from Respondent TWFP, who stated, "For me its newsflashes, workshops, very very good was the ethics training via the school of governance online training."

When asked if these mechanisms work, Respondent VCMS stated, "The process is too long to get to conclusion and wrapping up of investigation. Mechanisms are protracted and takes too long. HR should have picked it up and there must be action on HR people who should have verified the salary, but did not do their job."

Respondent PIFS stated, "Declarations and gift policy, which is voluntary declaration, one could omit to declare them." Respondent AIMM suggested, "There's still opportunities for people to accept a bribe we will not know that 20% could be accept the bribes."

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the following mechanisms in the department, and below are their responses:

Code of Ethics: The majority of respondents responded in the affirmative.

Ethics Committee (EC): Responses are divided into those who think one exists and those who are not aware. When asked if the members of the EC are competent, the majority of respondents did not know who the EC members were. Of the two respondents who did know (or thought they knew), Respondent VCMS stated, "CFO is the acting head of ethics and he is competent and capable. The COO as the Chair is not as she is also unethical; DDG 1 is ethical when it suits her, she's sometimes not competent. She is striving to be good person, she covers her back when she does something wrong." Respondent PBFA stated, "No, wouldn't know for now.

Previous – competent they were. Capable they were not hence committee was dissolved."

Whistleblowing policy: The majority of respondents were aware that the department had a whistleblowing policy.

Protection of whistleblowers: Even though the majority of the respondents stated that there was protection for whistleblowers, there did not seem to be assurance of such protection, as was evidenced by the responses. Respondent SCFS stated, "I have not been aware of any kind of scenario where the whistleblower has not been protected; general feeling is that when you are stepping out and taking an action of reporting something it is difficult as there is a lot of talk. I don't think the dtic has a very good approach to keeping confidential things, confidential whether it's on an individual level or on a broader level, there seems to be a lot of leaked info around – this one said this, that one said that, that kind of culture can also be applied to there will be a lot of corridor talk, that's why people's judgements come as well via the corridor talk, it may be negative to a person's promotion opportunities." While in agreement, Respondent TWFP also stated, "Somehow it does always come out I don't know how, but there's few instances they were always not protected." This view was apparent in the response from Respondent SBFA, who elaborated that "at the dtic haven't looked into the whistleblowers and haven't come across it, but in news they say there's no protection, don't know about the dtic – should be more awareness of the impact people think they are not protected." Respondent AIMM was sceptical about the protection and said, "I'm unsure although they say there is protection, but if you record something what if you need to testify in recording behind closed doors, if this person wants to see who you, then what happens."

Ethics education, awareness and training and the quality thereof

The majority of the respondents stated that they were aware of ethics education in the department. The majority were also satisfied that the training was satisfactory to good, however, Respondent AIMM thought that "every year, it’s the same thing – do something differently if you attend the 1 course it’s the same 60% good”.

Processes have ethics embedded therein and ethics is entrenched in practice

There seems to be consensus around the existence of processes, however, these do not seem to be entrenched in the practice, as was stated by most of the respondents. Respondent SCFS said, “It’s there, but an individual must decide whether they want to abide by it or not – coming as an employee, to the workplace and doing 2 hours of work and going for 2 hours lunch yes, in terms of disciplinary process that I have instituted has come out in defence of employer.” This was supported by Respondent SBFA, who was of the view that it “depends where you are at the dti, people will complain I’ve been doing this and others get 1st preference. Other divisions and units experience sometimes you won’t know if its favouritism or lodging grievance as they are being forced to work, there’s 2 sides to every story, people scream because they don’t want to work.” This was echoed by Respondent AIMM, who stated, “Collude with HR to fill an advertised post. CD and HR can manipulate the recruitment process, they just follow what is recommended by the CD.”

Visible solutions to ethical problems/dilemmas

The majority of respondents believed that there were solutions, with Respondent TWFP stating, “Yes, I think there are – when people come late, etc. these things are not unethical, its unintentionally, not everybody thinks the same way as us – to make up the time. Consequences is if your manager sees you coming late and talks to the staff, using the printer who is making copies of private stuff, there are repercussions where you can be traced and tracked, is it work number or private numbers on work cellphones.” Respondent VCMS, however, stated, “Solutions are there but implementation is a problem.”

4.4.2 Recap of responses to research question 4

The sentiment is that solutions for ethical dilemmas were available, but not effectively implemented. Processes were in place, but employees chose not to adhere to these processes, resulting in unethical behaviour. The majority of respondents were aware of the department’s mechanisms such as ethics education, whistleblowers policy and protection for whistleblowers. Many respondents, however, believed that even though the mechanisms were there, there were incidents where the whistleblower was exposed as there was a lot of talk in the department and no anonymity.

4.5 The culture of the department

In order to determine what employees felt about the culture of the department, and their attitudes towards it, they were asked what they thought the culture was, whether management’s actions affected the culture, and whether they identified with their department’s goals.

4.5.1 Determination of the culture of the department

Where respondents believed that the culture in the department was unethical, and in response to the question of what is the biggest contributor to this culture, Respondent PIFS stated, “We have not taken a stand in the organisation, on our ethical culture, contributor does rest with leadership in an organisation – leadership does not walk the talk”, and “another contributor is not having the will and the ability to drive the culture forward in a particular direction. Perhaps being absent in the process, it is not seen as a priority.” Respondent JIMM supported this view that “on paper the culture is ethical”. Respondent VCMS referred to the greater government, stating: “What happens to leaders when found to be in the wrong? Nothing! e.g. Zuma, culture is that people are getting away with murder, this allows people to take chances. There’s deliberate unethical behaviour and what’s happening in govt.” This sentiment was supported by Respondent TWFP, who said, “I work for this money and some *** up there (in higher level of Govt.) stole money, resulting in our increases and bonuses being taken away and we work very hard. I work for my bonus, but the person on top who earns much more than my salary has stolen money."

In support of all other respondents, Respondent AIMM stated that the "environment is unethical – certain people want to show their power, favouritism, they want to improve wellness of their friends first – in our division, plays a pivotal role and u can physically see that there is nothing junior staff can do about it."

Do actions of management and staff impact on the culture of the department?

All respondents unanimously agreed that it did and offered reasons. Respondent VCMS said, "We've tried to adopt Rea Aga, SBFE* who is leader of this and what she does is contrary to Rea Aga. People are fearful of her, it's her way or no way, she vilified people as well. It does affect the culture, badly so, ruling by authoritative leader and thinking that's the correct way, impacts on everyone in the Department." The view was shared by Respondent SCFMS, who stated, "I think if one as management is walking ethically and demonstrating the principles and philosophies it does influence the rest of the team members it does affect their areas of functional work and areas, it does have a ripple effect. If you, as management, are unethical you give people tacit permission to act unethically as well." This view was also evident in the response from Respondent PIFS, who emphasised, "I think if one as management is walking ethically and demonstrating the principles and philosophies it does influence the rest of the team members it does affect their areas of functional work and areas, it does have a ripple effect. if you, as management, are unethical you give people tacit permission to act unethically as well." In support was Respondent JIMM, with the view that "insubordinates tend to rely on leadership and so forth and it does influence them what the leaders do". Respondent AIMM coined his view as "where management acts unethically, it demoralises the staff, the whole morale are down, people are asking how management could do this, you can see what they have done. Some members don't want to work anymore they just come in, do the work and go home." Respondent PBFA felt strongly about this relationship, “If the manager is acting unethically, we will also follow that. If leader leads in e.g. let’s say if the manager doesn’t care about the work we are doing, we also will not perform, then we won’t behave ethically because remember doing your job in an ethical way, if nobody cares then we will not care. Culture will be inconsistent.”

Do staff identify with the department’s goals?

All respondents confirmed that they did know what the department’s goals were and that they identified with them. In response to the question of whether they would go the extra mile for the department, all but one respondent said “yes”.

4.5.2 Recap of respondents views on the culture of the department

The majority of the respondents stated that the culture was unethical, elaborating that on paper it was ethical, but that the actions of the leaders indicated otherwise. All respondents agreed that the actions of management had a direct impact on the culture.

4.6 Summary and conclusion

The main objective of this study was to establish the perceptions of employees of the dtic with regard to ethics in the department and whether ethics had an impact on the culture of the department.

Thematic analysis was used to establish patterns from the data collected from respondents via interview schedules. Key themes emanated from the study: Opportunities in the department for management and staff to be unethical; trust levels in the organisation, with general leadership and the Head of Department; to what extent respondents themselves act unethically; visible consequences for transgressors of the ethics code and policy; the biggest contributor to the ethical/unethical culture in the department; if employees do their jobs ethically; recurrences of unethical behaviour; visible solutions for unethical problems; ethical actions and behaviours displayed by leadership; ethical and effective leadership; support and promotion by the Accounting Officer of the ethical culture; mechanisms in place to prevent unethical behaviour; existence of Ethics Committee and competence of members; existence and effectiveness of the whistleblowing policy and protection of whistleblowers; and ethics education, training and awareness in the department.

The study established that even though processes, mechanisms and support were evident, the effectiveness of these mechanisms did not enhance the ethical culture of the organisation. In addition, there were many opportunities in the organisation for management and staff to act unethically, with consequences for breaches of the ethics codes and policy being applied mainly to junior staff. Employees' own personal morals, values and dignity would prevent them from acting unethically if given the opportunity to do so. There was a concern that junior employees were pressured by management to perform unethical activities.

The results also indicated that there was an imperative to ensure that all employees had the requisite knowledge to understand what constitutes unethical behaviour and what mechanisms were in place to prevent such behaviour, as well as consistency in decision-making and leadership.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents an interpretation and analysis of the research findings that were presented in Chapter 4. The analysis will be done by comparing the findings with the literature review on the impact of ethics on the culture of an organisation. Similarities and differences as well as any new information or insights that might contribute to the body of literature on this topic shall be identified and discussed. The key theoretical concepts, trends, models and frameworks identified in Chapter 2 as part of the literature review will be compared with the actual findings of this research (from the evidence gathered from the interviews). The chapter will then give a summary of the analysis.

The objective of the research study was to determine the opportunities and contributors for unethical behaviour; the attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour; whether leadership encourages ethical behaviour; and the mechanisms to prevent unethical behaviour.

5.2 Analysis

A discussion of each research question will be presented in the section below.

5.2.1 Opportunities and contributors for unethical behaviour

Gildenhuys (2004) stated that senior government officials, such as Ministers and Directors-General, shift responsibility to junior staff when things go wrong. They get away with it and continue to act unethically. This fact has emerged in many responses, with respondents citing abuse of power that creates fear – of occupational detriment and loss of job security, victimisation and/or intimidation – resulting in employees being scared to challenge these senior officials. It seems that senior management in the department believes itself to be untouchable. Gildenhuys (2004) stated that political power attracts corruption.

Procurement and tender irregularities emerged from the study. This is in line with reporting by Sweden's Council of Basic Values (n.d.), which stated that officials in the procurement function are vulnerable since contracts for government work are attractive. Lawton et al. (2013) supported that there are many challenges to procurement decisions, while Gildenhuys (2014) stated that government sometimes puts out tenders not for services or items required, but to negotiate deals with suppliers for personal benefit. Employees who currently feel dissatisfied due to work pressures and doing more than what they are remunerated for could act unethically. Beeri et al. (2013, p. 64) stated that quality of work life is divided into eight categories, with category one being "fair and adequate compensation". Other factors emerging from the study that provide opportunities for unethical behaviour include not adhering to working hours, where civil servants arrive at work late, still take the required amount of time for lunch and then leave early, and do not work back in the time. This is supported by Oyadare (1998), who found that civil servants were not prompt in coming to the office. Unethical behaviour starts with insignificant unethical acts, from stealing at the workplace, be it a pen, and coming late to work (stealing time from your employer) to using the photocopy machine to copy personal information. If left unaddressed, unethical acts will seem attractive and become bigger and bolder, eventually involving large amounts of money (Scott & Steinberg, 2009).

Leaders in the department do not walk the talk. This does not encourage employees to do the right thing when they observe leaders not practising what they preach. Trevino and Weaver (2003) found that there is a direct and strong relationship between ethical leaders who walk the talk and encourage ethical conduct. Leaders can lead by example and be role models for employees, demonstrating and modelling the organisation on personal values, attitudes and behaviour (Bandura, 1977).

The observation is that abuse of power by senior management, mainly leadership, is prevalent in the public sector and experienced by employees of the department.

5.2.2 Attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour

The study reports that at least 20% of employees in the department could be accepting bribes as two employees involved in the function of paying incentives to applicants were offered bribes. These were the only two employees selected from this business unit to participate in the study. Extrapolated, the offers of bribes could be made to all employees in that function. Bribes are given to government officials mainly in the form of gifts. The definition of gifts is blurred and so gives rise to bribery. In addition, officials accept small gifts in the performance of their duties, which could constitute bribery. The intention to influence the public official must be questioned or proved at the time of presentation of the gift as it may only become evident later. This sentiment is supported by Sebola (2018), Sweden's Council of Basic Values (n.d.), Lawton et al. (2013), Beeri et al. (2013), Gildenhuys (2004), Rossouw (2016), and Hellsten and Larbi (2006).

The study showed that when people have the opportunity to act unethically, they would not do so due to reasons of self-discipline, spirituality, self-pride, personal value system, protection of jobs and reputation. This is, however, in contrast to Soman (2018) and McVenn (1919), who stated that if people were given an opportunity to be unethical, in the majority of the cases, they would be unethical if they were to gain something at the expense of someone else. Also, respondents were all aware of the consequences of unethical behaviour and that holding a job to support their family was key to not acting unethically. Boone (2017) discussed the importance of ethics in life, society and religious practices, and hence the requirement of ethical behaviour. This is in line with what the study revealed. Respondents observed that there were recurrences of unethical behaviour from employees who wait out the period of the sanction. They test the system, as senior management is not disciplined for their own unethical behaviour.

5.3 Does leadership encourage ethical behaviour?

The actions and behaviour of leaders in the public sector was tantamount to blatant abuse of power. It was reported that rules do not apply to everyone, due to favouritism and nepotism.

Some DDGs are unethical and have no integrity. There was a lack of trust with certain individuals. Kalshoven et al. (2012) found that there was a positive relationship between ethical leadership and commitment, trust, effectiveness of the leader and job satisfaction. The study also revealed that leaders who were consistent in their behaviour, guided ethical behaviour and clarified work responsibilities were perceived to be more effective, therefore if leadership behaved ethically, employees would be committed to “going the extra mile”.

There was no trust in leadership as there were unethical and abusive actions and employees experienced these behaviours. Gildenhuys (2004) stated that political power attracts corruption. Media reports, supported by the history of politics not only in South Africa but worldwide, revealed that many politicians have no principles, are opportunistic and power-hungry. They have been found to lie and have no integrity. The cleaning up must start with public servants as they set an example, and when they are corrupt the entire society will tend to be corrupt. Gildenhuys (2004) demonstrated the spillover effects of unethical leaders in public service.

There was a level of mistrust of leadership as honesty and integrity was minimal. Managers blatantly disregarded processes. The study by Kalshoven et al. (2012) revealed that leaders who were consistent in their behaviour, guided ethical behaviour and clarified work responsibilities were perceived to be more effective.

The Head of Department (DG) seems to be leading ethically and effectively, and supports the ethical environment, however, this support is not apparent as the study shows that the ethical environment has not been enhanced. The study shows that even though the DG has the requisite skills and competencies, he does not make decisions for the good of the department. King IV (2016) outlined the following three key principles for the management of an ethical organisation: Principle 1 requires ethical and effective leading by the Accounting Officer; principle 2 requires the Accounting Officer to support the ethical culture; and principle 7 requires the Accounting Officer to possess the requisite skills and competencies.

The study revealed that there is inconsistency in decision-making, lack of transparency, and irrationality around some of the decisions made by the leadership, which hence is not dealing effectively with ethical dilemmas. Ethical decision-making means effectively dealing with ethical dilemmas and in keeping with a high ethical standard (Beeri et al., 2012). This is supported by Gini (1997), who stated that all decisions have inherent value, and that leadership is obligated to lead with morals. Hence, making declarations does not change the ethical culture; what is required is to model that behaviour to inspire employees to act ethically. That is what ethical leadership entails.

5.4 Mechanisms and controls in place to identify and address unethical behaviour

The success of the ethics programme and effort depends on the "structures" in place (which includes the Ethics Committee, codes of conduct, ethics education, whistle-blowing procedures and ethics audits) that lay the foundation for ethics development, management and monitoring. Commitment will be achieved when an organisation provides protection for whistleblowers (Wood & Rimmer, 2003).

Generally, respondents were satisfied that there were mechanisms in place to prevent unethical behaviour, however, these mechanisms were considered weak, tardy and long, with some being voluntary (disclosures) and therefore not conclusively effective. A concern was raised that no surveys were conducted, but surveys that were not done anonymously would not be successful. Some mechanisms cited were declarations and gifts register, however, these mechanisms are voluntary and officials may omit to disclose, hence the controls are not effective and insufficient to mitigate the ethics risk.

Although the majority of respondents were aware of the existence of an Ethics Committee, they did not know the members who comprised the committee, and had no knowledge of their capabilities, competencies and mandate. The committee is therefore not an effective mechanism to aid the ethics culture in the department. For the respondents who did know about the ethics committee, it was alarming to note that the very members of the ethics committee displayed unethical behaviours. King IV (2016) recommended a social and ethics committee that carries a greater responsibility than a compliance function, and a higher standard for the committee with the majority of members being non-executive to ensure independent judgement. Members must be competent and act with due care and skill.

The majority of respondents were aware of the department's whistleblowing policy. The importance of awareness of the whistle-blowing line is to enable employees to report unethical behaviour in a safe and anonymous manner. This will encourage reporting of incidents, which, if investigated, will minimise the occurrence of unethical behaviour.

Although six of the 10 respondents believed there was protection of whistleblowers, three of these six respondents believed that information was not kept confidential at the department and was leaked, hence confidentiality is lost and could prevent one from being exposed to promotion opportunities.

If employees perceive there to be no confidentiality around whistleblowing, they would not report unethical behaviour, which would not be conducive to a healthy ethical environment and culture.

The annual report of the Department of Trade and Industry (2018) stated that, in respect of ethics, an ethics committee was in place and meetings were held quarterly; awareness and training around ethics was conducted for all levels of the department; public service corporate governance prescripts were adopted; frameworks for compulsory training were rolled out; and the department ensured no conflict of interest as all managers and officials disclosed their financial interests as per the DPSA requirement.

The majority of rrespondents were aware of training offered for ethics, with some respondents having attended this training many years ago, while others had heard about the ethics training, which is contradictory to what has been reported in the annual report of the dtic.

A recommendation was made to change the training content as it is a regurgitation of the same material every year. Lack of training and awareness of ethics will result in an increase in unethical behaviour and employees not having a consistent understanding of what constitutes unethical behaviour. The ethical environment and culture will not be fostered.

5.5 The culture of the department

The majority of the respondents stated that the culture was unethical; that on paper it was ethical, but the actions of leaders indicated otherwise. All respondents agreed that the actions of management have a direct impact on the culture. The standards and behaviours of leaders have the greatest impact on employee behaviour and the culture of an organisation, and hence leaders must be role models for ethical behaviour (Beeri et al., 2012). Respondents were unhappy that the greater government was creating a bad culture for the whole of the public service, citing the actions of former President Jacob Zuma, who has acted unethically yet faces no consequences.

5.6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter offered a discussion of the empirical findings presented in chapter 4, by providing an overview of the study's main findings.

The study has revealed that there are several opportunities and contributors to unethical behaviour. In addition, it has revealed that the attitudes and behaviours of leaders and employees depict much of what is visible in the organisation, i.e. if unethical behaviour is accepted in the organisation, then people will behave and act unethically. Leadership was found to be acting unethically, and there is a level of mistrust and blatant disregard for processes. Although mechanisms, controls and measures are in place, these are not applied consistently, and ethics is not entrenched in the operations of the department.

6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

6.1.1 Research problem statement

The pledge year after year by the President of a state free of corruption, patronage and theft of public money seems to be just talk, as high levels of corruption and lack of consequences – viz. charges, monies recovered and being fired from public service – are the order of the day. Reported cases stem from former President Jacob Zuma and other parliamentarians, who were found guilty of acts of corruption and other unethical behaviours, but remained in the employ of the government.

6.1.2 Purpose statement

The purpose of this research was to determine the factors that shape the ethical culture of the dtic, by asking a range of players within the department about their perceptions of various aspects of ethical behaviour and the institutional framework in which this takes place.

6.1.3 Research questions

Research Question 1: What factors encouraged unethical behaviour

Research Question 2: What were the attitudes and behaviours of management around unethical behaviour?

Research Question 3: Does leadership encourage ethical behaviour?

Research Question 4: What mechanisms and measures are in place to identify and address unethical behaviours?

6.1.4 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework used was of Svenson and Wood (2007) and provided both an external and internal methodology for ethics, encompassing the entire organisation, the structures to manage ethics, relevant processes, and the performance of the organisation in line with ethics policies and ethos. It incorporated structure, process and performance components.

6.1.5 Research strategy, design, procedure and method

The cross-sectional research design was used with the intent of generalising from a sample to a population. The study was at a point in time. The research data and information-collection instrument used was the interview schedule. A semi-structured data-collection method was used.

The interview questions were sourced from the frameworks of King IV (2016) and Svenson and Wood (2007) in a semi-structured data-collection method. The sampling type used was convenience/opportunity due to the diversity of sampling selected.

6.1.6 Empirical research results

The following are the findings of the empirical research results.

Research question 1: Factors that encourage unethical behaviour
The following factors were found to encourage unethical behaviour:
(1) Abuse of power by leaders, resulting in employees fearful of challenging the actions of senior management when these actions were found to be unethical; (2) collusion on recruitment processes, resulting in favouritism and nepotism; (3) absence of common understanding of ethics; and
(4) leadership neither walks the talk nor has the ability to drive an ethical culture forward.

Research question 2: Attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour
The following attitudes and behaviours around unethical behaviour were identified: (1) There seems to be a sense of entitlement with civil servants who do not execute their work; (2) there is a possibility that employees are accepting bribes due to the nature of work of the department; (3) there is a lack of discipline with regards to working hours as employees come late, take lunch and still leave early; (4) mangers instruct junior employees to perform unethical tasks; (5) junior staff is subject to disciplinary actions, but senior

management is immune to this process and cover up wrongdoings; and (6) employees are aware of the consequences should they act unethically (this is a positive and a deterrent).

Research question 3: Does leadership encourage ethical behaviour?
The following findings were made: (1) Some senior managers display blatant abuse of power; (2) favouritism; (3) nepotism; (4) there is a level of mistrust in leadership; (5) leaders do not walk the talk; (6) employees see and hear about the unethical behaviours of certain leaders; and (7) regarding the tone at the top, even though employees believe the DG supports the ethical culture, this is neither apparent nor enhances the culture.

Research question 4: What mechanisms are in place to prevent unethical behaviour?
The following findings were made: (1) Gifts register and declarations are in place, however, these are voluntary; (2) internal audit, risk management, supply chain management policies and processes, whistleblowers policy, ethics awareness and ethics committee are in place; (3) there are concerns that there is no protection for whistleblowers as information is not kept confidential; (4)]ethics is embedded in the processes of the department, but not entrenched in practice as the breaches are blatant; and (5) there are solutions for ethical dilemmas, but implementation is problematic.

6.1.7 Empirical research results conclusion

The results of the empirical research conclude that ethics has a significant impact on the organisational culture of a government department, not only in South Africa, but also worldwide.

6.2 Conclusions

6.2.1 Research knowledge gap

The study was confined to one government department only, with a limited number of respondents. Only a qualitative study was conducted. A study encompassing various tools could be used to study the different aspects of the study. The study was done at a point in time, hence the impacts of any interventions will not be determined. One could conduct a longitudinal study over a period of time to test the efficacy of interventions and assess the effectiveness thereof. The extent of the problem could not be determined with a small sample. Perhaps another study could be conducted on a similar topic, covering as many participants as possible and extending the scope to other organisations in order to gain a broader picture of how ethics impacts on organisational culture. The researcher further suggests that quantitative methodology be employed to determine if the same results can be achieved.

6.2.2 Contribution of the research to the knowledge gap

The researcher determined the relationship between the factors contributing to ethics and the culture of the organisation.

6.2.3 Comparison of the results to other similar studies

A study by Oyadare (1998) found similar issues, whereby civil servants were not prompt in coming to the office, and there was a breach of respect for office rules, diligence and attentiveness. Even though civil servants were expected to be free of unethical behaviours and attitudes, the study revealed a complete breach thereof.

6.3 Limitations

Several research limitations were experienced during the research process. Time was a critical limitation as the researcher only received the ethics clearance from WITS on 3 March 2021, and could only then proceed with data collection. This seriously hampered the researcher’s progress to completion.

The department was busy with financial year end, making it difficult to obtain more or suitable respondents. Due to the short notice given to potential respondents, only 11 respondents participated in the study out of the 26 requests sent. Civil servants are always sceptical about providing information as confidentiality cannot be guaranteed as it is for the protection of whistleblowers, and people do not want to volunteer information they think could come back to “haunt” them. Twelve interviews were held, but in the process of respondents having to verify the information transcribed, one respondent went on study leave. The researcher did not receive this respondent’s final responses and was therefore not able to include them in the study. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the dtic’s remote working policy, face-to-face interviews were not possible, however, all meetings were held on the MS Teams platform.

6.4 Recommendations

6.4.1 Ethics education

Develop an ethics communication strategy and roll it out to the whole department. Commence with basic ethics training, making it mandatory for every employee of government, commencing with the dtic. Implement a standard consequence management policy, signed off by the HOD or Minister, and enforce the policy. Hold workshops and focus groups to tap into the perceptions of employees regarding their interpretation of ethics and values, then standardise and train around a common ethics language, as education is more than just a newsflash; it is face-to-face engagement. Hold regular (at least quarterly) workshops or discussion fora as it must be ongoing, not a once-off process.

Foster a culture of zero tolerance for unethical behaviour

The Head of Ethics/Ethics Officer must conduct roadshows (on digital platforms during COVID-19) to ensure visibility of the Ethics Officer and the Ethics Office. Advise employees to approach the ethics office with any and all observations of unethical behaviours and actions for investigation and report back. Every reported case/complaint must be investigated and feedback must be given to the reporter/complainant within an acceptable timeframe. Where resources or competencies are not available in-house, the Public Protector or Public Service Commission must be used for this purpose. Consider obtaining an outsourced partner to manage the anonymous ethics hotline (preferably a private, reputable company); this would depend on available finances.

Offer non-financial incentives

With the bloated wage bill and continued abolishment of posts, additional work will continue to be loaded onto employees. The department should determine non-financial incentives to motivate employees. Giving staff time off from work was determined to be acceptable so employees could have “free” time to spend with family and friends, etc.

Lifestyle audits

Lifestyle audits on employees and their spouses would uncover any unethical practices.

Ethics test during recruitment process

As part of the selection criteria, candidates must undergo an ethics test to determine ethical fit with the department. For existing employees, an annual ethics test should be administered and followed through to ensure that all employees are at a satisfactory level.

6.4.2 Policy implication

The study has practical implications in enabling an ethical environment for people and policies to thrive. Unfortunately, government officials who are setting bad examples create a problem for ethical behaviour in the rest of public service. More reporting of unethical behaviour, and seeing it through to finalisation or action being taken, will improve the culture of the organisation.

6.4.3 Proposed future research

Future research may be conducted on the many normative ethical theories. The Encyclopaedia Britannica (2020) defines normative ethics as a moral philosophy defining the criteria of what is morally right and wrong, i.e. determining how basic moral standards are arrived at and justified. Some of the notable normative ethical theories that can be researched include utilitarianism, religion or divine command theory, natural law and moral relativism.

Of interest and voiced strongly by one of the respondents is the religious and spiritual values that drive ethical behaviour and actions. Parboteeah et al. (2008) refer to the knowledge dimension of religion, which is manifested through personal or private religious beliefs that reflect (Cornwall et al., 1986) the existence of and belief in the importance of God (Weaver & Agle, 2002).

Studies have shown that prime factors to religiosity are the religious beliefs of people (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2004). People's religious beliefs are the result of religions that incorporate teachings about ethical, acceptable and appropriate behaviours and actions (Tittle & Welch, 1983; Weaver & Agle, 2002). For example, the Bhagavad Gita advocates a consciousness and soul-centred approach to ethics, and provides guidelines on what is considered unethical. The Ten Commandments contain moral tenets that provide similar moral guidance. Buddhism teaches that ethical life is based on humans coexisting with nature and showing compassion (Dalai Lama, 1974)

Religious beliefs do not support any unethical behaviours and the justification thereof. Steadfast values in religion indicate that people have a basis for a moral life built on their religious beliefs (Vitell & Paolillo, 2003). Conroy and Emerson (2004) argue that believers in God are less likely to act unethically because of the fear of being caught by an omniscient God and being punished.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A-Data Collection Instrument

Interview Schedule

Level in organization:
Length of service at **the dtic:**
Sex:
Race/ethnicity:
Name*
Your name will remain anonymous and a pseudonym will be used in the report.

1. Do you believe that the actions of leadership are ethical?
1.1. Why do you think that?
1.2. What actions or behaviours do they display?
2. What opportunities are there in the department for management and staff to be unethical?
2.1. Is there trust in leadership?
2.2. Why?
2.3. Have you experienced this lack of trust?
3. Have you yourself acted unethically? / If given the opportunity would you act unethically?
3.1. Why?
3.2. What was the consequence? / What do you expect the consequence to be?
4. What mechanisms are in place to prevent unethical behaviour?
4.1. Do these mechanisms work?
4.2. Why do you state so?
5. Please respond yes or No. Provide comments where you wish to

5.1	**In the department…**	**Yes**	**No**	**Comments**
5.2	Code of Ethics			
5.3	Ethics Committee			
5.3.1.	Is the ethics committee composed of competent and capable members?			
5.4	Are decisions made ethically?			
5.5	Is ethics embedded in the policy and procedures?			
5.6	Do employees act ethically?			
5.6.1	Is this behaviour visible?			
5.7	Do you identify with your Department's goals and values?			
5.7.1	Are you committed to these goals?			
5.7.2	Will you voluntarily go the extra mile			

	for the department?			
5.8	Is there a policy on whistleblowers?			
5.8.1	Is there protection for whistleblowers?			
5.9	Is there ethics education, training and awareness in the department?			
5.9.1	What is the quality of such?			
5.10	Are good ethical practices embedded in the day-to-day operations of the department (do people do their job ethically)?			
5.11	Where management or staff are found to have breached the code of conduct or ethics policy, is there visible consequences for the transgressor?			
5.12	When there are ethical problems, are there visible solutions?			
5.13	Do you find recurrences of the behaviour?			
5.14	Does the Accounting Officer lead ethically and effectively?			
5.15	Does the Accounting Officer support the ethical culture?			
5.16	Does the Accounting Officer have the required skills and competencies to manage ethics in the organisation?			

6. Do the behaviours of management and staff impact on the culture of the organisation?

6.1. How?

7. What is the biggest contributor to the ethical/unethical culture in the department_

8. What measures do you believe need to be put in place to prevent unethical behaviour?

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX B

Bio of the researcher

The researcher is Ms Gonasagrie Munsami Perumal. She is the Chief Risk Officer and Ethics Officer of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition. She reports into the Director-General of the department. Her mandate includes risk management, business continuity management, ethics, fraud prevention, regulatory compliance and corporate secretariat.

Her mandate for risk management is to facilitate the risk identification, assessment and mitigation processes at the department. She is responsible for the identification of key risks that could prevent the achievement of strategic outcomes at the strategic/executive level, and that adequate interventions are in place to mitigate or manage these risks. She is also responsible to ensure that the department has adequate business continuity management processes in place and that they are effective.

Her mandate regarding ethics is to ensure that there is an ethical culture in the department and that all employees are educated in ethics.

Prior to her employment at the dtic, Ms Perumal was the head of ethics for Absa Retail Collections. In that role, she was the risk manager and compliance officer. Prior to that, she was the Head of Risk at Zurich Insurance SA, where she started up the risk function and ensured that it was sustainable, after appointing resources, setting the strategy and implementing risk management processes.

Ms Perumal worked at Nedback for the major part of her career, first in Internal Audit and then chosen as one of the top 10 auditors to roll out the risk management initiative in the Bank when risk management was in its infancy in the country and fairly new worldwide.

Ms Perumal has a BCom (specialising in Internal Audit) and BCom Honours (specialising in Business Management) from the University of South Africa.

Her competencies are varied and acquired over the span of her career, in different industries (retail, banking, insurance and now public service). Her strengths are out-of-the-box, innovative and creative thinking, good strategic planning processes, challenging the status quo, and selling ideas and winning over executives with the benefits of risk management, ethics and good corporate governance.

The employer, the dtic, has funded Ms Perumal’s studies with a study bursary. The topic was chosen as she is the Ethics Officer, and with her studies she will be able to improve the ethics environment of the department (without compromising the confidentiality of the participants).

APPENDIX C

Participant Information Sheet

Wits Business School

Participant Information Sheet

Good day

My name is Salomy Perumal and I am a Master's in Business Administration student, at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating Ethics in the department. The aim of this research project is to find out what contributing factors there are in the department that may lead to unethical behavior and may impact the culture of the department.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve a meeting with me and you and it will take around 30 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you (optional). If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrec-medical.researchoffice@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Salomy Perumal
Ms
Nov 20 2020

Researcher:	Supervisor:
Salomy Perumal	Daniel Mokholane
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APPENDIX D

Consent Form

The impact of ethics on the organisational culture of a government department in South Africa

Salomy Perumal

I, ________________________________, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes	YES	NO

…………………………………… (signature)
…………………………………… (name of participant)
…………………………………… (date)

…………………………………… (signature)
Salomy Perumal…………………...(name of person seeking consent)

APPENDIX E

ETHICS CERTIFICATE

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BA2327414/418
This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

Project title	The impact of ethics on organisational culture at the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC)
Investigator / Researcher	Ms Gonasagrie Munsami Perumal
Nature of Project	MBA (Research Article)
Decision of the Committee	Approved unconditionally
Issue Date of Certificate	2021-03-03
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project report
Chairperson	Prof Anthony Stacey +27 11 717 3587 +27 82 880 4531 anthony.stacey@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Salomy Perumal
Ms
Mar 3 2021

Signature   Date:

APPENDIX F

TITLE APPROVAL (PAG LETTER)

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Private Bag 3 Wits, 2050
Fax: 0270865535224
Tel: 02711 7173582

Reference: Ms Jennifer Mgolodela
E-mail: jennifer.mgolodela@wits.ac.za

10 February 2021
Person No: 2327414
PAG

Ms G Munsami Perumal
1846 Mees Avenue
Randpark Ridge
Randburg Uit 24
2194
South Africa

Dear Ms Gonasagrie Munsami Perumal

Master of Business Administration: Approval of Title

We have pleasure in advising that your proposal entitled *The impact of ethics on the organisational culture of a Government department in South Africa* has been approved. Please note that any amendments to this title have to be endorsed by the Faculty's higher degrees committee and formally approved.

Yours sincerely

MBosman

Mrs Marike Bosman
Faculty Registrar
Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management