

Employee Views of Ethics at Work: 2013 Office of the Public Service Commission Survey

December 2013



1. Purpose

“Ethics are as important for the public servant as blood for the body”

(Unknown in Van der Waldt & Helmbold, 1995:170).

The Public Service Commission’s (PSC) Fraud Prevention Plan aims to encourage:

- a) a culture within the PSC where all employees continuously behave ethically in their dealings with members of the public and other stakeholders; and
- b) all employees and other stakeholders to strive towards the prevention and detection of fraud impacting, or having the potential to impact on the PSC.

In addition, the Minimum Anti-Corruption Capacity Requirements requires the Office to conduct an ethics risk survey.

In line with this requirement, the Fraud Prevention and Risk Management Committee compiled a survey questionnaire. Through this survey, the Office will measure employees' perceptions of ethics and conduct in order to identify areas for improvement, as well as risks.

2. The questionnaire

The survey questionnaire consisted of 20 questions. It was placed on the PSC Intranet for electronic completion by 22 November 2013. All employees were invited via e-mail and on the Lift News to participate in the survey.

Employees were not required to provide their name nor any identifying details. The survey was therefore anonymous.

Employees were also requested to ensure that they provide a response to each question.

3. Respondent profile

As indicated above, all employees were invited to participate in the survey. Due to the low response rate by the completion date, managers were requested to prompt employees to complete the questionnaire.

A total of 60 (26%) out of 232 employees participated in the survey. **Figure 1** below reflects the percentage of participation per Salary Level (SL). It shows that the level of participation of employees on SL 1 to 8 was low.

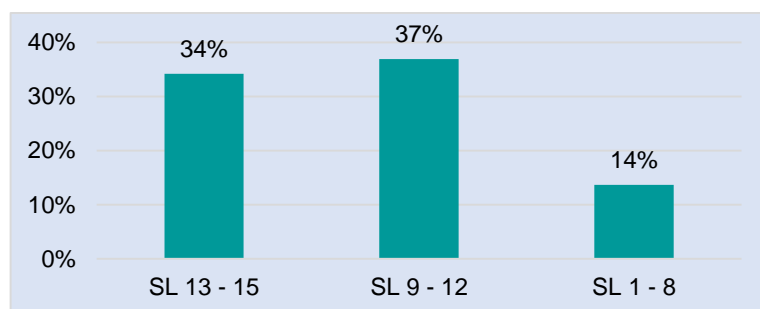


Figure 1: Percentage participation per salary level

Figure 2 on the next page shows the gender profile of the participants in the survey. It reflects that a substantially higher percentage of females (67%) participated in the survey.

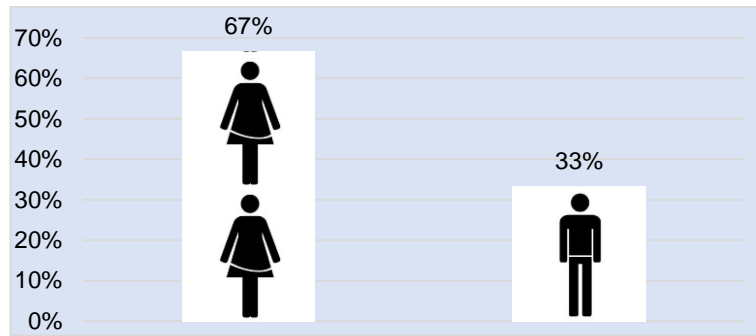


Figure 2: Gender profile of participants in the survey

4. Analysis

4.1 Is honesty practiced at work?

Figure 3 sets out employees' perceptions as to whether honesty is practiced in the PSC's daily operations. Only 35% of employees felt that honesty is practiced within the PSC.

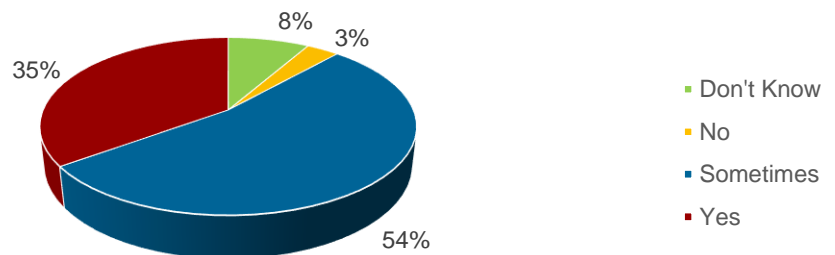


Figure 3: In the PSC's daily operations, would you say that honesty is practiced?

Of the 54% that indicated that honesty is "sometimes" practiced, 28% were employees at SL 13 – 15.

4.2 Pressure to act unethically

Figure 4 shows whether employees have felt pressure to compromise the PSC's ethical standards. 85% of employees indicated they had not felt pressured to compromise standards. The remaining 15% of employees said they had felt such pressure (answering "Yes" or "Sometimes").

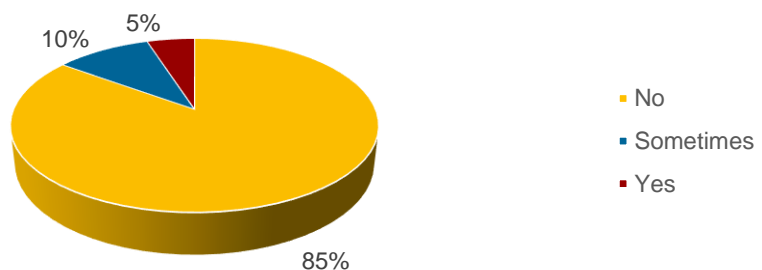


Figure 4: Have you felt pressured to compromise the PSC's standards of ethical conduct?

56% of employees that had perceived pressure to compromise the PSC's ethical standards are employed on SL 9-12. Employees who said honesty is practiced in the PSC's daily operations ("Yes"/"Sometimes") were more likely to say that they had not experienced pressure to compromise ethical standards (83%).

4.3 Awareness of ethical misconduct

Employees were asked whether they had been aware of actual misconduct by their employer or colleagues that either violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards (see **Figure 5**). Almost half of the employees (46%) indicated they were aware of behavior that violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards in the past year at work.

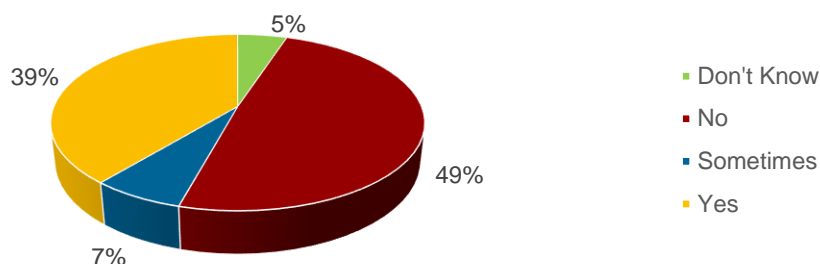


Figure 5: During the past year at work, have you been aware of any conduct by your employer or colleagues that you thought either violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards?

Of the employees on SL 13 -15, 64% indicated that they had been aware of actual misconduct by their employer or colleagues that either violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards. The high rate of awareness accords with their supervisory responsibilities.

4.4 Reporting of misconduct

Having identified employees who had been aware of misconduct, the Survey enquired from these employees whether they had taken appropriate action by raising the concern through any means. A significant percentage of employees (65%) indicated that they did not raise their concerns with management or through any other mechanism.

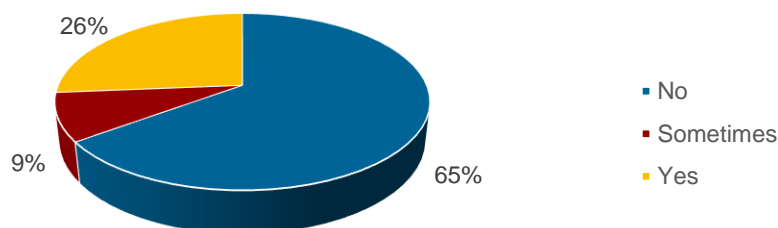


Figure 6: Did you raise any of your concerns with management or through any other mechanism?

It was disconcerting to note that 73% of employees on SL 9 -12 (middle management level) indicated that they did not take appropriate action by raising their concerns with management or through any other mechanisms.

There was an interesting difference in male and female employees' responses to this question. Men who were aware of misconduct seemed more likely to raise their concerns than women.

4.5 Taking responsibility for actions

For a workplace to function effectively, both employees and supervisors must live up to their responsibilities. Employees were asked whether employees in the Office take responsibility for their actions, including their mistakes. Only 24% of employees were of the view that employees take responsibility for their actions, including for their mistakes. 41% of

employees were of the view that employees at time take responsibility for their actions (answering “Sometimes”).

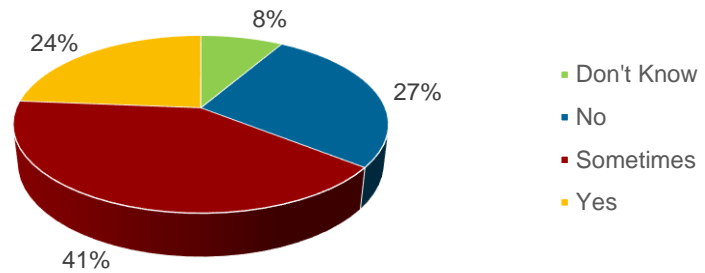


Figure 7: Employees in the Office take responsibility for their actions, including their mistakes

Employees on SL 1 – 8 are more likely to be of the view that employees take responsibility for their actions.

4.6 Setting a good example

Figure 8 reflects the perceptions of employees whether their managers generally set a good example of ethical behavior. 64% of employees were of the view that their managers set a good example of ethical behavior.

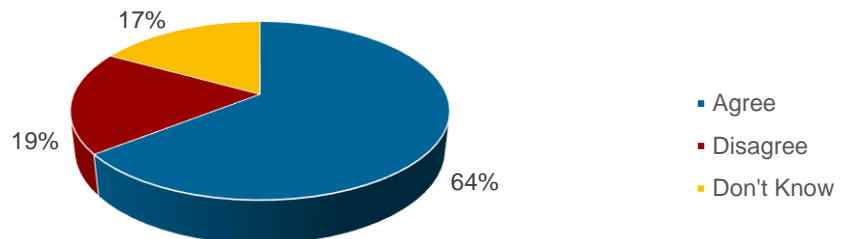


Figure 8: My manager generally sets a good example of ethical behavior

Of the employees who disagreed that employees set a good example, 27% were at SL 13 – 15, 36% at SL 9 – 13 and 36% at SL 2 – 8.

4.7 Honesty and ethics in the workplace

A key component to workplace ethics and behavior is integrity, or being honest and doing the right thing at all times. Employees were asked whether their managers explain the importance of honesty and ethics in the work they do. 60% of employees agreed that their managers explain the importance of honesty and ethics in the work they do.

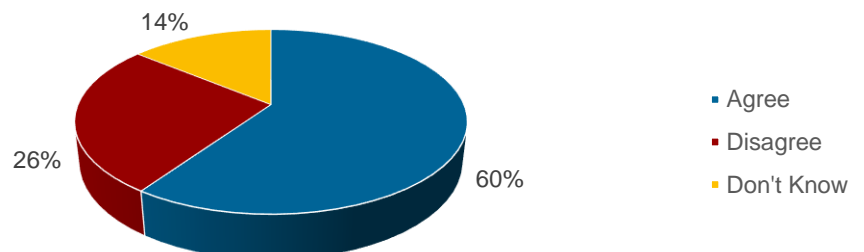


Figure 9: My manager explains the importance of honesty and ethics in the work we do

Employees on SL 9 – 12 are (31%) were more likely to disagree with the statement that their managers explain the importance of honesty and ethics in the work they do. It is reassuring to note that 79% of employees on SL 2-8 are more likely to agree with the statement that their managers explain

the importance of honesty and ethics in the work they do. Employees on these levels require tighter supervision.

4.8 Support to act ethically

Ethics is not just about the regulatory framework that guides behavior (e.g. the Code of Conduct for the Public Service), but an ongoing management process that underpins the work of the Public Service. **Figure 10** reflects the view of employees whether their managers support them in following the PSC's standards of ethical behavior. It is encouraging to note that 72% of employees receive support from their managers in following the PSC's standards of ethical behavior.

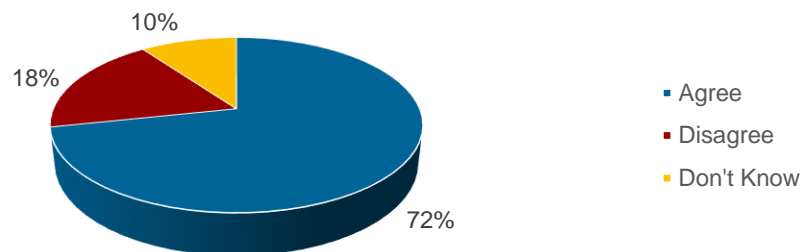


Figure 10: My manager supports me in following the PSC's standards of ethical behavior

Male employees (75%) are more likely to agree with the statement that their managers support them in following the PSC's standards of ethical behavior.

4.9 Employee discipline

In terms of the Disciplinary Code and Procedures for the Public Service, discipline is a management function and is regarded as a corrective measure and not a punitive one. Employees were asked to indicate whether the PSC disciplines employees who violate ethical standards. The high incidence of employees who did not know (52%) whether the PSC disciplines employees who violate ethical standards could be ascribed to the fact that the outcome of disciplinary processes are regarded as confidential. In addition, progress with the implementation of disciplinary measures is only reported at top management level.

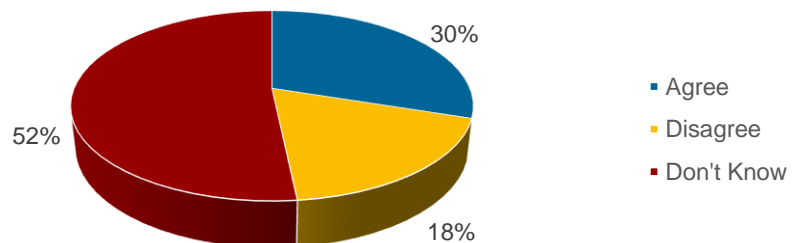


Figure 11: The PSC disciplines employees who violate ethical standards

83% of the employees who disagreed with the statement that the PSC disciplines employees who violate ethical standards are below SL 13 -15. The trend is in keeping with the level of reporting on disciplinary matters within the PSC.

4.10 Awareness about 'right and wrong'

Figure 12 indicates whether employees agree or disagree with the statement that ethical issues of 'right and wrong' are brought to their attention. 64% of employees agreed with the positive statement.

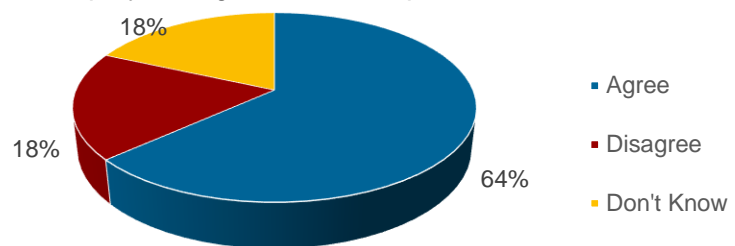


Figure 12: Ethical issues of 'right and wrong' are brought to our attention

Male employees (74%) are more likely to agree with the statement that ethical issues of 'right and wrong' are brought to their attention.

4.11 Raising dissatisfactions

Grievances should be resolved as close to the point of origin as possible. Employees were requested to indicate whether they agree with the statement that they would rather raise a dissatisfaction with a senior manager/ Commissioner than to lodge a grievance. 75% of the employees agreed with the statement. Employees should, however, be cautioned that if a dissatisfaction cannot be resolved between him/herself and his/her manager, the formal grievance procedure should be followed.

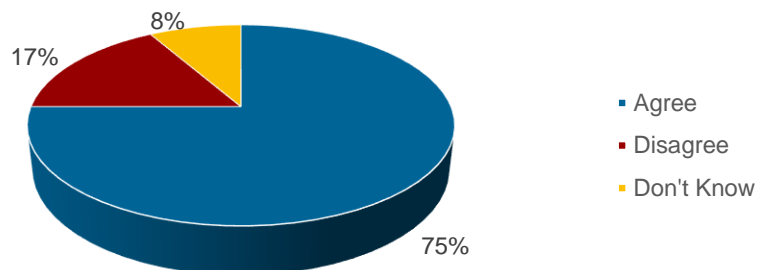


Figure 13: I would rather raise a dissatisfaction with a senior manager/ Commissioner than to lodge a grievance

4.12 Application of the Code of Conduct for the Public Service

A Brown Bag Lunch Session on the Code of Conduct took place on 11 September 2013. An Article was also published in the Aug/ Sept 2013 Izwi Laze OPSC on the event to create further awareness. It is encouraging that 98% of employees agreed with the statement that the Code of Conduct applies to them.

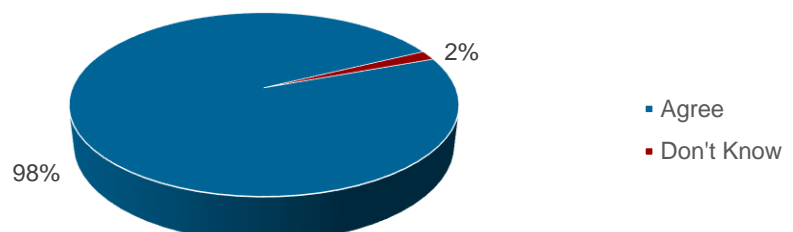


Figure 14: The Code of Conduct for the Public Service applies to me

The employee who did not agree with the statement is employed at SL 2 – 8.

4.13 Information on the Code of Conduct for the Public Service

At the Brown Bag Lunch Session on the Code of Conduct, employees were provided with a pamphlet on the Code of Conduct. The PSC also publishes Lift News to apprise employees of various elements of the Code of Conduct. 88% of employees that participated in the Survey have agreed with the statement that they had been provided with information on the Code of Conduct for the Public Service.

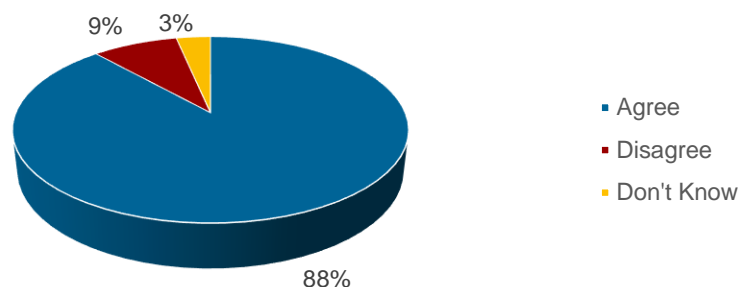


Figure 15: I have been provided with information on the Code of Conduct

4.14 Awareness of the Whistle-blowing Guidelines

The Whistle-blowing Guidelines provides employees in the PSC with a mechanism to raise concerns about fraud and corruption within the organisation. 85% of employees indicated that they were aware of the Whistle-blowing Guidelines.

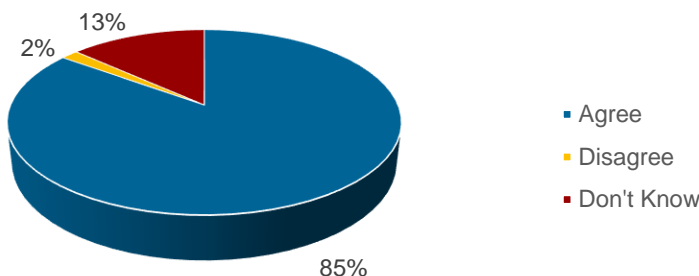


Figure 16: I am aware that the PSC has Whistle-blowing Guidelines

It is disconcerting to note that 3 of the 38 employees on SL 13 – 15 disagreed with the statement, as all senior managers are expected to promote the Fraud Prevention Plan of the PSC.

4.15 Declaration of gifts

The PSC has a Gift Policy in place which guides the process of the acceptance of gifts. In addition, employees are expected to declare all gifts received in an official capacity in a Gift Register. **Figure 17** below shows the response of employees as to whether they declare all gifts from suppliers, consultants or customers of the PSC. 88% of employees agreed with the statement.

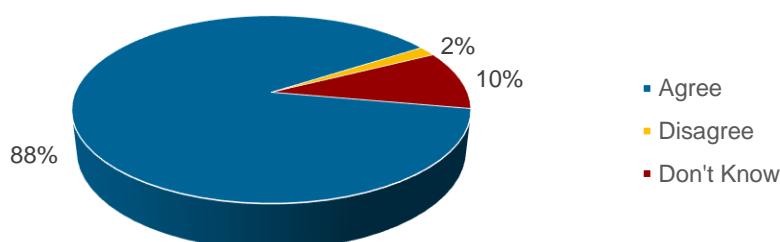


Figure 17: I declare all gifts from suppliers, consultants or customers of the PSC

The 12% of employees who did not agree with the statement are on SL 2 – 8 and 9 – 12.

4.16 Declaration of conflicts of interest

The PSC has defined a conflict of interest as “*Any financial or other private interest or undertaking that could directly or indirectly compromise the performance of the public servant’s duties or the reputation of a public servant’s department in its relationship with its stakeholders*”¹. The Code of Conduct for the Public Service requires of employees to declare conflicts of interest during the performance of their duties. **Figure 18** shows that 87% of employees agreed with the statement.

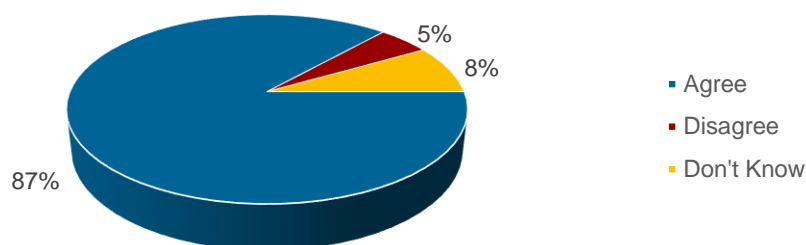


Figure 18: I declare conflicts of interest during the performance of my duties

Of great concern is that one employee at SL 13 – 15 disagreed with the statement. Employees on SL 13 – 15 are, in addition to the Code of Conduct for the Public Service, required to declare all registrable interests.

4.17 Awareness of Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure

Disciplinary and grievance procedures are frameworks which provide clear and transparent structures for dealing with difficulties which may arise as part of the working relationship from either the employer’s or employee’s perspective. These procedures are necessary to ensure that everybody is treated in the same way in similar circumstances, to deal with issues fairly and reasonably, and to ensure that employers are compliant with prevailing legislation.

Figure 19 shows the response of employees in relation to their awareness of the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure. 93% of employees are aware of the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure.

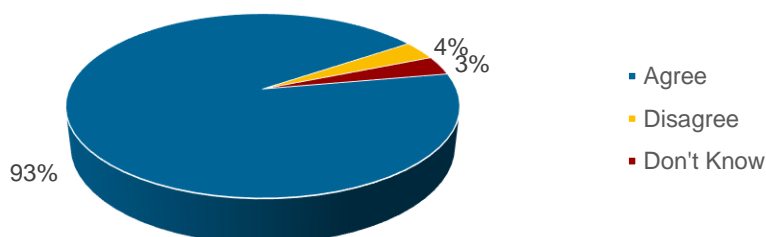


Figure 19: I am aware of the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure

¹ See definition of conflict of interest in the PSC Rules on managing conflicts of interest identified through the financial disclosures framework for senior managers

4.18 Awareness of internal policies

To ensure that employees act confidently in rendering organisational support, awareness of legal requirements is essential. Employees were asked to respond to the statement whether they have perused internal policies, e.g. Recruitment and Selection Policy, Travel Policy, Fraud Prevention Plan, Telephone Policy. The outcome has confirmed that 92% of employees are aware of the internal policies.

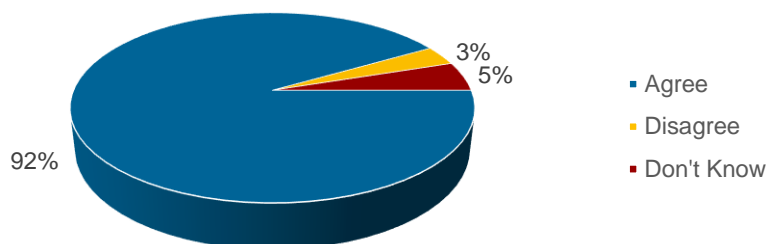


Figure 20: I have perused internal policies, e.g. Recruitment and Selection Policy, Travel Policy, Fraud Prevention Plan, Telephone Policy

4.19 Effectiveness of awareness raising mechanisms

Awareness raising within the PSC in respect of issues identified in the Fraud Prevention Plan and Risk Management Strategy is mostly conducted by means of the PSC Lift News. A survey has never been conducted to assess the effectiveness of the mechanism in raising awareness. It is noted that 93% of employees agreed with the statement that the PSC Lift News provides helpful information on ethical issues and fraud prevention.

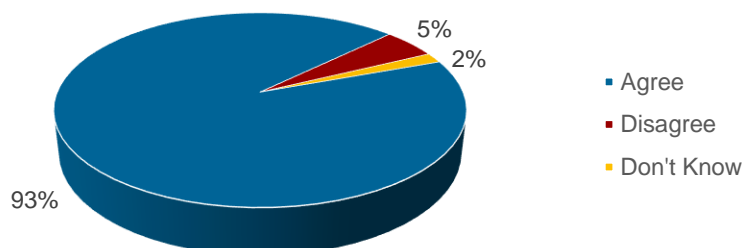


Figure 20: The PSC Lift News provides helpful information on ethical issues and fraud prevention

5. Initiatives suggested by employees

50% of the employees who participated in the survey, suggested initiatives to address awareness of public service values and ethics and perceptions of values and ethics in the PSC. The majority of employees that responded to the question identified the need for the PSC to conduct workshops/ brownbag lunches on ethical issues on a regular basis.

It was interesting to note that employees have suggested that dedicated time should be set aside at branch meetings to address awareness of public service values and ethics and perceptions of values and ethics in the PSC.

Employees also raised the need for leadership to lead by example and to regularly communicate with them on issues of values and ethics. It was also suggested that leadership should take visible corrective action against transgressors, but not necessarily formal disciplinary action.

6. Concluding remarks and recommendations

This Report presents the results of the first Ethics at Work Survey conducted in the PSC.

There were a number of positive findings around the ethical culture in the PSC. In this regard, 85% of employees indicated that they had not felt pressured to compromise standards; 88% of employees declare gifts; and 87% of employees declare conflicts of interest during the performance of their duties. Furthermore, awareness of the prevailing policies and procedures impacting on ethics in the workplace is high.

Perceptions around management was positive in that 64% of employees felt that their managers generally set a good example of ethical behavior and 72% indicated that their managers explain the importance of honesty and ethics in the work they do.

The perceptions of employees around honesty were disconcerting. There is a perception of a low rate of honesty, with only 35% of employees feeling that honesty is practiced in the PSC and a high rate of awareness of acts of dishonesty (46%). There also appears to be a reluctance to report concerns to management or through any other mechanism, whereas there is adequate awareness of the process to follow to report such misconduct.

In order to address immediate risks emanating from the survey, the following recommendations are made:

- a) Improve the dissemination of information around ethics to ensure that employees within the PSC know the basic principles and standards they are expected to apply to their work and where the boundaries of acceptable behavior lie, e.g. the Code of Conduct for the Public Service should be circulated to all employees and employees should be required to confirm in writing that they are aware of its contents.
- b) Ethics and integrity should be reflected as a standing item on the agendas of Branch meetings. Employees should be provided with an overview of the outcome of disciplinary action and an opportunity to openly discuss concerns.
- c) Employees will be encouraged to utilize mechanisms to report unethical behavior.
- d) Employees will be made aware of the fact that if a person is aware of a transgression of a regulatory requirement and does not report such transgression, such person will also be subjected to disciplinary action in the event that this is uncovered.