

Employee Views of Ethics at Work: 2015 Office of the Public Service Commission Survey

July 2015



1. Purpose

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

- a) a culture where all employees continuously behave ethically in their dealings with members of the public and other stakeholders; and
- b) all employees 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 Office in 2013 conducted a survey and placed the report on the outcome of the survey on the Intranet. Recommendations around the dissemination of the Code of Conduct to all employees, encouraging employees to utilize mechanisms to report unethical conduct and the implementation of disciplinary action were implemented by the Office.

At the end of the 2014/15 financial year, the Fraud Prevention and Risk Management Committee again compiled a survey questionnaire. Through this survey, the Office measured employees' perceptions of ethics, conduct of employees and risk areas in order to identify areas for improvement.

Where possible, data from the previous survey was used in the analysis for triangular purposes.

2. The questionnaire

The survey questionnaire consisted of 27 questions. It was placed on the PSC Intranet for electronic completion by 25 May 2015. All employees were invited via e-mail and on the Lift News to participate in the survey. The initial completion date was extended due to the poor response rate.

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

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

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.

3. Respondent profile

A total of 84 (31%) out of 272 employees participated in the survey. This represents an increase of 5% in responses compared to the 2013 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 improved substantially, whilst participation at SL 13-16 declined.

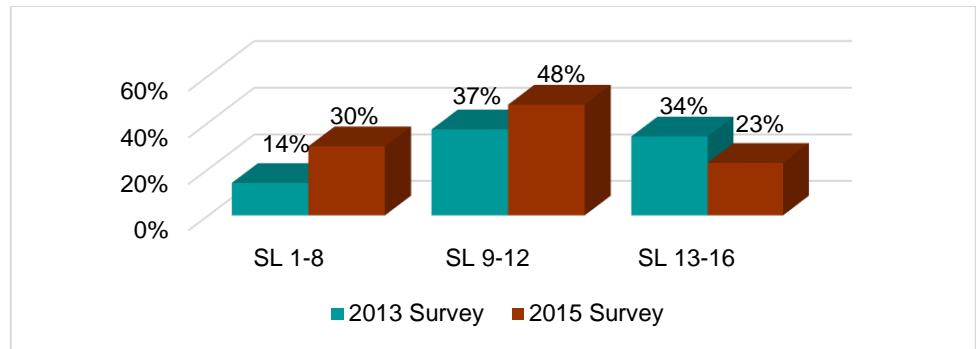


Figure 1: Percentage participation per SL

Figure 2 below shows the gender profile of the participants in the survey. It reflects that a higher percentage of females (67% in 2013 and 63% in 2015) participated in the survey, as compared to male employees.

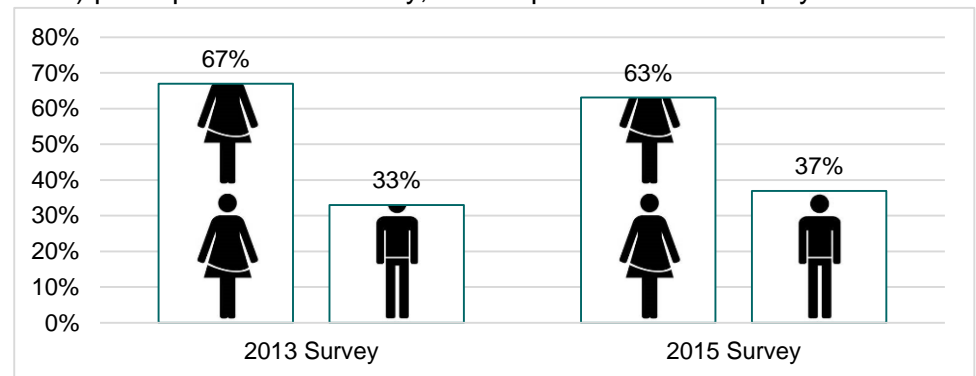


Figure 2: Gender profile of participants in the survey

4. Analysis

4.1 Is honesty practiced at work?

Three statements were presented to respondents to measure honesty in the workplace, namely:

- I occasionally take home small items from the office like pens and pencils.
- I would never add additional hours on a Subsistence and Travel claim.
- I go to the bathroom and find a R100 note on the floor. Finders keepers, losers weepers.

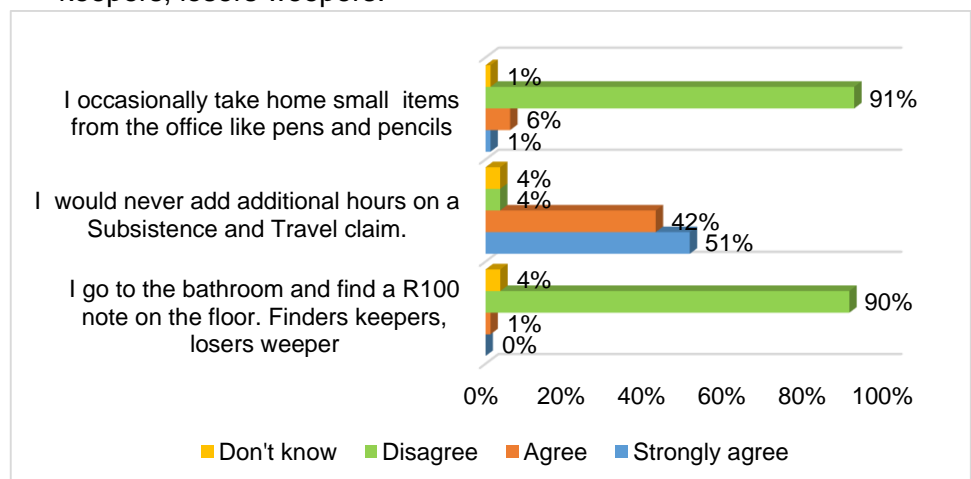


Figure 3: Statements to measure honesty in the Office

An analysis of **Figure 3** above shows that more than 90% of employees

who responded to the survey would act honestly in instances where they have to act truthfully in dealing with public funds and assets and the property of their colleagues.

4.2 Pressure to act unethically

Figure 4 below shows whether employees have felt pressure to compromise the PSC's ethical standards. 84% of employees who participated in the survey indicated they had not felt pressured to compromise standards. 9% of employees who participated in the survey felt pressured by management or a colleague to act unethically. The fact that there are employees who are of the view that they have been pressured by the management and a colleague to act unethically is a worrying factor.

The majority of employees that had perceived pressure to compromise the PSC's ethical standards are employed on SL 9-12.

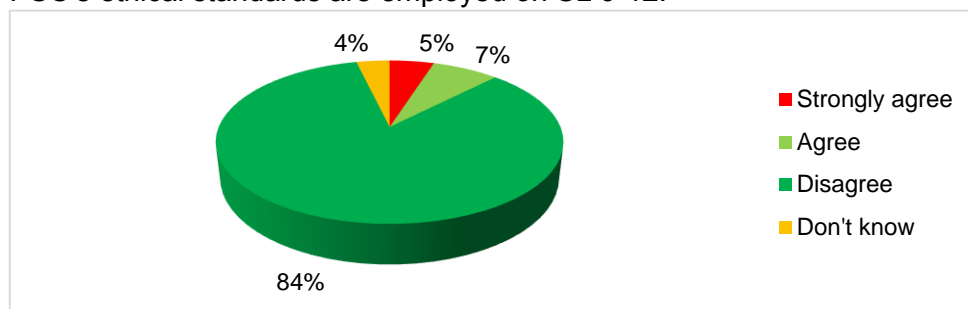


Figure 4: During the past year, I felt pressured by management or a colleague to do something unethical

4.3 Awareness of ethical misconduct

Employees were asked whether they had been aware of actual misconduct by others that either violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards (see **Figure 5** below). 36% of employee indicated they were aware of behavior that violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards. There has been an increase of 6% since the previous survey.

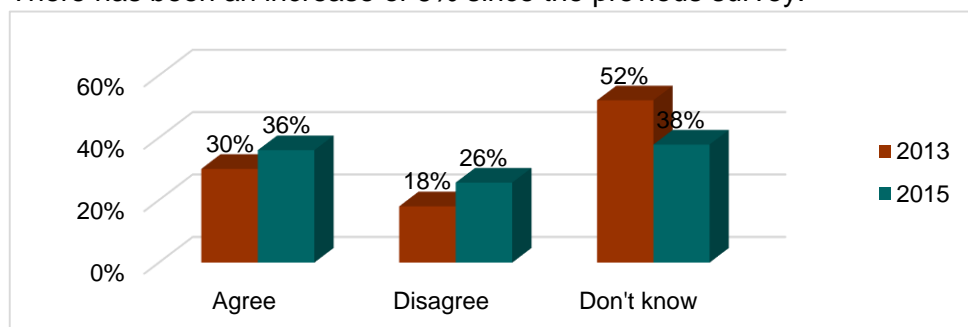


Figure 5: I am aware of conduct by others that either violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards

4.4 Remunerated work outside the Public Service

All employees in the PSC are required to request permission from the EA or Director-General (as delegated authority) before they perform remunerative work outside the Public Service¹. 14% of employees that participated in the survey disagreed with the statement that they declare remunerated work they perform after hours.

15% of employees on SL 9 -12 that participated in the survey are not likely to obtain permission to perform remunerative work outside the Public

¹ Republic of South Africa. Public Service Act, 1994, as amended. Section 30

Service, as they disagreed with the statement that they declare remunerated work they perform after hours.

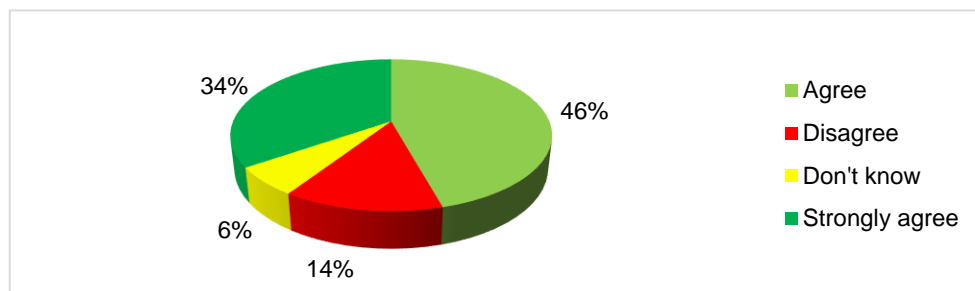


Figure 6: I declare remunerated work I perform after hours

4.5 Taking responsibility for actions

For a workplace to function effectively, both employees and supervisors must live up to their responsibilities. 88% of employees who participated in the survey indicated that they take responsibility for their actions, even if it cannot be traced back to them.

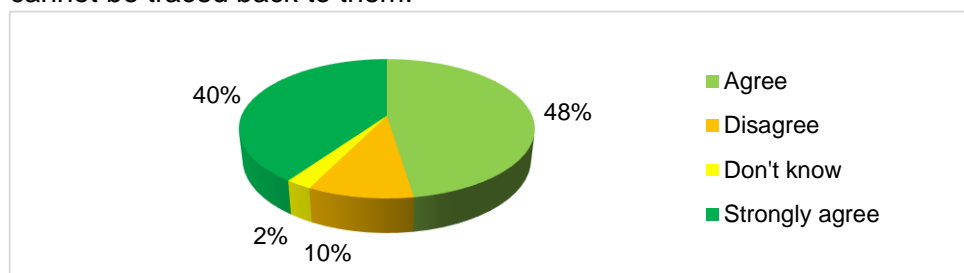


Figure 7: I make an error and another employee gets blamed. No one would be able to trace the error back to me. I immediately come forward to take responsibility

10% of employees indicated that they will not come forward to accept responsibility for their own mistakes. Of the employees on SL 9 – 12, 23% disagreed with the statement.

4.6 Setting a good example

Figure 8 below reflects the perceptions of employees whether their managers generally set a good example of ethical behavior. In 2013, 64% of employees were of the view that their managers set a good example of ethical behavior. This figure increased to 69% in 2015.

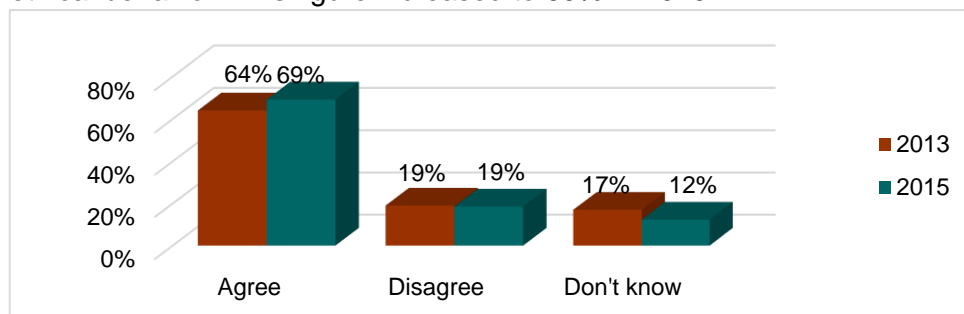


Figure 8: My manager generally sets a good example of ethical behavior

Of the employees who disagreed that employees set a good example, 20% (3) were at SL 13 – 15, 60% (9) at SL 9 – 13 and 20% (3) 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. 75% of employees agreed that their managers explain the importance of honesty and ethics in the work they do. This represents an increase of 15% from the previous survey.

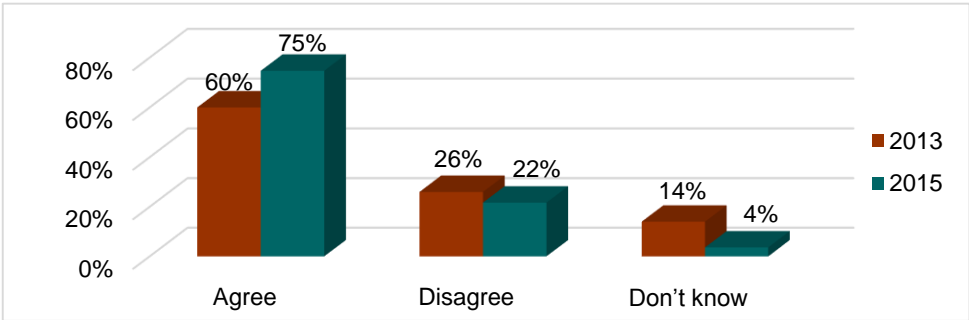


Figure 9: My manager explains the importance of honesty and ethics in the work we do

Employees on SL 9 – 12 are (28%) 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 84% 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** below 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 73% of employees that participated in the survey receive support from their managers in following the PSC's standards of ethical behavior.

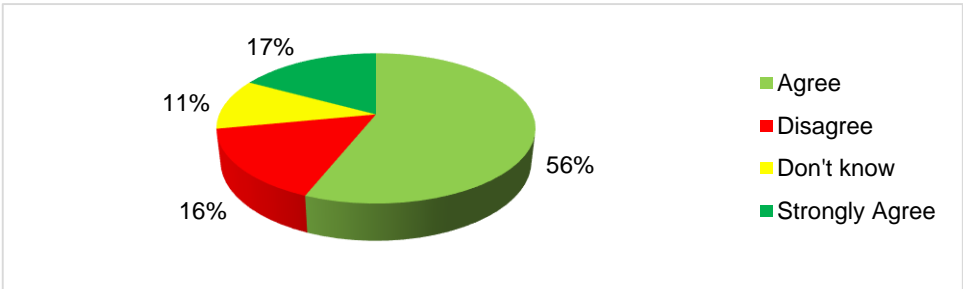


Figure 10: My manager supports me in following the PSC's standards of ethical behavior

4.9 Realisation of potential and targets

Two statements were presented to respondents to obtain their views on realizing their full potential and meeting targets, namely:

- a) If I don't work to my full potential, it is not unethical
- b) I have a responsibility to meet target dates set by my manager

Figure 11 on the next page provides an analysis of the responses to the two statements.

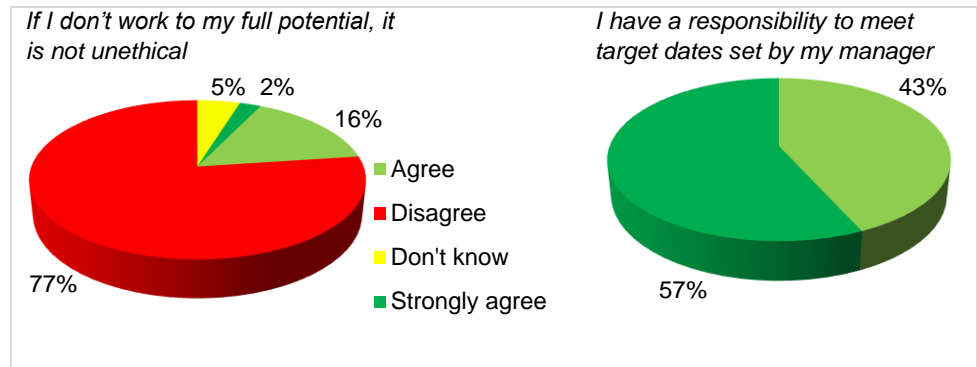


Figure 11: Realisation of potential and targets

16% of employees agreed with the statement that if they don't work to their full potential it is not unethical. Employees at SL 1-8 are more prone to have this view (32% of employees at SL 1-8 that participated in the survey).

All employees agreed with the statement that they have a responsibility to meet target dates set by their managers.

4.10 Awareness about 'right and wrong'

Two statements were presented to respondents to measure their awareness about 'right and wrong', namely:

- I surf the Internet for non-work related matters during work time. Everyone does it.
- It is fine to "pop out" of the office for 30 minutes and not inform my supervisor

Figure 12 below indicates whether employees agree or disagree with the above statements. 68% of employees that participated in the survey disagreed with the statement that they surf on the Internet during work time.

It is encouraging to note that 94% of employees report short absences from duty to their supervisors.

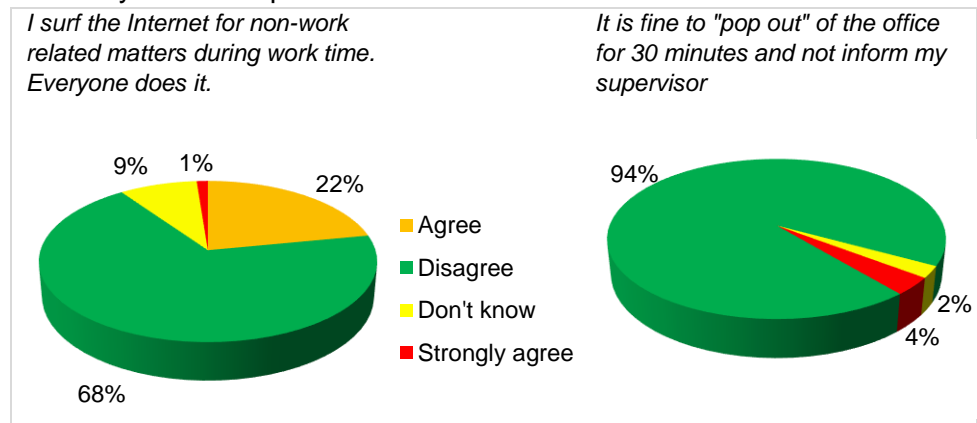


Figure 12: Ethical issues of 'right and wrong'

4.11 Raising dissatisfactions

Dissatisfactions should be resolved as close to the point of origin as possible. Employees were requested to indicate whether they feel confident to raise concerns with management or through any other mechanism. Only 57% of employees that participated in the survey agreed

with the statement. There is a need for the Office to create confidence in its reporting mechanisms.

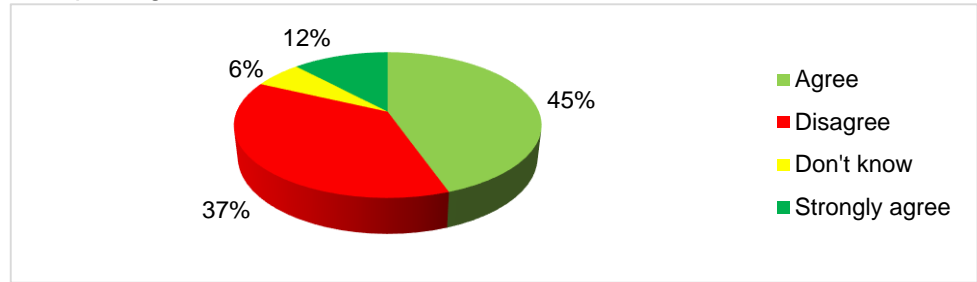


Figure 13: I feel confident to raise any of my concerns with management or through any other mechanism

4.12 Awareness of the Code of Conduct for the Public Service

The Office depends on its employees to comply with the Code of Conduct for the Public Service. The Code emphasizes important ethical principles and establishes essential expectations of what the Office expects of its employees.

98% of employees that participated in the survey agreed with the statement that they are familiar with the Code of Conduct and that they act accordingly. It would appear that the efforts by the Office to promote the Code of Conduct since the previous survey were successful.

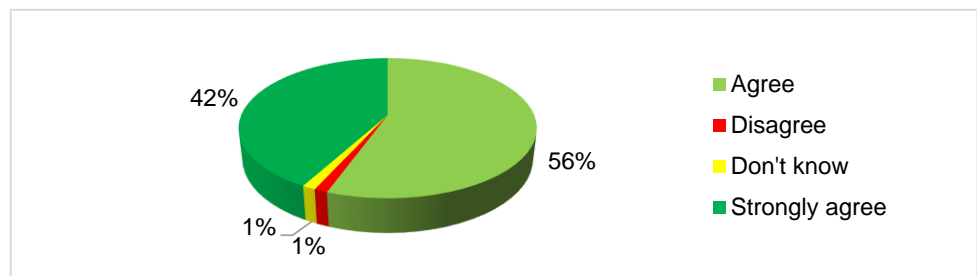


Figure 14: I am familiar with the Code of Conduct for the Public Service and act accordingly

One employee on SL 13-16 disagreed with the statement. This finding is worrisome considering that the employee that disagree with the statement is a member of the Senior Management Service.

4.13 Ethics in the workplace

Ethics in the workplace are important to ensure that employees conduct themselves in accordance with accepted principles of right and wrong. Three statements were presented to respondents to assess their perception of ethics in the workplace, namely:

- Ethics in the workplace is my responsibility.
- From the top down, the PSC is run with honesty, integrity and respect for other.
- Calling in "sick" is okay as long as it's not super-busy at the office.

The responses to statements (a) and (b) above are analysed in **Figure 15.1** below.

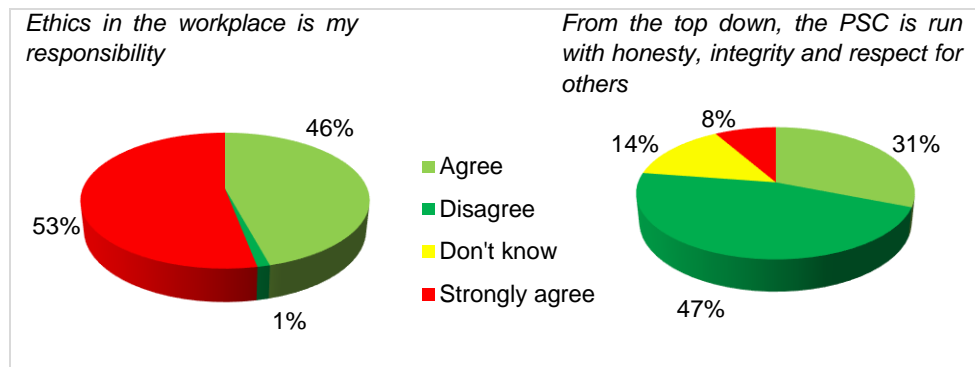


Figure 15.1: Perceptions of ethics in the workplace

99% of employees that participated in the survey agree with the statement that ethics in the workplace is their responsibility. However, only 78% of employees that participated in the survey agreed with the statement that the PSC is run with honesty, integrity and respect for others. Employees on SL 9 – 12 (53%) are more prone to disagree with the statement.

The responses to statement (c) above are analysed in **Figure 15.2** below.

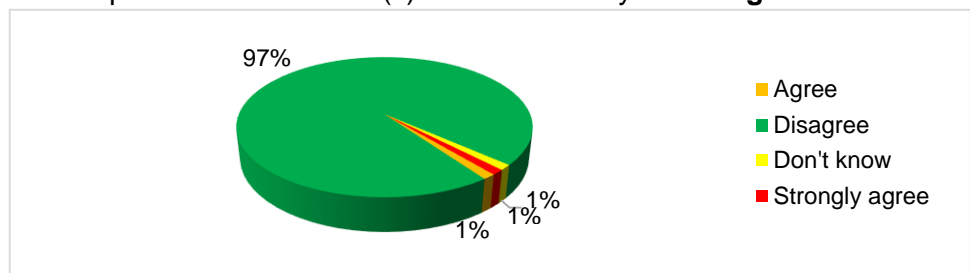


Figure 15.2: Calling in "sick" is okay as long as it's not super-busy at the office.

The fact that employees disagree with the statement may be a positive indication that they use sick leave responsibly.

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. 71% of employees that participated in the survey indicated that they were aware of the Whistle-blowing Guidelines. The **Figure 16** shows a decline of 14% of employees who are aware of the Whistle-blowing Guidelines.

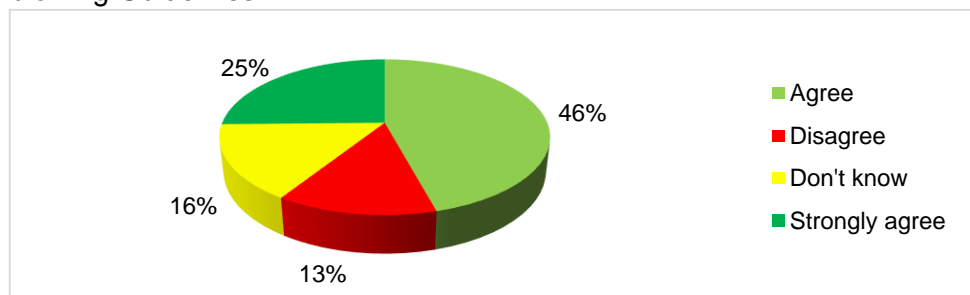


Figure 16: I am aware that the PSC has Whistle-blowing Guidelines

The fact that 2 of the 19 employees on SL 13 – 15 that participated in the survey indicated "Don't know" in response to the question is a worrying factor. All senior managers are expected to promote the Fraud Prevention Plan of the PSC.

4.15 Conflict of interest

Figure 17 below shows the response of employees to a question relating

to the acceptance of gifts.

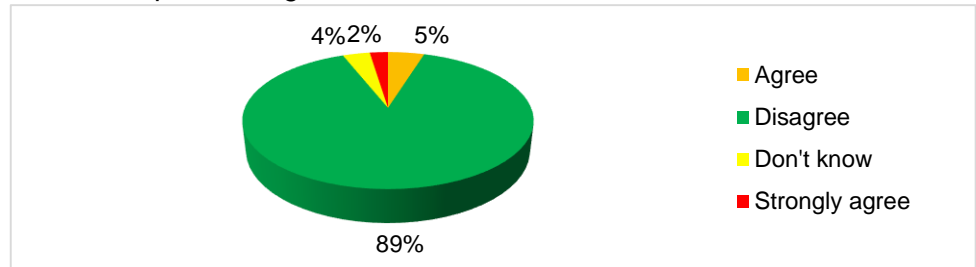


Figure 17: A PSC supplier gives me a gift of my favorite chocolates valued at R350. I accept the gift and enjoy the chocolates.”

A total of 89% of employees disagreed with the statement, which shows a high level of awareness of the Gift policy of the Office.

4.16 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 18 below shows the response of employees in relation to their awareness of the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure. 85% of employees are aware of the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure. This shows a decline in awareness of 8% of employees that participated in the survey.

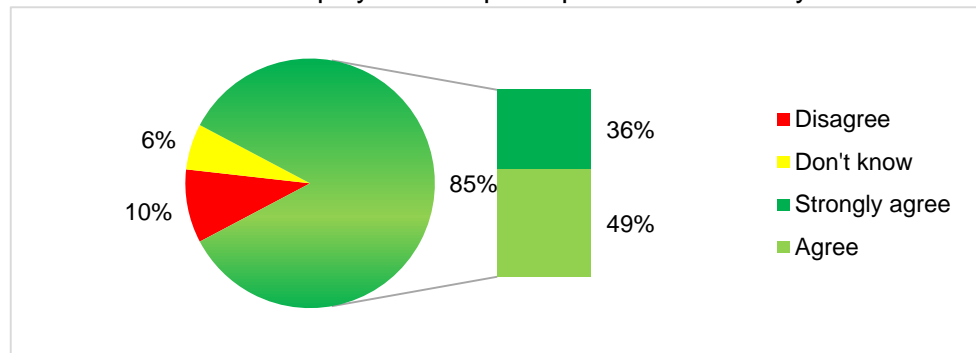


Figure 18: I am aware of the Disciplinary Code and Procedure and the Grievance Procedure

4.17 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. 76% of employees regularly check internal policies.

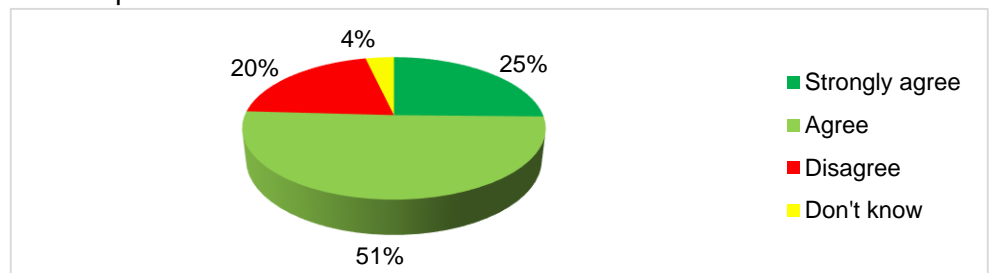


Figure 19: I regularly check the internal policies of the PSC on the Intranet, e.g. Recruitment and Selection Policy, Travel Policy, Fraud Prevention Plan, Telephone Policy

4.18 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. 89% of employees agreed with the statement that the PSC Lift News provides helpful information on ethical issues and fraud prevention. There has been a decline of 4% of employees who participated in the survey that agreed with the statement.

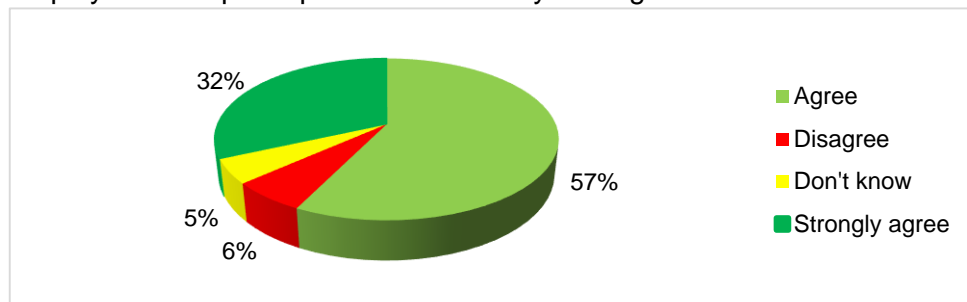


Figure 20: The PSC Lift News provides helpful information on ethical issues and fraud prevention

5. Comments by employees

The comments provided by respondents mostly covered the following areas:

- Lack of respect of individuals in the workplace.
- Employees openly studying during working hours and the impact thereof on the workload of other employees.
- Decisive action not being taken against employees who act unethically, with the result that discipline is not taken seriously.
- Unfairness and bias conduct in the recruitment and selection process.
- Manager should lead from the top and should act in the same way they expect of employees.
- There is a need to share information on ethical issues within the OPSC and create more awareness.

6. Concluding remarks and recommendations

The survey results show a number of positive findings regarding awareness of the ethical conduct, such as what's 'right or wrong', honesty in the workplace on issues such as Subsistence & Transport Claims, reporting absence from duty, accepting responsibility for mistakes, etc.

It also reflects that employees are generally of the view that their supervisors set good examples. However, the majority of employees on SL 9 – 12 do not share this view. This shows a need for Members of the Senior Management Service to improve their conduct and lead by example.

Although awareness of the prevailing policies and procedures impacting on ethics in the workplace is fairly high, there is still a need to improve awareness on these policies, especially on SL 1- 8.

Issues requiring attention is the lack of confidence by employees that their concerns will be addressed, the knowledge of unethical conduct by employee that either violated the law or the PSC's ethical standards, as well as the pressure by management or colleagues for employees to do

something unethical.

The comment made by employees reiterates the need to address disciplinary matters swiftly and inform employees that unethical conduct will not be tolerated.

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

- a) Improve awareness in respect of the Whistle-blowing Guidelines by circulating it to all staff and encourage employees to utilize mechanisms to report unethical behavior.
- b) Submit the findings of the report to Members of the Senior Management Service (SMS) to appraise them of the perceptions of employees, especially employees at SL 9 – 12. It is further recommended that Members of the SMS be workshopped on ethical leadership.
- c) 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.
- d) The lack of respect for colleagues in the workplace and standards of professionalism should be addressed through a diversity management course and the planned internal workshops on the Code of Conduct for the Public Service.

The recommendations should be implemented by the end of the 2015/16 financial year.