Adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The Case of the Ermelo Regional Office

By

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Declaration

I, Bheki Wonderboy Maseko, do hereby declare that this research is my original work and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it has neither previously been submitted nor currently being submitted to any other University for a degree or any other award. Where someone else's work has been used, due acknowledgement has been given and reference made accordingly.



……..

Signature of candidate

26.08.2026

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Dedication

To my dearest daughters, Nompendulo, Wethu, and Temangcamane Maseko, this dissertation is dedicated to you, as you inspire me to work hard for you guys.

Abstract

The South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) is responsible for providing civic and immigration services while safeguarding the National Population Register (NPR). This study explored officials' adherence to ethics and ethos at the DHA's Ermelo Regional Office. It examined how the disciplinary code, ethical-risk processes, reporting channels and ethics training support ethical conduct; identified environmental conditions that influence officials' behaviour; and considered measures for curbing bribery, fraud and the irregular issuing of documents. An interpretivist qualitative case-study design was adopted. Data were generated through semi-structured, in-person and online interviews with 15 officials selected through purposive and snowball sampling. The sample was considered sufficient when subsequent interviews produced no new codes or themes. The data were analysed using the six phases of thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the disciplinary code is broadly aligned with the Department's ethical values, but its implementation is perceived as uneven. Ethical risks are identified through risk registers, audits and application sampling, although these practices are not consistently experienced across units. Reporting channels exist, but concerns remain about accessibility, confidentiality and protection from retaliation. Ethics training was also perceived as irregular and insufficiently practical. Leadership conduct, hierarchical workplace relations, workload, pressure to meet targets, re shortages and unsuitable infrastructure were identified as conditions influencing behaviour. The study recommends regular scenario-based ethics training, integrated ethical-risk monitoring, protected anonymous reporting, consistent disciplinary procedures, ethical leadership through coaching and mentoring, and adequate operational res.

Keywords: Department of Home Affairs, public service ethics, organisational ethos, code of conduct, ethical risk areas, employee conduct

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Acronyms

AG	Auditor General
ANC	African National Congress
BMA	Boader Management Authority
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
NPR	National Population Register
PASC	Public Administration Select Committee
PSC	Public Service Commission
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authorities

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study. The chapter outlines the background, rationale, and motivation for the study. The problem is identified and the research questions and the aim of the study are also articulated in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter provides an overview of the research methodology adopted and concludes with an outline of the chapters in the dissertation.

1.2 Introduction and background of the study

The South African Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has a responsibility to improve its efficacy, responsiveness, and general performance in the provision of public service and security of the National Population Register (NPR) (Department of Home Affairs, 2024). This improvement is essential for strengthening positive work ethics and organisational ethos. In pursuit of its service-charter goals and objectives, the Department commits to key principles that promote ethical conduct in the delivery of safety and security. These principles include:

i. The alignment of the organisation's disciplinary code with its code of ethical practice.
ii. A regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas.
iii. The establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels, such as protected disclosure and whistleblowing.
iv. The development of performance measurement and remuneration systems that reward ethical behaviour and punish unethical conduct.
v. Training in ethical principles, standards, and decision-making.
vi. Ensuring the independent verification of conformance to established principles and standards of ethical behaviour (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2019).

During the provision of public services, these principles should be taken into consideration, hence the DHA officials should clearly understand that neither the

community, nor their colleagues, nor senior officers, nor political leaders expect or require them to break the law or to violate the DHA code of conduct to perform their duties. In essence, keeping the NPR clean by preventing illegal immigrants from accessing enabling documents, such as South African birth certificates and identity documents, could be challenging and demanding for the DHA. However, this does not justify the adoption of negative work ethics and ethos. Therefore, this study sought to explore how ethics and ethos influence service provision at the DHA.

The study seeks to understand the key elements or factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the content of codes of conduct in the public service in addressing corruption and ethics. Additionally, the study examined the South African public service code of conduct regarding the ethics and ethos for public servants, particularly at the DHA, as well as practical guidelines to determine whether they comply with international practices.

1.3 Preliminary literature review

The onus to interrogate unethical conduct among DHA officials should start by analysing the environment in which these individuals work, guided by the application of the Batho Pele principles and the legislative framework governing the provision of public services. The DHA employees, like any other employees in the civil service, are guided by several policies in their conduct, regardless of the nature of the environment in which they work.

1.3.1 Ethics

Professional ethics comprise the standards and principles used to evaluate conduct in a work setting. In public administration, these standards extend beyond personal morality because officials exercise public authority, use public res and make decisions that affect citizens' rights. A code of ethics translates values such as integrity, impartiality, accountability and fairness into expectations that guide judgement and discretion (Gilman, 2005). However, a written code does not by itself establish ethical conduct; its influence depends on employees' knowledge of the code, consistent managerial example, credible reporting arrangements and fair consequences for misconduct (Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008). In the DHA, ethics therefore concerns both compliance with

legal and departmental requirements and the quality of officials' decisions when processing identity, citizenship and immigration matters. This understanding is central to the study because adherence is assessed through the relationship between formal standards and the conduct described by officials at the Ermelo Regional Office.

1.3.2 Ethos

Organisational ethos refers to the shared values, norms and expectations that characterise how members of an institution understand and perform their work. Public-service ethos is distinguished by service to the public interest, impartiality, accountability, fairness and respect for citizens, rather than by profit as the primary measure of performance (Shand & Howell, 2015). It is expressed through routine practices, leadership conduct and the way officials use discretion, not merely through an organisation's stated values (Witesman, Walters & Christensen, 2023). For DHA officials, this ethos requires that enabling documents and immigration services be administered lawfully, consistently and with due regard for human dignity. Ethics provides standards for judging particular decisions, while ethos describes the institutional culture that either supports or weakens those standards. The distinction is analytically important because officials may know the rules yet work in an environment whose routines, incentives or leadership behaviour make adherence more difficult.

1.4 Problem statement

The DHA, through its officials, is mandated to provide civic and immigration services transparently, efficiently and effectively. It is a strategic department because its decisions on identity, citizenship, immigration and enabling documents affect access to public services, the integrity of the NPR and national security. Ethics refers to the standards used to judge official conduct as right or wrong, while organisational ethos refers to the shared public-service values and norms that shape how officials perform their duties (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). Despite the applicable constitutional values, codes and disciplinary procedures, misconduct remains a material concern. In November 2024, the Department reported the dismissal of 18 officials for fraud, corruption and related misconduct, including the irregular issuing of identity documents and passports

(Government of South Africa, 2024). Such cases indicate a possible gap between formal ethical requirements and adherence in daily practice, which may weaken service delivery, public trust and the security of official records. Conduct may also be influenced by leadership, hierarchical relations, workload, re constraints and the wider ethical climate (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). However, national policies and aggregate misconduct figures do not explain how these requirements are understood and applied in a regional office. The study therefore examined adherence to ethics and ethos at the Ermelo Regional Office and the environmental conditions that influence officials' conduct.

1.5 Research questions

1.5.1 Primary question

The study was guided by the following primary research question

'How do officials adhere to ethics and ethos at the South African DHA's Ermelo Regional Office?'

1.5.2 Secondary questions

The primary research question was answered through the following secondary questions:

i. How are ethics and ethos reflected in the disciplinary code, ethical-risk processes, reporting channels and ethics training at the Ermelo Regional Office?
ii. Which environmental conditions influence the conduct and behaviour of officials at the Ermelo Regional Office?
iii. Which measures could strengthen adherence to ethics and ethos and curb bribery, fraud and the irregular issuing of documents at the Ermelo Regional Office?

1.6 Aim and objectives

1.6.1 Primary objective

The primary objective of the study was to explore officials' adherence to ethics and ethos at the South African DHA's Ermelo Regional Office.

1.6.2 Secondary objective

The primary objective of the study is based on the following secondary objectives:

i. To examine how ethics and ethos are reflected in the disciplinary code, ethical-risk processes, reporting channels and ethics training at the Ermelo Regional Office.
ii. To identify the environmental conditions that influence the conduct and behaviour of officials at the Ermelo Regional Office.
iii. To recommend measures through which the authorities at the Ermelo Regional Office can strengthen adherence to ethics and ethos and curb bribery, fraud and the irregular issuing of documents.

1.7 Justification and expected contribution of the research

This study is justified by the public importance of the services rendered by the DHA and the consequences that unethical conduct may have for citizens, institutional integrity and the NPR. Although the South African public service has constitutional values, disciplinary procedures and anti-corruption measures, ethical systems are effective only when employees understand them and when managers apply them consistently (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). The Ermelo Regional Office provides a bounded setting in which the practical relationship between formal ethical requirements and officials' daily experiences can be examined. The study contributes context-specific evidence on disciplinary alignment, ethical-risk identification, reporting channels, ethics training and environmental influences on conduct. Its findings may assist the Ermelo Regional Office to identify gaps between policy and practice, strengthen accountability and support an ethical climate in which officials can provide services fairly and consistently. Although the findings are not statistically generalisable, the detailed case evidence may also be relevant to comparable DHA offices facing similar organisational conditions.

1.8 Research methodology

The investigation adopted an interpretivist qualitative case-study methodology because adherence to ethics and ethos is experienced and understood through officials'

interpretations of workplace rules, relationships and practices. The case was bounded to the Ermelo Regional Office, which enabled the study to examine these experiences in their organisational context.

1.8.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted to examine how officials interpret and experience ethics and ethos in their daily work. This approach was appropriate because it enabled participants to explain how formal requirements, workplace relationships and environmental conditions influence conduct, rather than reducing these experiences to predetermined numerical measures (Creswell, 2013).

1.8.2 Population and sampling

The target population comprised 40 officials at the Ermelo Regional Office who had been employed by the Department for at least three years. This inclusion criterion was used because officials with three or more years of service were expected to have sustained experience of the office's procedures, disciplinary expectations, ethical risks and service-delivery environment.

A total of 15 officials were selected initially through purposive sampling and subsequently through snowball referrals. The sample included officials from the Office of the Manager, Human Re Management, Supply Chain Management, Immigration, Civic Services and Information and Communication Technologies, thereby incorporating experience from operational and support functions. Recruitment continued alongside preliminary analysis until additional interviews no longer produced substantively new codes, themes or insights. The final sample of 15 was therefore determined by data saturation rather than by the numerical range alone, although it falls within the range commonly used in qualitative inquiry (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The non-probability sampling process may have favoured well-connected or willing officials, and this limitation was considered when interpreting the findings.

1.8.3 Research design and data collection

A research design provides the logical plan through which evidence is generated and connected to the research questions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). A descriptive qualitative case-study design was used because the study sought a detailed, context-sensitive account of how officials at one regional office understood and experienced adherence to ethics and ethos. The design also enabled comparison of experiences across the six participating units while retaining the institutional context in which those experiences occurred.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in person and online through Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The same interview schedule, introductory explanation and core questions were used in each mode to support consistency, while follow-up probes were used to clarify participants' experiences. Before final data collection, the schedule was piloted with four officials to assess the clarity, sequence and relevance of the questions. Feedback from the pilot informed minor wording and probing adjustments, and the pilot participants were excluded from the final sample.

1.8.4 Data analysis

The interview data were analysed thematically through the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2021). The researcher first became familiar with the transcripts, generated initial codes, grouped related codes into candidate themes, reviewed the themes against the coded extracts and complete dataset, defined and named each theme, and produced the analytical account. This process enabled recurring patterns to be identified while preserving differences among the participating units.

1.9 Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this research study, the following criteria prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1985:1) were adhered to:

- Credibility is the focus of qualitative research, and it means having confidence in the authenticity and interpretation of the data. The goal is to make the research

results more credible and to show credibility to others. To ensure credibility, the research process, procedures, and participant details were detailed.

- Transferability is the ability to apply the research findings to different backgrounds or groups of people. Researchers should provide enough descriptive information in their reports so that others can assess how the findings may be relevant in various contexts.
- Dependability in qualitative research is the stability of data over time and over conditions. If research results can be repeated in the same or similar conditions, it adds to their dependability. Researchers have a responsibility to provide a reasonable, traceable, and well-documented research process to establish dependability.
- Conformability relates to the fairness and accuracy of data, and whether it matches the experiences of multiple independent individuals. The researcher ensured that the data truly reflects what the participants shared and does not include biased interpretations. The research results should represent the voices of the participants and the conditions of the investigation, rather than the personal biases or opinions of the researcher.

1.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the UNISA Ethics Committee before data collection under reference number 7197. The researcher observed informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, secure data management and restricted access to the collected material in accordance with the ethical requirements for qualitative research (Arifin, 2018).

1.11 Limitations

The study was delimited to officials employed at the DHA's Ermelo Regional Office and focused on their experiences of ethics, ethos and workplace conditions. Its principal limitation is that evidence was generated from one office and from officials who agreed to participate; the findings therefore cannot be statistically generalised to the entire Department. Purposive and snowball sampling may also have favoured particular

workplace networks or perspectives. In addition, the use of both in-person and online interviews may have produced minor differences in rapport and the depth of probing, although the same interview schedule and procedures were used in both modes. The study did not include service users, former officials or documentary case files, and the findings represent reported perceptions rather than independently verified incidents of misconduct. These limitations were considered when drawing conclusions, while the detailed description of the case supports assessment of transferability to comparable offices.

1.12 Outline and structure of the dissertation

This dissertation comprises six chapters, which are organised as follows:

Chapter One establishes the foundation and scope of the study. It presents the background to ethics and ethos in the DHA, formulates the research problem, aligns the research questions with the aim and objectives, and explains the study's justification and expected contribution. It also summarises the interpretivist qualitative case-study methodology, population, sampling, data collection, thematic analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and limitations.

Chapter Two reviews extant literature on the application of ethics and ethos at the DHA. This chapter discusses the employees' adherence to ethics, ethos, and associated constructs, as well as the outcomes and consequences of this.

Chapter Three informs on the methodology employed in the research process, the study's grounding philosophy, the chosen methodology approach and motivation for the approach is outlined. The chapter further unpacks the data collection and analysis methods used in the study, as well as the target population, and sampling techniques.

Chapter Four provides an overview of measures and mechanisms used to ensure ethical conduct at the DHA in South Africa. The chapter further unpacks the role of the Public Protector and the Auditor-General.

Chapter Five presents the results of the collected data. The collected data are analysed in this chapter based on the DHA employees' views and perceptions regarding the

environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of officials at the Department.

Chapter Six concludes the dissertation and aims to address the research questions. The discussion in this chapter includes a summary and interpretation of the findings, as well as a summary of the conclusions and recommendations to provide practical solutions to the gaps identified. In essence, this chapter sums up the study. The chapter further reaffirms the current policies regarding ethics and ethos in the DHA, the key findings from the study, theoretical contributions, and recommendations for practice in the Department.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: ADHERENCE TO ETHICS AND ETHOS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN DHA

2.1 Introduction

The DHA institution, like any other public entity, is grounded on Public Service principles, vision, and mission that sets it as an important institution that provides significant services to the populace. Based on the grounding principles that set the standard operating procedures for the public entity, the personnel in its structures need to fully support the Department to achieve its goals and objectives. This chapter discusses the employees' adherence to ethics, ethos, and associated constructs, as well as the outcomes and consequences of this.

The DHA, as a public entity in South Africa, is bound by the Batho Pele principles ('Putting the People First') – a variation on Ubuntu, in which most public service institutions operations are grounded. The Batho Pele principles are consolidated from the constructs of consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, transparency, and redress. Accordingly, any personnel or associated stakeholders associated with the institution need to adhere to and be guided by the principles of Batho Pele.

Additionally, Section 195(1) of the Constitution provides guidelines on the standard requirements for public administration that are grounded on significant principles, inclusive of professionalism, impartiality, and excellence; accountability and transparency; participatory policy-making; and efficiency, effectiveness, equity, development, and service orientation.

2.2 Ethics in the DHA in South Africa

Ethics is a moral law of human conduct or behaviour that is considered from the point of view of good or evil. The term “ethics” is derived from the Greek noun “ethos”, meaning “the customs and conventions of a given community” (Fredrick, 2017). Ethics are at the core of professionalism and efficiency in the public service, which proves true for the employees and stakeholders at the South African DHA. The Public Service Charter in Africa refers to ethics as “the standards which guide the behaviours and actions of personnel in public institutions.” Its 22nd article defines ethics as “a sound culture based on certain values and principles,” which include efficiency, professional discipline, dignity, equity, impartiality, fairness, public spiritedness, and courtesy in the discharge of duties. In view of this, public-service ethics are broad norms that indicate how public servants, as agents of the state, should exercise judgement and discretion in carrying out their official duties (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2000).

Ethics, honesty, and transparency are the hallmarks of effective and efficient service delivery; hence it is important for the DHA employees to adhere to them for provision of services to the general populace requiring them. There are several reasons why ethics are important, including the limit of laws, the role of expertise and knowledge in the design of public policies, the limit of steering by incentives, and the limits that can maybe be understood because of “human nature”.

2.3 Codes of ethics in the DHA in South Africa

The need for employees and relevant stakeholders to act ethically has led public institutions to develop codes, policies and oversight arrangements that define acceptable conduct and support implementation, monitoring and accountability. Within the DHA, these instruments provide a common point of reference for decisions involving public services, personal information, official documents and the exercise of administrative discretion. Their effectiveness nevertheless depends on whether officials understand the requirements and whether managers apply them consistently.

Sakyi and Bawole (2010) describe codes of ethics as principles, values, standards and rules that guide organisational decisions, procedures and systems in ways that protect stakeholder welfare and rights. Such codes communicate the ethical values of an

organisation and clarify employees' responsibilities towards colleagues, the institution and the public (Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008). Although their content and level of detail differ, codes commonly address conflicts of interest, use of organisational res, relations with service users, confidentiality, gifts and dealings with external stakeholders (Petersen & Krings, 2009). In the DHA context, these provisions are especially relevant because officials handle sensitive personal information and make decisions that can enable or restrict access to identity and immigration services. A code therefore has practical value only when its provisions are translated into clear procedures, training, supervision and consistent disciplinary action.

2.4 Ethos and generic principles of the public service ethos in the South African DHA

Public service ethos (values) are considered as the "enduring beliefs that influence the choices public servants make from among available means and ends" (Kernaghan, 2002:2). Woodhouse (1997:1) describes public service ethos as an amalgamation of beliefs and norms or conventions of behaviour. The ethos serves as an ethical core or code for civil servants, including officials at the DHA in South Africa. Additionally, public service ethos are a set of vague and ambiguous statements, which are set to assert the reality of the ethos and to make its contents concrete (Brereton & Temple, 1999). Ethos is expressed by the characteristics of public servants at any public serve entity, such as the DHA. Therefore, a civil servant should be ideally altruistic, community oriented, impartial, professional, and loyal to the public good.

The phrase "public service ethos" refers to tendencies that propel individuals to "perform meaningful public service by helping others, furthering the common good and serving the public interest" (Brewer, Ritz & Vandenabeele, 2012:1). Employees and stakeholders at the DHA in South Africa will need to subscribe to specific public service ethos, which is manifested through a high level of motivation to serve the public good.

2.5 Theoretical framework of ethics and ethos: The New Public Management

This study uses New Public Management (NPM) as a public-administration perspective rather than as a complete theory of ethics. NPM emphasises managerial efficiency,

measurable performance, accountability for results and citizen-centred service delivery (Christensen & Lægreid, 2013). These principles are relevant to the DHA because ethical conduct affects both the integrity of administrative processes and the quality of services received by citizens. However, performance targets and managerial controls may also create ethical tensions when efficiency is pursued without sufficient attention to public values, procedural fairness and officials' working conditions. The study therefore uses NPM to examine the relationship between accountability, performance and service delivery, while constitutional public-service values provide the normative basis for assessing ethics and ethos.

Several organisations have adopted the NPM approach in the pursuit of improving service delivery to the general populace. This has been encouraged by the principles of NPM that promote the importance of incorporating a culture that emphasises the centrality of the citizen or customer, as well as accountability for results.

The NPM seeks to establish and maintain significant principles in the operations of public organisations with the following core, grounding pillars and principles to guide the efficiency and effectiveness of these entities:

- Creation of an enabling environment for private sector participation in the economy and protection of individual property rights.
- Enactment of anti-corruption laws, establishment of watch-dog bodies, and enforcement of ethical and accountability codes.
- Reactivation of the public service's professional values and inculcation of the ethos of responsiveness, transparency, and accountability in service delivery agents (Balogun, 2003: 11).

The relevance of NPM to this study lies in its emphasis on managerial accountability, organisational performance and responsiveness to service users. Applied to the DHA, these principles support clear standards, measurable service commitments and responsibility for the lawful processing of applications. Yet a narrow focus on output targets can encourage shortcuts where workload, res and supervision are not aligned with the complexity of the work (Dlamini et al., 2020). NPM must therefore be balanced with the constitutional principles of fairness, transparency, accountability and a high

standard of professional ethics. This combined perspective permits the study to assess not only whether the Ermelo office achieves operational results, but also whether the environment in which those results are pursued supports ethical judgement and a public-service ethos.

2.6 Ethical conduct in the South African public sector

The conduct of public officials has received sustained scrutiny because fraud, corruption, conflicts of interest and abuse of administrative authority undermine service delivery and public trust. In the DHA, such misconduct may include accepting bribes, unlawfully issuing identity or travel documents, manipulating applications, disclosing protected personal information or disregarding prescribed procedures. On 20 November 2024, the Department announced the dismissal of 18 officials for offences including fraud, corruption, sexual harassment and the irregular issuing of identity documents and passports (Government of South Africa, 2024). These outcomes provide concrete evidence that unethical conduct is not limited to abstract policy concerns. They also demonstrate that misconduct can compromise both individual service users and the integrity of national identity systems. For the Ermelo Regional Office, the relevant analytical question is therefore whether formal controls are reinforced by an ethical climate, safe reporting, training and consistent leadership in daily practice.

Sebola (2014) argues that ethics support political neutrality, professionalism and effective policy implementation. In practice, these outcomes depend on an organisational ethics system that connects constitutional values, leadership behaviour, reporting arrangements and fair consequence management (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). Political or managerial interference becomes ethically problematic when it displaces lawful criteria, discourages officials from raising concerns or weakens accountability for administrative decisions. An ethical climate is therefore created through the conduct that leaders model and the practices that employees observe, rather than through policy statements alone (Burhan, Khan & Malik, 2023). For the DHA, this means that impartial service and the integrity of official records require clear role boundaries and consistent protection of professional judgement.

Upholding ethics in public administration requires political office-bearers and appointed officials to respect their distinct constitutional roles and the applicable code of conduct. Political direction is legitimate when it concerns policy priorities, but interference in individual administrative decisions may weaken impartiality, accountability and consistent service delivery. Ethical leadership therefore requires clear role boundaries, transparent decision-making and consequences for conduct that places personal or partisan interests above the public interest (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). In the DHA, these requirements are particularly important because decisions on identity and immigration documentation must be based on law and verified evidence rather than external influence. The issue is not simply disagreement between political and administrative actors; it is whether governance arrangements protect officials' professional judgement while holding them accountable for lawful performance.

Repeated audit findings across public institutions indicate that weak internal controls, delayed corrective action and limited consequence management can allow governance failures to persist. The Auditor-General's 2017–2018 municipal audit outcomes, released on 23 May 2018, reported a regression in audit results and again identified inadequate accountability and insufficient action on previously reported control weaknesses (Auditor-General South Africa, 2018). Although these findings concerned local government rather than the DHA, they illustrate why ethical commitments must be supported by functioning controls, documented follow-up and responsible leadership. In the DHA context, audit recommendations, risk registers and disciplinary processes should therefore operate as connected accountability mechanisms rather than as isolated compliance exercises.

In the 2017-2018 municipal audit outcomes released on 23 May 2018, Auditor-General Kimi Makwetu reported that previously identified weaknesses in internal control and accountability had not produced significant improvement (Auditor-General South Africa, 2018).

The report emphasised that recurring weaknesses in internal control, limited consequence management and inadequate follow-up had contributed to a reversal in audit outcomes (Auditor-General South Africa, 2018).

The Auditor-General's finding demonstrates that formal recommendations do not improve conduct unless responsible officials implement them and are held accountable for repeated failures. Ethical training may increase awareness of duties and decision-making standards, but training cannot substitute for effective controls, supervisory example and consistent consequences (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). In the DHA, training should therefore use realistic dilemmas involving gifts, document processing, conflicts of interest, confidential information and pressure from colleagues or members of the public. This practical approach links knowledge of the code to the situations in which officials must exercise judgement, while organisational systems provide the support and accountability needed for that knowledge to influence conduct.

2.7 Service delivery and ethical leadership in South Africa

Upholding ethical leadership in South African public administration remains difficult where corruption, weak controls and improper influence affect organisational decisions. In the DHA, the risk is particularly serious because irregular access to identity and travel documents can compromise both service users and national administrative systems. The Department's dismissal of 18 officials in November 2024 for offences including fraud, corruption and the irregular issuing of documents demonstrates the practical consequences of misconduct (Government of South Africa, 2024). Ethical leadership requires managers to model lawful conduct, protect impartial decision-making, respond consistently to reported breaches and ensure that performance expectations do not reward procedural shortcuts (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Leadership is therefore relevant not only to sanctioning misconduct after it occurs, but also to creating the conditions in which officials can recognise, discuss and resist unethical pressure.

Unethical leadership obstructs service delivery when those in authority tolerate misconduct, use res for improper purposes or apply rules inconsistently. Ethical-climate theory indicates that employees interpret leaders' conduct, organisational practices and accepted routines as signals of the behaviour that is rewarded or sanctioned (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Where leaders model integrity and explain decisions, they strengthen accountability and employees' willingness to act ethically. Conversely, political interference, power struggles and arbitrary supervision may create uncertainty,

discourage reporting and normalise the prioritisation of private or partisan interests. These effects are particularly serious in the DHA because citizens cannot obtain equivalent identity and immigration services from another institution. Ethical leadership must therefore connect public values to practical decisions, protect professional judgement and ensure that operational pressures do not displace lawful and impartial service.

Basheka (2008) argues that although local municipalities in South Africa are positioned as the closest sphere to the people, their capacity to render services is constrained by the lack of accountability and corruption of scarce government res. To improve the delivery of services through ethical leadership, the National Treasury developed reporting templates for provincial treasuries to enhance accountability, monitoring, and evaluation of the entire supply chain management system. These efforts were developed to inhibit public sector corruption, particularly in procurement systems (Ambe & Badenhorst-Weiss, 2012). Therefore, it is argued that the South African public administration has taken greater strides in promoting ethical leadership in the three spheres of government, namely, the national, provincial, and local. However, a vacuum exists with regards to the skills to implement the legal imperatives to guide sound ethical conduct. This calls for ethical leadership that can drive change, transform the functions of the public institutions within the confines of the law, and render quality basic services to the public, who are the consumers of government services.

2.8 Corruption

Corrupt conduct by public officials is prohibited under the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 12 of 2004. Within the DHA, relevant ethical risks include bribery, conflicts of interest, manipulation of applications, identity fraud and the irregular issuing of identity or travel documents. Evidence of these risks is reflected in the Department's dismissal of 18 officials in November 2024 for offences including fraud, corruption and the irregular issuing of documents (Government of South Africa, 2024). These cases show why the code of conduct must be supported by preventive controls, prompt investigation and proportionate disciplinary and criminal consequences.

Financial pressure may create vulnerability, but it does not establish a direct causal explanation for corruption, and low remuneration cannot excuse misconduct. Corrupt conduct is better understood as the interaction of individual motives, opportunity, weak controls, organisational norms and the perceived likelihood of detection and sanction (Fernando & Bandara, 2020). A documented DHA case illustrates the practical risk: in July 2022, two officials were dismissed after one processed 111 documents for a fee and another irregularly issued 13 passports (SAnews, 2022). The case indicates that prevention should combine fair employment conditions with access controls, audit trails, segregation of duties, ethical leadership and credible consequences. This avoids reducing corruption to personal greed while recognising the organisational conditions that may enable abuse.

2.9 Recommendations to improve adherence to ethics and ethos in the DHA in South Africa

Various measures could assist DHA officials and relevant stakeholders to adhere to ethics and ethos. Regular seminars, unit discussions and scenario-based workshops can clarify how public-service values apply to recurring dilemmas such as gifts, conflicts of interest, pressure to accelerate applications and the protection of personal information. For example, a workshop may require officials to apply the code to a request to bypass verification procedures and then identify the appropriate reporting route. Education should complement, rather than replace, fair disciplinary action because officials require both practical guidance and credible accountability. A sound human-re policy should therefore integrate ethics into induction, supervision, performance discussions, professional development and refresher training.

DHA managers, human-re practitioners, ethics officers and the Counter-Corruption and Security Services Branch should support officials to act in accordance with the code of conduct. Employees cannot apply requirements that have not been clearly communicated or practiced, particularly where individual beliefs and workplace norms differ. Basic ethical-awareness programmes should therefore be linked to the Department’s functions and reinforced through induction, case-based learning, coaching and routine supervisory

discussions. Training is most likely to influence conduct when it is accompanied by leadership example, safe advice and reporting channels, and consistent application of consequences (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). The responsibility for an ethical culture consequently rests not only with individual officials but also with the managers and systems that shape daily decisions.

Regarding the improvement of ethos at the South African DHA, Ndukwe et al., (2021) suggests that traditional public sector ethos should be redefined to allow for innovative ideas in service delivery in the public space. Witesman et al. (2023) conclude that a new "synthesised" ethos that draws on the core elements of bureaucratic principles, as well as market-based values, would deliver superior public services.

2.10 Challenges to the conduct and adherence to ethics and ethos by employees and stakeholders in the DHA in South Africa

There are several challenges that employees face with adhering to the ethics and ethos in the DHA. The literature argues that the mismatch between the native cultural ethos and ethical frameworks, based on rational doctrines of enlightenment, are a cause for escalating unethical conducts in the public service. The ethics introduced to the practice of public administration tend to be artificial in relation to the actual custom practices of African diversity, which raises questions on whether Africa is truly free if its ethical values and customs are regarded as unethical in terms of standards that are outside its being. There is also a need to harmonise the legislation governing ethics and the generally accepted cultural values and practices of the South Africans that is informed by authentic African customs (Fernando & Bandara, 2020).

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on ethics, ethos, codes of conduct, ethical leadership, corruption, service delivery and the organisational conditions that influence adherence in the DHA. It also explained the use and limitations of NPM as the study's public-administration perspective. Chapter Three presents and justifies the interpretivist qualitative case-study methodology used to investigate officials' experiences at the Ermelo Regional Office.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology that was adopted for this study. The chapter outlines the primary methods employed to collect data, namely, interviews and document analysis, followed by a description of the analytical procedures used to interpret the findings. Establishing a clear and rigorous methodological approach is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations that guided the research.

3.2 Application of research methods

This research employed an interpretivist paradigm because it sought to understand the meanings that officials at the Ermelo Regional Office assign to ethics, ethos and workplace conduct. Interpretivism recognises that organisational practices are experienced differently according to officials' roles, relationships and work settings. It was therefore suitable for examining how participants understood disciplinary rules, ethical risks, reporting channels, training and environmental influences through their own accounts (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

The study was grounded on the qualitative research approach, as the researcher was interested in exploring the participants' lived experiences and feelings on the constructs under study (Naderifar et al., 2017). The qualitative research was employed as it allowed the participants free reign in sharing their experiences on the conduct and adherence of ethics and ethos by employees and stakeholders at the DHA.

3.3 Data collection method

The study used face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews. Using two modes provided access and flexibility, but it also created a possible risk of variation in rapport and probing. To support consistency, the researcher used the same interview schedule,

explanation of the study and core questions in both modes, and recorded and transcribed the interviews using the same procedure. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate because they enabled participants to describe their experiences freely while allowing the researcher to probe answers relevant to the research objectives (Kakilla, 2021).

The interviews were conducted with the employees at the DHA, comprising senior and lower-level officials. The interview questions focused on the key issues that had already been identified yet with expectations that other issues might emerge. A separate set of interview questions for the directorates at the Ermelo DHA was developed. The interviews were led by a small number of operational questions that were associated with exploring the lived experiences of employees on issues surrounding employee conduct and envisaged ethos and ethics within the DHA. The operational questions provided direction-giving prompts, while follow-up questions emerged based on the direction the participant responses.

Before commencing with the final data collection, a pilot study was conducted with four participants to ascertain how well the questions have been structured and to check whether the participants understand the questions posed. All the participants used in the pilot study were excluded from the final data collection process.

3.4 Sampling method

The population comprised 40 officials employed at the Ermelo Regional Office. Purposive sampling was first used to identify officials who had at least three years of service and whose roles provided relevant experience of the office's ethical requirements and operating environment. Initial participants were approached directly, provided with the study information and invited to participate voluntarily. Snowball sampling was then used when interviewed officials identified colleagues who met the inclusion criterion and could contribute perspectives from other units. Referrals were treated only as introductions; participation remained voluntary and no referring participant was informed whether a colleague took part.

The final sample comprised 15 officials: three from the Office of the Manager, three from Human Re Management, three from Supply Chain Management, two from Immigration, three from Civic Services and one from Information and Communication Technologies.

Recruitment and preliminary coding proceeded together. After the fifteenth interview, additional accounts repeated existing codes and no substantively new themes relevant to the objectives were identified; the sample was therefore considered to have reached data saturation. The number also falls within the five-to-25-participant range discussed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), although saturation and coverage of the six units, rather than the numerical range alone, determined sufficiency. Because purposive and snowball sampling are non-probability techniques, the sample may reflect referral networks and officials who were more willing to discuss the subject; this limitation was considered during interpretation (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017).

3.5 Data analysis

Data gathered from the participants were analysed using the thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis was chosen as it allowed themes to be generated from the collected data (Braun & Clarke 2013:6). The generated themes from the collected data were then be used to make meanings to the views shared by the participants on the research questions.

The analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2021:210) six phases of thematic analysis. First, the researcher familiarized himself with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts while noting initial ideas. Secondly, initial codes were then generated by identifying meaningful features of the data relevant to the research objectives. Thirdly, the related codes were then grouped into potential themes that reflect recurring patterns across participants' responses. Fourthly, the emerging themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represent the dataset. In the Fifth stage, each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its meaning and contribution to the study. Finally, the researcher produced a coherent analytical report by integrating the themes with relevant literature and the theoretical framework.

3.6 Research limitations

The research process can be challenging and results in differing outcomes and results. In this study, one significant limitation that impacted the results is that the data were collected from one, namely, employees at the Ermelo DHA.

3.7 Ethical considerations

During the research process the researcher was mindful of behaving ethically and maintaining integrity throughout the whole research investigation. The following guidelines of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, data storage (Creswell 2013) were followed to ensure that the study remains ethical and scientific:

- Informed consent: To ensure that the participants were not forced to take part in the study but did so in their own free will, the participants were required to sign a consent letter.
- Confidentiality and privacy: The researcher showed respect to all the participants by safeguarding their rights to confidentiality and privacy. No personal details of the participants are disclosed in the study report. The transcriptions were referenced with a unique identifier representing the participants' identities to ensure that confidentiality was observed. All findings are structured in a manner that no participant will be attributed to the findings.
- Data storage: Once all the data were gathered, the researcher securely stored the data in a safe and secure password-protected computer and a lockable safe only accessible to the researcher.
- Feedback: The participants were informed and assured that all data collected would only be used for academic purposes and that the outcomes of the investigation would not be distributed to other parties except the stakeholders that took part in the study. The participants were assured that all the information relating to the study would be made available to them should they need to view it.
- Data collection commenced after the researcher was granted an ethical clearance certificate by UNISA to proceed to collect data.

3.8 Conclusion

The research adopted the qualitative approach to understand the ideas, experiences, and opinions of the participants on the concepts and themes that were introduced in the study. Focusing on a case study provided the study with a specific and practical reach to have a clearly defined focus.

The chapter highlighted the research approach, research design, sampling technique, and the data collection and analysis methods adopted for this study. These methods were explained and justified as appropriate to fulfill the objectives of this study. The ethical considerations and limitations of the study were also explained.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETHICAL CONDUCT INTERVENTIONS AT THE DHA IN SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 Introduction

The department that forms the case study of this research is in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. This chapter focuses on the Ermelo Regional office DHA as the case study.

To guarantee that they offer clients effective and efficient services, DHA employees in South Africa are guided by civil service standards. This chapter discusses the interventions that can help this state entity promote and uphold good behaviour among its employees in accordance with the standards of employees provided in Chapter 9 institutions (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2008).

The following identified measures and interventions have been identified as significant interventions that can help to curb unethical conduct amongst employees at the DHA.

4.2 Measures and mechanisms to ensure ethical conduct

The Constitution's Chapter 9 provides provisions that the public's constitutional rights are upheld and that the government uses legal procedures to formally oppose unethical behaviour and guarantee accountability. These purported Chapter 9 Institutions "are accountable to the National Assembly and shall report on their activities and the fulfilment of their functions to the Assembly at least once a year," according to Section 185(5) of the Constitution. The researcher aimed to improve interventions that could be utilised to improve public sector systems through gathering data from participants on their lived experiences, views and perceptions on issues surrounding their current conduct. It is an all-encompassing strategy that incorporates the views and opinions of public sector role-players together with the assistance of other disciplines. The media, AG, and Public Protector are just a few of the institutional tools that South Africa has in place to address unethical behaviour. Therefore, strategies regarding behaviour may intersect with other viewpoints to create a coherent whole (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2008).

4.2.1 Legislation, judiciary, and the Public Service Commission

One of the ways used by public institutions to curb unethical conduct is the judiciary and legislation systems that keep employees in line in their conduct, ensuring that employees who misbehave in any way are brought to book. The Constitution, together with Public Service Act (Section 20 on Misconduct) and the Labour Relations Act (Section 203 on Codes of Good Practice), also provide enforceable regulations on how managers in public service should conduct themselves. For example, there have been several corruption cases in DHA, as well as convictions that show that the Judiciary is effective (Du Toit, Ströh & Van der Waldt, 2011).

4.2.2 Public Service Commission

The Public Service Commission (PSC) for the Republic of South Africa is an independent and impartial body. No person or organ of the state may interfere with the functioning of the Commission (Mthembu, 2013). In terms of Section 196(4) of Chapter 10 of the Constitution, the PSC applies control and is competent to apply a code of conduct to members of the public service. The PSC has the power and function to investigate, monitor, and evaluate the organisation, administration, and personnel practices of the public service. The Commission may also make recommendations, give directions, and conduct enquiries aimed at ensuring that personnel procedures relating to recruiting, appointments, transfers, promotions, dismissals and/or discharge, and other career incidents of members of the public service comply with the values and principles set out in Section 195 of the Constitution. According to Republic of South Africa (1996), the PSC ensures effectiveness and contributes to conformity in the total system of governance. A unified system of governance suggests efficient and effective delivery of services, a responsive public service, adherence to ethical behaviour by public officials, and a focus on productivity and accountability.

The PSC's function is to promote the basic constitutional values and principles of public administration in the public service as follows:

- A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- Efficiency, economic, and effective use of res must be promoted.

- Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably, and without bias.
- Public administration must be accountable.
- Transparency must be fostered by providing the members of the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information,
- Effective human re management, to maximise human potential, must be cultivated (Republic of South Africa, 1996, section 195).

Moreover, Van Niekerk and Olivier (2012:143–144) state that "the PSC fulfils a central role in the development of the Code of Conduct for the public service that forms the cornerstone of the public service's integrity framework as it sets standards for ethical conduct." For example, one of the strategic objectives of the DHA is "to create an enabling environment by putting in place support services that are effective, efficient, integrated, and that prevent corruption.

4.2.3 Training and guidance

The DHA's standard operating procedures and technological processes change as legislation, security controls and service-delivery systems are updated. Officials therefore require induction and refresher training on the Public Service Code of Conduct, conflicts of interest, gifts, protected disclosures, information security, document verification, fraud indicators, lawful use of discretion and the disciplinary consequences of misconduct. Scenario-based exercises can prepare officials to respond to pressure to bypass verification, disclose personal information or accelerate an application improperly. Training should also explain when and how to seek advice or report suspected wrongdoing. Its purpose is not merely to transmit rules, but to strengthen ethical judgement and consistent application of procedures in situations that expose the Department and the NPR to risk (Garavan et al., 2021).

4.2.4 An ethical code of conduct

According to Cheminais, Van der Waldt and Bayat (2012:87), "the goal of an ethical conduct is to develop a workable framework of moral choice for the public personnel manager." All government departments in South Africa have codes of conduct. The foundation of the Public Service Code of Conduct is contained in Chapter 10 of the

Constitution and is applicable to administrations within every sphere of the government, organs of the state, and public enterprises (Republic of South Africa, 1996). A code of conduct is always of value. Strong forces such as values, norms, and standards direct behaviour at all levels of society. A state can enforce certain norms through legislation, but norms are usually established through voluntary association and freedom of speech within the community.

According to Van der Waldt and Helmbold (2015:130), a code of conduct has the following four main objectives:

- To encourage and maintain responsible behaviour among public officials.
- To promote public confidence in the integrity of public officials.
- To provide guidelines to officials regarding their relationship with other officials, political office-bearers, and members of the public.
- To provide guidelines to officials regarding the exercise of any discretionary powers they may possess.

Through a code of conduct, diverse values may be fixed in a common value system against which all policy implementation actions and policy decisions may be measured (Clapper, 2015). The DHA has developed a code of conduct for officials to ensure that they act within the parameters of the law and that their actions do not infringe the rights of the communities which they serve (Republic of South Africa, 1998b).

Establishing a code of conduct for the public service is a complex process given that the personnel have different ethnic, religious, and educational standards and views. Common ground should thus be found as a starting point. All employees in the public service have a common goal, namely, the fair, efficient, and effective government of all people in South Africa according to the laws of the government of the day. On this basis, a code of conduct can be drawn up (Clapper, 2015).

There is a wide variety of opinions on the causes of unethical behaviour. Although various authors have different views, they agree on a few causes, which this chapter focuses on.

4.3 Possible causes of unethical conduct

Many factors could result in public human re functionaries behaving unethically. Bayat and Meyer (2014:226) discuss the following:

- Greed, which they describe as “avarice and the concomitant striving for personal gain”: Due to greed, public functionaries may seek private gain at public expense, thereby enriching themselves materially.
- The presence of an ethos of corruption in which public functionaries are “wittingly or unwittingly drawn into corruption due to ignorance, or perhaps because they are poorly remunerated” (Gildenhuys, 1991:75).
- Differing ethical standards and norms prevalent in an institution because of the heterogeneity of the personnel corps could lead to “ethical dilemmas, such as moral ambiguity or dualism”. In this instance, public human re managers may find themselves in conflicting situations, in which the views and values of different groups take precedence.

Bateman and Zeithaml (2013:86) mention the following as causes of unethical behaviour:

- Excessive emphasis on short-term gains over long-term considerations.
- Failure to establish and adhere to a written code of ethics.
- Looking for simple solutions to ethical problems.
- Unwillingness by the public human re managers to take an ethical stand that may impose financial costs.
- Looking at ethics solely as a legal issue and not being prepared to go beyond what the law prescribes.
- A lack of clear procedures for handling ethical problems.

Promoting and maintaining ethics in public human re management is not easy. It requires that decision-makers define an ethical issue clearly and identify the relevant values in the situation. In addition, they should carefully weigh the conflicting values (Bateman & Zeithaml, 2013). An awareness of the factors discussed above could assist in promoting ethics among public human re managers.

To ensure management excellence in the public sector, the causes and enabling conditions of unethical conduct must be addressed. Du Toit, Ströh and Van der Waldt (2011) identify deficient control and accountability, complex legislation, inadequate procedures and manuals, deficient management and organisational weaknesses as generic contributors to unethical conduct. These factors are organisational rather than purely personal: unclear rules may create inconsistent decisions, weak supervision may

reduce the perceived likelihood of detection, and impractical procedures may encourage informal workarounds. In the DHA, their combined effect could weaken document verification, confidentiality and impartial service. The value of this framework is therefore its emphasis on systems that managers can improve, while individual officials remain responsible for complying with lawful and ethical requirements.

- Deficient control and accountability to enforce ethical conduct.
- Complex legislation which could lead to different interpretations.
- Inadequate procedures and manuals to guide conduct.
- Deficient management and organisation to direct actions.
- Psychological factors.

4.3.1 Complex legislation

Complex legislation consists of legal and regulatory provisions whose technical language, overlapping requirements or frequent amendment make consistent interpretation difficult. When officials do not receive accessible guidance, legal advice or updated procedural training, they may apply the same requirement differently or rely on informal interpretations. Complexity can also create opportunities for deliberate misuse where control responsibilities are unclear. Managers should therefore translate legal requirements into current operational guidance, provide access to specialist advice and document decisions involving uncertainty. In the DHA, this is necessary to ensure that identity, citizenship and immigration decisions remain lawful, consistent and auditable.

4.3.2 Inadequate procedures and manuals

Procedures and operational manuals should translate legislation and policy into practical steps for officials' day-to-day work. Inadequacy arises when manuals are outdated, difficult to access, inconsistent with current systems, silent on recurring exceptions or insufficiently clear about responsibility and escalation. Officials may then depend on informal instructions or personal judgement, which can produce inconsistent service and create opportunities to bypass controls. Manuals should state the required evidence, verification sequence, segregation of duties, approval levels, record-keeping standards and route for obtaining guidance when an unusual case arises. They should also be

reviewed after policy or system changes and tested with the officials who use them. In the DHA, practical and current guidance reduces uncertainty without removing professional discretion, because officials still need to justify decisions that affect citizens' rights and the integrity of the NPR.

4.3.3 Deficient management and organisation

Deficient management arises when leaders fail to plan, allocate res, supervise performance, respond to risks or apply rules consistently. In such an environment, unaccountable behaviour may include ignoring verification requirements, concealing errors, favouring particular applicants, failing to report conflicts of interest or permitting unauthorised access to systems and records. Inequitable behaviour may involve applying procedures differently according to personal relationships or other irrelevant considerations. Weak monitoring can allow these practices to continue because output is not linked to the quality and legality of decisions. DHA managers are therefore responsible for setting clear expectations, reviewing exception reports, separating incompatible duties, responding promptly to concerns and ensuring that performance pressure does not reward shortcuts. Effective management does not eliminate individual responsibility; it creates the controls and ethical climate within which responsible conduct is expected and observable.

4.3.4 Psychological factors

Individual motives such as the desire for status, power or financial gain may influence unethical choices, but they operate within an organisational context. Opportunity, weak controls, accepted workplace practices and the perceived likelihood of detection can either restrain or enable those motives (Fernando & Bandara, 2020). Public officials should therefore recognise personal conflicts and temptations while managers reduce opportunities for abuse through segregation of duties, monitoring and a clear ethical climate.

> …one explanation for unethical behaviour in workplaces is that money – the lack of it, or the desire for its acquisition, or fear of losing it – brings out the worst in

human nature… attracts greedy, ruthless people who have no hesitation in being manipulative, exploitative and devious.

Personal interests are more likely to displace the public interest when opportunity, weak accountability and permissive organisational norms occur together. Ethical conduct therefore requires both individual self-control and institutional arrangements that make improper decisions visible and consequential (Fernando & Bandara, 2020).

4.4 Ethical considerations in communication: A macro perspective

Ethics in the public sector is about the application of moral standards in the course of official work. Public officials do not simply carry out specific instructions or orders from a higher authority; they make valued judgements that have implications for their professional and ethical standing. This poses a challenge for public officials when they perform their work. Ethics in the public sector refers to a category of discretionary decision-making, which involves moral standards in official work in the context of a specific environment (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022).

A government needs a strong, stable, and secure society to prosper and to ensure the well-being of the public. The three basic ideals in government ethics are promoting standards of living, improving service, and increasing the loyalty and happiness of the officials (Mthembu, 2013). Community ethics means that there is reasonable consensus within a community about ethical norms and values. This consensus forms the basis for the expectations that the community has of public institutions and officials.

4.4.1 The unique ethical context of government communication

Government decisions and actions often affect more people and with greater consequences than business decisions. Therefore, communicating in government tends to be more important yet often more difficult than communicating in business. According to Mudau (2015:17), the main differences between government and private sector communication are as follows:

- **Openness and transparency:** Since government is seen as the “public’s business”, individual citizens or groups deem it their right to know what the government does. The media correspondingly consider it their duty to report on

virtually every facet of government judged newsworthy, or simply of public interest. The decisions of public officials are more likely to receive public scrutiny than those of their private sector counterparts.

- **Source of information:** Governments have also become more active acquirers and senders of information. No private company collects as much information about citizens as the government does. Government agencies acquire a wide variety of information through, for example, censuses and taxation. In this regard, there is growing tension between the public's right to privacy and the government's right to know. The main reasons the government communicates with the public include keeping the public informed about government policies, procedures, requirements, and conditions; gleaning citizen feedback about them; and complying with citizens' requests. Government institutions provide public information through written position and progress reports, public meetings, public opinion polls and surveys, network programming (internet, intranet, e-mail), media conferences, interest groups, political parties, public service announcements, newspapers, magazines, radio and television news coverage, other media, and non-governmental organisations (Mudau, 2015). On 11 May 2025, the DHA announced that approximately 1.4 million naturalised citizens and lawful permanent residents would be eligible to apply for Smart ID cards and use the eHomeAffairs platform from 12 May 2025 (Government of South Africa, 2025). This communication illustrates how timely, accessible information can support equal access to services and reduce uncertainty among affected service users.
- **Multiplicity and range of audiences:** Not only do governments communicate more frequently on a greater range of subjects than businesses do, but government communication also typically involves more audiences. This diversity of audiences and levels of communication requires the ability to analyse audiences and flexibility in communicating with them (Gortner, 2014).
- **Statutory framework:** The type and method of communication tend to be more stringently regulated in government than in business. In South Africa, for example, the Constitution (Section 32) and the White Paper on Service Delivery demand access to government information.

- **Political environment:** There is a need for effective and frequent communication between elected political representatives and public officials who need to follow political decisions. A high level of trust between a minister and a director-general, as the administrative head of a department, is of importance to ensure accountability, consistency, and coordination. Public institutions are also more likely to experience intervention from political party officials, legislators, public interest groups, and other political role-players than are typical private institutions (Mthembu, 2013). According to Mudau (2015), the political environment refers to the political processes, ideologies, structures, and outcomes emanating from the interaction between groups and individuals in society in the process of competing for scarce public res. A political environment manifests itself in the authoritative allocation of these res through the formal parliamentary process.

4.5 Ethical considerations in communication: A micro perspective

From a micro perspective, public managers must consider how their decisions affect employees, service users and the use of scarce resources. Ethical judgement requires managers to identify the values at stake, assess lawful alternatives and explain decisions in a manner that can withstand public scrutiny (McLeod, 2015). This approach reveals the value dimension of decisions that may otherwise appear purely technical and supports fair labour practices, accountable resource use and consistent service delivery.

Fourie (2013:170) states that although ethics can affect managerial work in any number of ways, the following three areas are of major concern for managers:

- The relationship between the public institution and officials; the relationship between public officials and the institution; and
- The interaction between the public institution and the community.

Managerial ethics also come into play in the relationship between the institution and other outside groups, such as organised interest groups. Public managers should be fair in the delivery of products and services, sensitive to different needs, and honest in the handling of res.

4.6 Guidelines and codes of conduct that underpin ethics in the DHA

The DHA is guided by a code of conduct and a code of ethics to ensure ethical behavior from its employees. The subsequent subsections explore and explain these guidelines in detail.

4.6.1 Impact of the Constitution and legal frameworks on ethics

The legal framework within which a democracy functions is the result of the ethics of democracy. The Constitution is the supreme law of the South African democratic landscape. As the Constitution is written in broad terms, certain sets of legislation and policies must be adopted to elucidate what it in fact signifies. In addition, South Africa is one of the countries where common law principles form part of the body of law.

One of the democratic principles in this constitutional democracy is that all legislations and public action is subject to review by the Constitutional Court (South African Board for People Practices, 2014). Mthembu (2013) states that the legal framework is the basis for communicating the minimum obligatory standards and principles of behaviour for every public servant. Laws and regulations state the fundamental value of public service and should provide the framework for guidance, investigation, disciplinary action, and prosecution. However, according to Bendix (2017), little attention is given to a "system of ethics" as a "regulator" in the employment relationship. While businesses have realised the need for ethics in conducting their business, this has often not translated into an "ethical framework for the conduct of the employment relationship" (Bendix, 2017).

In defining a constitution, Botes (2015) notes that it is the embodiment of the will and wishes of the citizens. Botes et al. (2006) further describe a constitution as a solemn treaty between individuals, groups, ethnic communities, religious denominations, private business, and many other forms of social associations to acknowledge the state and the government as the organ charged with the authoritative allocation of values. These authors further point out that provision is made in a constitution for how administration should be exercised. Craythorne (2006) compares a constitution to a door, noting that "the constitutional door opens to provide rights and obligations and to define and circumscribe the structures and institutions for the nation" and arguing that it closes to those who choose to violate the rights of others, and twist structures and institutions for

their own purpose. In other words, the Constitution sets out ethical guidelines for public managers and provides standards against which to measure performance and deviations. According to Section 2 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the Constitutional Act is the supreme law of the Republic and is binding to all legislative, executive, and judicial organs of the state at all levels of government. This brings about a fundamental adaptation to public management, as political supremacy is now vested in the Constitution (Van der Waldt & Helmbold, 2015:8). This means that public management must function in accordance with the guidelines and restrictions of the Constitution, while public managers must act within a strict framework of laws and regulations (Van der Waldt & Helmbold, 2015:10). Through promoting and ensuring ethics in public management, Chapter 10 of the Constitution outlines the basic values and principles governing public administration (Republic of South Africa, 1996:83). Section 196(1) (2) states that there shall be a single PSC for the Republic, which shall be independent and impartial (Wessels, 2012). The Commission shall function without fear in the interest of the maintenance of effective and efficient public management and the promotion of high standards of professional ethics in the public sector. Unethical conduct in the form of injustices of the past is recognised early in the Preamble, and the Bill of Rights is entrenched in Chapter 2 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996). To atone for the unethical conduct of the past, affirmative action principles, although not referred to by name, find reflection in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Hugo, 2012:81).

Section 195(1) is particularly important in public management. According to the Section, ethics in public management may be promoted through the adherence to democratic values and the principles enshrined in the Constitution. Section 7(I) refers to the Bill of Rights as the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa, and affirms democratic values as comprising, among others, human dignity, equality, and freedom. Chapter 2 on rights consists of 27 rights and sections on the application, limitation, conditions for suspensions, enforcement, and interpretation of the Bill of Rights. According to Venter (2014:224), human dignity is the most fundamental value from which other values derive. Section 10 of the Constitution emphasises this, stating that “Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.” Therefore, it can be inferred

that public managers should take cognisance of democratic values in the performance of human re functions to act in accordance with the Constitution and the promotion and maintenance of ethics in public management.

4.6.2 The statutory and political framework

Du Toit and Van der Waldt (2009:125) describe statutory as the "legal provisions in terms of which [a] society's activities are directed and which can influence the lives of individuals in society." This means that the laws and regulations that apply demark the statutory environment in which we live. They serve as guidelines for which we must direct our lives, telling us what we are allowed to do and what we are not allowed to do. Should we contravene them, we should expect to be punished. The Collins English Dictionary (2012:1422) explains statutory "as prescribed or followed by statute." In the context of this study, particularly on the statutory framework within which services must be delivered, the researcher describes a statutory framework as a framework and prescribed by legislation. In South Africa, the Constitution prescribes how the government must be structured in all three spheres. The Constitution is also specific on the composition of government implements (or organs).

According to Cheminais et al. (2013), a political environment refers to the political processes, ideologies, structures, and outcomes emanating from the interaction between groups and individuals in society in the process of competing for scarce public res, and it manifests itself in the authoritative allocation of these res through the formal parliamentary process. Du Toit and Van der Waldt (2009) describe the political framework as the environment created and manipulated through the activities of different social groups. An example is the ideologies of the African National Congress (ANC) that were translated into the policies of the government when it came into power. Such policies include the Affirmative Action Policy, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, and the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998. Section 195 of the Constitution stipulates that public administration should adhere to the following principles:

- A high standard of professional ethics.
- Impartial, fair, and equitable provision of services.
- Effective, efficient, and economic utilisation of res.

- Accountability, transparency, and development orientation.

In view of this initiative by the government, a foundation was lain on which the public sector was to develop a culture of professional service ethos. Furthermore, ethical standards and professional service ethos were realised through skills development and training.

4.6.3 Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act 97 of 1998)

The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 seeks to develop the skills of the South African workforce, improve workers' quality of life and employment prospects, increase workplace productivity and encourage employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment. It also supports learnerships, workplace training and measures intended to redress disadvantages through education and skills development (Republic of South Africa, 1998a). For public institutions, these purposes provide a statutory basis for continuous development, including training that strengthens professional and ethical competence.

The Act provides for an institutional and financial framework involving the National Skills Authority, National Skills Fund, Sector Education and Training Authorities, labour centres and workplace skills planning. It also encourages cooperation between public and private institutions so that workplace training can lead to recognised learning and occupational competence (Republic of South Africa, 1998a).

For most government departments, the current challenges are to maintain or improve performance in an environment of constant change. Public servants and their respective departments need to review the implications of such changes regularly to adapt their activities to the new challenges. According to Maile and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022), new activities require the refinement of existing skills or the acquisition of new skills. While it is acknowledged that several legislations and policies enacted served to restore the professional service ethos, the public sector could not have achieved much without the 1996 Constitution, a document that will be discussed in the next subsection.

4.6.4 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 Of 1996)

The South African 1996 Constitution is a comprehensive document covering what the founding body regarded as necessary to move the country into an era of true democracy. It starts with several founding provisions and a comprehensive Bill of Rights.

The further provisions of the Constitution cover the spheres of government and their functional areas, judicial bodies, institutions supporting constitutional democracy, public administration, security services, traditional leaders, and public finance. The Constitution ends with general provisions focusing on international law, the national flag, oaths and solemn affirmations, and election procedures. What is of importance for the purpose of this chapter is the system of democratic values established by the Constitution.

The Constitution lays the foundation for ethical behaviour in the South African public sector. It outlines the democratic values and principles guiding public administration. In terms of Section 195(a) of the Constitution, “public administration must be accountable and a high standard of professional ethics must be promoted.” According to Republic of South Africa (1996), the Constitution compels that the actions of public officials should be in line with the values and principles in public administration and be upheld by all public personnel in the provisioning of services to society. The Constitution also makes provision for the establishment of institutional bodies, such as the AG, the Public Protector, and the PSC, which all play various roles in anti-corruption.

The Constitution provides the binding framework within which ethical questions in the public sector must be addressed. Democratic values are not rigid in the sense that they prevent judgement; rather, principles such as dignity, equality, accountability and fairness establish the limits within which public officials exercise discretion. These values make public institutions answerable to citizens and subject administrative action to legal and public scrutiny (Republic of South Africa, 1996). For the DHA, constitutional legitimacy therefore depends on both lawful outcomes and fair procedures when officials process applications, protect personal information and communicate decisions.

Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights forms the foundation for building work and service relationships in the public sector. The Bill of Rights of all people in South Africa affirms the democratic values of humanity, equality, and freedom, and obliges the state to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights in the Bill. It promotes the following norms and principles which form part of the political culture:

- Equity is important, as all public officials must have equal access to opportunities. All staff must be treated equally and given the same opportunities.
- Fairness, which implies that all public officials must be treated in a fair and just way.
- Responsibility and accountability, in which the government accepts responsibility, and being responsible for accounting to society for what has or has not been done (Bayat & Meyer, 2014:35).

Political culture, in turn, gave birth to a culture of professional ethos, which is viewed as the administrative culture. The latter comprised the following elements:

- Efficiency (both internal and external): Efficiency requires that public officials realise that they are working with limited budgets. On the other hand, the public is ignorant of the wide spectrum of society's expectations. This situation requires efficiency, effectiveness, and economy of government institutions and public officials. However, the public also demands efficiency, effectiveness, and economy from government institutions and public servants.
- Productivity: Programmes must promote the development of more innovative work practices, which will maximise productivity and increase customer responsiveness.
- Performance management: Organisations should evaluate individuals' job performance. When this is done correctly, employees, their supervisors, the human re section, and, ultimately, the organisation, benefit by ensuring that individual efforts contribute to the organisation's strategic focus.
- Flexibility: To ensure that training and education programmes are designed flexibly to meet the individual and changing needs of departments.
- Public participation: Public managers must take the initiative in identifying and implementing mechanisms that will accommodate the public's need to participate in the process of public decision-making and other management.
- Ethical conduct: The normative standards and guidelines regulating the behaviour and ethical conduct of public employees. These norms emanate from outside the organisation in the form of the manifestation of community values, laws regulating the ethical conduct of public employees, and ethical codes of conduct determined

by professional and regulatory bodies (Cheminais, Van der Waldt & Bayat, 2012:34).

The elements are also indicative of professionalism. It could further be argued that any law or conduct in the public sector not consistent with the demands of the Constitution is invalid. For this reason, the authority and legitimacy of the Constitution in the activities of the public sector cannot be overemphasised. It could be said that the public sector is bound to the demands of the Constitution. The researcher argues that the Constitution is an important document for the public sector because it meets the following criteria for legitimacy:

- A sovereign, democratic, and constitutional state based on universally accepted values, such as universal adult suffrage and a multi-party system of government to ensure an accountable, responsive, and open government.
- A Bill of Rights, which protects the individual from the exercise of state power.
- Democratic values and principles.

4.6.5 White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele Principles)

The paradigm for service delivery in the past was supposed to be in accordance with certain normative principles, as the introduction of Batho Pele principles added a new dimension to service delivery. Batho Pele prescribes the rights of members of the public on what they are legitimately entitled to. Batho Pele also provides specific guidelines to public servants in terms of the regard which they should have for the rights of those whom they serve. The new dimension that the Batho Pele principles add to service delivery has ushered in a new paradigm on public service delivery and reemphasised the importance of the client as the recipient of services (Fox & Meyer, 2015).

However, the public sector does not seem to measure up well to these requirements partly because of the failure of the management to adhere to the performance contract in terms of the Public Service Act (Proclamation 103 of 1994: Section 12). According to Lekoeneha (2000), many public managers are threatened and uncomfortable with improvement efforts because they feel that they will lose power, prestige, and control.

Over and above the legacies of the past such as a lack of representation, corruption, and poor performance, the oversupply of unskilled labour and problematic labour relations, which were characterised by rules tailored for control and not proper management, the

discrepancies and deceased authority of moral standards reigned supreme. Such challenges can be addressed through supreme effort, tremendous resilience, and the contractive participation of all role-players (Republic of South Africa, 1998c). In line with the Constitutional principles, as mentioned earlier, the White paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery calls on provincial departments to make service delivery a priority. This can become a reality if the following is maintained:

- Equity and fairness.
- An appreciation for the wider public interest.
- Making informed judgements and making public officials accountable.
- Safeguarding public confidence in the integrity of government by being honest.
- Avoiding conduct that creates the appearance of impropriety, or which is otherwise unbefitting for public servants (Denhardt, 2013:236-241).

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Section 6 of Chapter 3) lays down a set of moral guidelines for which public servants must do their work to provide services to the satisfaction of their customers. Eight principles have been identified and are known as the Batho Pele principles, which means “the people first”. These are consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, openness and transparency, redress, and value for money. These Batho Pele principles should be regarded as “a guidance by all levels of Government and the wider public sector when introducing their service delivery programmes” (South Africa. Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997). The Batho Pele principles were explained in Chapter Two of this study.

4.7 Code of conduct

A code of conduct is a written statement of principles and standards that guides employees’ decisions and behaviour. In the South African public service, the code provides a common ethical framework for relations with the public, colleagues, political office-bearers and the state, and it clarifies the conduct expected when officials exercise discretion (Nagiah, 2012). Its preventive value lies in communicating boundaries before misconduct occurs, while disciplinary procedures provide a basis for responding when those boundaries are breached. Within the DHA, the code is especially important where

officials handle confidential information, verify identity and immigration applications, and control access to enabling documents.

Codes of conduct select and organise general public-service values into standards that are relevant to an institution's functions. They may address impartial service, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, gifts, use of state res, reporting duties and compliance with lawful instructions. A code is narrower than the complete ethical framework because legislation, regulations, departmental procedures, leadership practices and oversight mechanisms also shape conduct (Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008). Its effectiveness therefore depends on clear communication, practical training, managerial example, safe reporting and consistent enforcement.

- A relationship with the legislature and the executive and executive: An employee puts the public interest first in the execution of their duties, loyally executes the policies of the government of the day in the performance of official duties as contained in all statutory and other prescripts.
- A relationship with the public (Chapman, 2012:26): An employee will serve the public in an unbiased and impartial manner in order to create confidence in the public service; is polite, helpful, and reasonably accessible in their dealings with the public; treats members of the public as customers who are entitled to receive high standards of service at all times; and does not unfairly discriminate against any member of the public on account of race, gender, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, political persuasion, conscience, belief, culture or language (Chapman, 2012:28).

It is apparent from the above that the code of conduct envisages certain behaviour from public officials. However, a code of conduct is not a panacea for unethical conduct as it has both advantages and disadvantages.

4.7.1 Advantages of codes of conduct

Codes of conduct have several advantages. They communicate ethical expectations in language that can be tailored to the recurring situations of a profession or institution, provide a shared basis for discussing difficult decisions and support the socialisation of new employees. When employees participate in their interpretation through induction,

workshops and case discussions, codes can clarify how broad principles apply to daily work (Mpinganjira & Roberts-Lombard, 2016). Their limitations are equally important. Broad principles may be difficult to apply without operational guidance, while highly detailed rules cannot anticipate every situation in which discretion is required. Codes may also lose credibility where leaders disregard them, enforcement is inconsistent or internal practices reward conduct that contradicts stated values (Kaptein & Schwartz, 2008). In the DHA, a code can therefore guide ethical judgement, but it cannot compensate for weak controls, unsafe reporting arrangements or a workplace culture that tolerates misconduct.

4.7.2 Disadvantages of codes of conduct

A central disadvantage of a code of conduct is that it may have little influence where implementation and enforcement mechanisms are weak. Employees must know the code, understand how it applies to their work and trust that similar cases will receive fair and consistent treatment. The code must therefore be linked to advice, training, supervision, protected reporting, investigation and proportionate disciplinary action (Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022). Even with these limitations, it remains an important component of ethics management because it states the standards against which conduct can be assessed.

A code of conduct channels officials' discretion by connecting personal judgement and technical competence to public-service values. In the DHA, it supports two related purposes: preventing maladministration that causes delay, inconsistency or waste, and deterring corrupt conduct undertaken for improper benefit. These purposes require more than the publication of a document. Management must monitor high-risk processes, communicate standards, investigate reported breaches and apply consequences fairly. The code is therefore most effective when it forms part of an integrated ethical system rather than operating as an isolated statement of principle.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the various measures and mechanisms that the DHA can implement to ensure ethical conduct amongst its employees. The interventions outlined in the

chapter are key in making sure that employees at the DHA can be able to serve customers while upholding the standards expected of them as employees in the public service. The next chapter analyses and presents the data collected from the study participants.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and presents the data collected from the study participants. The participants of the study responded to questions concerning ethical behaviour and ethos in their assigned tasks and roles at the DHA Ermelo office.

The main aim of the study was to explore officials' adherence to ethics and ethos at the DHA's Ermelo Regional Office. The secondary objectives of the study sought to:

i. To examine how ethics and ethos are reflected in the disciplinary code, ethical-risk processes, reporting channels and ethics training at the Ermelo Regional Office.

ii. To identify the environmental conditions that influence the conduct and behaviour of officials at the Ermelo Regional Office.

iii. To recommend measures through which the authorities at the Ermelo Regional Office can strengthen adherence to ethics and ethos and curb bribery, fraud and the irregular issuing of documents.

The data gathered from the participants will add to knowledge on the employees' lived experiences on ethical conduct and ethos issues in the Department. Additionally, data collected and interpreted will assist to consolidate recommendations, solutions, and guidelines on how DHA authorities at the Ermelo office can curb immoral behaviour amongst employees (taking bribes, issuing fraudulent documents etc) amongst employees in the different departments various departments.

5.2 Sample distribution

Table 5.1: Demographics of the participants

Groups	Participants	Ages	Current positions	No of Years/Tenure	Number of Participants
A	**Office of the Manager**				
	Participant 1	**50**	**Office Manager**	**10**	**3**
	Participant 2	**47**	**Assistant Director**	**7**	
	Participant 3	**39**	**Senior Admin clerk**	**9**	
B	**Human Resource Management Division**				
	Participant 1	**47**	**Human Resource Manager**	**10**	**3**
	Participant 2	**37**	**Assistant Director (HR)**	**8**	
	Participant 3	**33**	**Senior Admin clerk**	**6**	
C	**Supply Chain Management**				
	Participant 1	**52**	**Procurement Manager**	**15**	**3**
	Participant 2	**40**	**Procurement Officer**	**9**	
	Participant 3	**28**	**Procurement Clerk**	**7**	
D	**Immigration Section**				
	Participant 1	**44**	**Senior Immigration Officer**	**6**	**2**

	Participant 2	**29**	**Immigration Officer**	**4**	
E	**Civic Services**				
	Participant 1	**52**	**Civic Service Supervisor**	**14**	**3**
	Participant 2	**40**	**Civic Service Clerk**	**12**	
	Participant 3	**43**	**Clerk (Transport)**	**15**	
F	**Information and Communication Technologies**				
	Participant 1	**42**	**Assistant Director (ICT)**	**14**	**1**

5.2.1 Age

The age ranges of the sample, as presented in Table 5.1, revealed a very mature sample of professionals in the organisation. Two employees were between 20 and 30 years old, another two between 30 and 40 years old, six were between 40 and 50 years old, and another two between 50 and 60 years. The age ranges reflect that the Departments' majority of employees are older employees, the department should consider employing younger employees as the older employees will retire soon.

5.2.2 Current position

The sample of employees comprised several professionals from different units in the Department. Three employees are from the Office of the Manager, another three employees from the Human Re Management Division, a further three employees from the Supply Chain Management, while two employees were from the Immigration section, three employees were from the Civic Services, and one employee from Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

5.2.3 Tenure

The tenure of the participants at the DHA is summarised in Table 5.1. The findings indicate that only one participant has been employed in the Department for 1–5 years, while six participants have been employed for 6–10 years, and five participants for 11–15 years. These results show that the majority of the participants (n = 11) have been employed in the Department for a considerable period, reflecting relatively high retention rates.

5.3 Themes consolidated from the data

Table 5.2: Coding framework

Theme – Office of the Manager	Sub-themes
Organisation's disciplinary code aligned (ethics and envisaged ethos practice).	Disciplinary code aligned, universal.
Ethical risk areas	Ethical risks areas identified, ethical risks isolated.
Accessible safe reporting channels	Channels developed, channels promote transparency, accountability and empower employees and citizens.
Training (ethical principles, standards and decision-making)	Training needs improvement, Training essential.
Environmental conditions (conduct and behaviour of employees)	Induction (coaching and Mentoring, autonomy, unethical environment, Toxic/overly hierarchical culture, pressure to meet targets, unrealistic goals, leadership and supervision, resource constraints.

Theme – Human Resource Management Division	**Sub-themes**
Organisation's disciplinary code aligned – ethics and envisaged ethos practice.	Aligned
Ethical risk areas.	Systems in place, No regular identification systems
Accessible safe reporting channels.	Channels not satisfactory, Reasonable reporting channels, culture of transparency and trust.
Training – ethical principles, standards and decision-making.	Workshops conducted and should be prioritised
Environmental conditions – conduct and behaviour of employees	Conducive environment, transparent, accountable, ethical environment, leadership behaviour.
Theme – Supply chain management	**Sub-themes**
Organisation's disciplinary code aligned – ethics and envisaged ethos practice.	Not aligned.
Ethical risk areas.	Present, not efficient and effective.
Accessible safe reporting channels.	Accessible safe reporting channels present, accessible safe reporting channels should be implemented
Training – ethical principles, standards and decision-making.	Comply with laws and regulations, impact customer loyalty and trust, equip officials with the knowledge.

Environmental conditions – conduct and behaviour of employees.	Poor support from management, abuse and toxic working environment, stressful environment, rewards, Organisational processes, leadership, society expectations, political pressure.
Theme – Immigration section	**Sub-themes**
Organisation's disciplinary code aligned – ethics and envisaged ethos practice.	Penalises any conduct or behaviour that does not align with ethical code, reinforces ethics and ethos.
Ethical risk areas.	Policy present, no compliance officer
Accessible safe reporting channels.	Safe reporting channels implemented, Channels to be effective and efficient (transparent).
Training – ethical principles, standards and decision-making.	Not enough training, training should concentrate on ethical behaviour (keeping private information safe, adhering to laws and rules etc), Training promotes service delivery and efficiency.
Environmental conditions – conduct and behaviour of employees.	Environment with highly trained employees, safe working environment.
Theme – Civic services	**Sub-themes**
Organisation's disciplinary code aligned – ethics and envisaged ethos practice.	Aligned with ethics and envisaged ethos.
Ethical risk areas.	Not efficient and effective, isolated.

Reporting channels.	Protected disclosure encouraged, whistle blowers should be protected, union representatives, good access to reporting channels – toll-free number.
Training	Implemented efficiently and effectively
Environmental conditions (conduct and behaviour of employees)	Dictatorial management, resource shortages, unsuitable building conditions and reduced staff morale.
Theme – Information and communication technologies	**Sub-themes**
Organisation's disciplinary code aligned (ethics and envisaged ethos practice).	Disciplinary code aligns with the Department's code of ethics and envisaged ethos.
Ethical risk areas.	Audits and random application sampling are used to identify ethical risks.
Safe reporting channels.	Channels implemented.
Training	Ethics and code-of-conduct training was perceived as irregular and reactive.
Environmental conditions (conduct and behaviour of employees)	Leadership, organisational culture, political interference, power struggles, workload.

5.3.1 Group A: Office of the Manager

5.3.1.1 Organisations' disciplinary code aligned: Ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Table 5.3: Organisations' disciplinary code aligned: Ethics and envisaged ethos practices

Main question: In your view is the Department's disciplinary code aligned with envisaged ethics and ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The disciplinary code in the South African Public sector is universal. It then remains with the implementing department to ensure that it aligns its ethics and ethos with the disciplinary code. In summary, the DHA's disciplinary code is aligned.*"*	Aligned with the public-service-wide disciplinary framework.
P2	*"*The organisation's disciplinary code set rules and guidelines on how to deal with unacceptable behaviour in the workplace and guide on processes to be followed when conducting disciplinary action which align with the code of ethics and practices set by the organisation*"*	Aligned with the organisation's ethics and disciplinary procedures.

The participants from the Office of the Manager were asked to share their views on whether the organisation's disciplinary code aligns with its code of ethics and the ethos it aims to promote. P1 indicated that the organisation's disciplinary code is indeed aligned with its ethical framework and the anticipated ethos practices. P1 further explained that they regard the code as universal in its application and intent.

5.3.1.2 Ethical risk areas

Table 5.4: Ethical risk areas

Main question: Based on your experience what is your view on the Ethical risk areas in the organisation?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The department complies a risk register annually that identifies all the risks in its activities and functions. This included identification of ethical risks. Office managers identify risks in their key functions and submit their inputs to the provincial office to form part of the provincial risk register. The risk register is reviewed from time to time to determine the impact of the interventions deployed.*"*	Office-level risks are consolidated into the provincial risk register and reviewed periodically.
P2	*"*The department have a formal identification of ethical risks and such risks are multi-faced. Home Affairs has implemented controls to mitigate risk, such as risk registers and audit reports.*"*	Ethical risks areas identified.
P3	"The regular identification of ethical risk areas in public institutions happens sporadically. The institution should conduct regular ethical-risk assessments and audits, develop a system to monitor common risks such as corruption or conflicts of interest, and encourage feedback from staff and stakeholders to identify ethical vulnerabilities. The participant concluded by saying that a lack of regular assessments can leave the Department exposed to potential ethical breaches."	P3

The participants were requested to share their opinions on the organisation's ethical risk areas. P1 and P2 reported the Department as having regular and formal identification of

ethical risk areas, while P3 noted isolated cases of the implementation of ethical risk areas.

5.3.1.3 Training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making in the DHA

Table 5.5: Training (Ethical principles, standards, and decision-making)

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Training on ethics in general in the department needs serious attention. While the department is trying through induction and other training but more needs to the done in ethics. When I look at the rate in which officils are charged, jailed and dismissed due to unethical behaviour, I am of the view that training is really needed on ethics.*"*	Training needs to be effective and efficient.
P3	*"*Regular and structured training is essential for embedding ethical standards. Her perceptions are: • Gaps: Many employees may lack comprehensive training on ethical principles and how to apply them in complex situations. • Recommendations: Training should focus on real-life scenarios, decision-making frameworks, and reinforcing the department's core values. • Impact: Continuous training fosters an ethical culture and empowers staff to handle ethical dilemmas effectively.*"*	Training implemented.

The participants' perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making within the DHA were also explored. P2 stated that the area "needs serious attention" and that current training is insufficient. P3 similarly emphasised the importance of such training, reporting on importance of training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making in the DHA.

5.3.1.4 Environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Table : Environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials

Main question: In your view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Employees are taken through an induction process to follow them into the Home Affairs or public service environment. It is known that officials operate in an environment requiring them to exercise their discretionary powers, hence, I have indicated that this environment should not be blamed for them not discharging their duties according to the dictates of the prescripts.*"*	Induction -Coaching and Mentoring, autonomy.
P2	*"*Some individual officials get tempted to commit fraud and corruption by issuing documents unlawful to community in exchange for money.*"*	Unethical environment
P3	"Several environmental factors influence the behaviors of officials, those factors are; • Workplace culture: A toxic or overly hierarchical culture can discourage ethical behavior. • Pressure to meet targets: Unrealistic goals may push employees to cut corners or engage in unethical practices. • Leadership and supervision: Ethical behavior is influenced by the example set by leaders. Resource constraints: Lack of adequate tools or training can lead to frustration and errors."	Toxic/overly hierarchical culture, pressure to meet targets, unrealistic goals, leadership and supervision, resource constraints.

The views of participants from the Office of the Manager show that environmental influences operate at both organisational and individual levels. P1 referred to induction, coaching and mentoring as mechanisms that prepare officials to exercise discretion responsibly, while P2 identified exposure to opportunities for fraud and corruption. P3 described a toxic or overly hierarchical culture as one in which authority is concentrated, employees may be reluctant to question decisions and ethical concerns may not be raised openly. Pressure to meet unrealistic targets may further encourage shortcuts where res and supervision are inadequate. These accounts indicate that hierarchy is not inherently unethical; the risk arises when it suppresses constructive challenge, weakens accountability or prevents officials from seeking guidance. Leadership example, realistic performance expectations and adequate res therefore shape whether discretion is exercised consistently with the Department's ethical requirements.

5.3.2 Group B: Human Re Management Division

5.3.2.1 Organisation's disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Table 5.6: Disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Main question: In your view is the organisation's disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The organisation's disciplinary code is good but requires some sort of improvement.*"*	Requires some improvement.
P2	*"*Every transgression in the disciplinary code is aligned with the sanction.*"*	Aligned with code of ethics and ethics.
P3	*"*Aligned, however it lacks implementation and stricter measures.*"*	Aligned with code of ethics and ethics.

Participants from the Human Re Management Division shared their views on the organisations' disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice. P2 and P3 noted that the Department's disciplinary code is aligned with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice, while P1 advised that the Department's disciplinary code requires improvement to align with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice.

5.3.2.2 Ethical risk areas

Table 5.7: Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Main question: In your experience does the organisation have regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Systems and policies are in place; however, there is always a space of improvement*"*	Systems in place.
P2	*"*Through internal communication the department does on a regular basis inform officials about the risks which may impact ethical conduct and areas*"*	Systems in place.
P3	*"*The organisation does not have regular and formal identification of risk areas because had they had regular identification risks areas the department would not be facing a lot of problems that is currently facing. Risks are usually identified once a problem arises, like the cases of identity theft and follow instances it poses as a potential risk when something is blown out proportion, only then they management will focus on preventative measures*"*	No regular identification systems

The participants shared their views on the organisation's ethical risk areas. P1 and P2 confirmed that the Department has regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas, while P3 shared that the Department does not have regular identification systems.

5.3.2.3 Accessible safe reporting channels

Table 5.8: Accessible safe reporting channels

Main question: Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"S*afe reporting channels are not satisfactory as there is a huge gap from Senior and Junior Officials. As a result, the safe reporting channels within the Department are compromised. Whistle blowing is indeed promoted together with the protection of confidential information*"*	Channels not satisfactory
P2	*"*The department has established reasonable reporting channels*"*	Reasonable reporting channels
P3	*"*Easily accessible safe reporting channels are crucial for promoting transparency and accountability. They allow individuals to report concerns, such as misconduct, harassment or corruption without fear of retaliation. The participant further mentioned that whistleblowing must be encouraged and reporting of incidents, protecting whistle-blowers and preventing retaliation. Also fostering a culture of transparency and trust enabling prompt investigation and resolution.*"*	Culture of transparency and trust.

The participants were asked about their views on safe reporting channels. P1 stated the reporting channels are not satisfactory, while P2 reported that the reporting channels are not reasonable, and P3 advocated for the implementation of reporting channels.

5.3.2.4 Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Table 5.9: Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Workshops on ethics are coordinated.*"*	Workshops conducted
P2	*"*The department does provide workshops, however they tend to benefit employees at head office not those in provinces.*"*	Workshops conducted
P3	*"*The institution should prioritise training on ethics and ethos*"*	Training should be prioritised

The participants were asked their perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making in the DHA. P1 and P2 reported that training takes place in the Department, while P3 cautioned that training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making in the DHA should be prioritized.

5.3.2.5 Environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Table 5.10: Environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Nature of jobs; conducive environment, office furnishing, organisation structure and design vastly contribute to the behaviour and performance of employees in the department.*"*	Conducive environment, office furnishing, organisation structure and design
P2	*"*The type of buildings that they occupy as office spaces which are not in good condition do affect the conduct and behaviour*"*	Poor office infrastructure.
P3	*"*It is important to have organisational culture that promotes transparency, accountability and ethics for officials to be encouraged and act with integrity. Workplace pressure, high stress levels and unrealistic workload can lead to burnout.*"*	Transparent, accountable, leadership behaviour.

Participants from the Human Res Division shared differing views regarding environmental conditions that affect their conduct and behaviour at the DHA. P1 outlined that conducive environment, office furnishing, organisational structure, and design impacts employee performance in the Department. P2 shared that poor infrastructure affects employees in their work, while P3 cautioned that leadership attributes and a transparent and accountable environment would also impact the conduct and behaviour of employees.

5.3.3 Group C: Supply Chain Management

5.3.3.1 Organisation's disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Table 5.11: Organisation's disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Main question: In your view how is the organisation's disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	*"*The department is lacking the practicality of ethics.*"*	Not aligned
P3	*"*The organisation's disciplinary code should be aligned to ensure that consequences for misconduct are clearly outlined and consistently enforced, promoting accountability and upholding the organisation's values.*"*	Should be aligned.

The Supply Chain Management participants (P1, P2) shared that the Department's disciplinary code is not aligned with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos of practice.

5.3.3.2 Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Table 5.12: Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Main question: In your experience does the organisation have regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The department does not deal with ethical risks. This can make it difficult to reduce ethical risk in the department. Furthermore, the participant mentioned that nepotism, conflict of interest and fraud as well as corruption are some of the things that the Counter Corruption Unit should deal with promptly. Thorough investigations must be conducted.*"*	Not efficient and effective
P2	*"Yes"*	Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas present

Supply Chain Management participants (P1 and P 2) confirmed that the DHA has regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas. However, P2 added that the formal identification of ethical risk areas was not efficient and effective.

5.3.3.3 Accessible safe reporting channels

Table 5.13: Accessible safe reporting channels

Main question: Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The reporting channels are safe for the public and the employees. The department's website has all the information on where to report. Also, for those who cannot access the website they can go straight to the manager.*"*	Accessible safe reporting channels present
P2	*"*There should be a suggestion box where people will write their concerns and put in there for the management to attend.*"*	Should be implemented

Participants from the Supply Chain Management Unit were requested to share their views on safe reporting channels in the Department. P1 reported that the Department had accessible safe reporting channels, while P2 advocated for the integration of such channels using suggestion boxes.

5.3.3.4 Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Table 5.14: Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Ethics training can help build trust, respect and positive corporate culture. It can also help the organisation to improve their reputation and public image.	Customer loyalty, trust
P3	*"*Assist deal with complex situations and make informed ethical decisions.*"*	Equipping officials with the knowledge

The perceptions of the participants from the Supply Chain Management on training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making in the DHA were investigated. P1 believed the training complies with laws and regulations, while ensuring customer loyalty and trust. P3 advised that the training equips officials with knowledge.

5.3.3.5 Environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Table 5.15: Environmental conditions affecting the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Social factors such as poor support from management, abuse and toxic working environment affect officials in the department.*"*	Inadequate support from management, abuse and toxic working environment

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	*"*Money can be the factor affecting the conduct of individual officials in the department.*"*	Monetary Rewards.
P3	*"*Things in the working environment that can affect how officials behave and do their jobs include the way the organisation operates, how leaders treat their teams and where they have the tools and support. Outside factors like what the society expects and political pressure can also play a role.*"*	Organisational processes, leadership, society expectations, political pressure.

Participants from Supply Chain Management identified management support, interpersonal treatment, financial incentives, organisational processes and external pressure as influences on conduct. P1's reference to abuse and a toxic environment concerns intimidating or disrespectful treatment, limited managerial support and workplace relations that discourage officials from raising concerns. Such conditions may affect conduct negatively by weakening trust, increasing stress and normalising silence. P2 indicated that money may influence behaviour; improper financial rewards can create incentives for favouritism, conflicts of interest or circumvention of procurement controls, whereas transparent and lawful recognition may reinforce compliant performance. P3 added that leadership, access to tools, social expectations and political pressure shape how officials perform their duties. Taken together, the accounts show that conduct is influenced by the interaction between personal incentives and the controls, relationships and expectations surrounding procurement work.

DHA. P3 shared that organisational processes, leadership, society expectations, and political pressure impact how they perform their assigned tasks.

5.3.4 Group D: Immigration section

5.3.4.1 Organisations' disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Table 5.16: Ascertaining whether disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Main question: In your view, how is the organisation's disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	"The disciplinary code of conduct penalises any conduct or behaviour that does not align with this ethical code. Disciplinary code reinforces the ethics and ethos espoused in its value statement."	Penalises any conduct or behaviour that does not align with the ethical code, Reinforces the ethics and ethos espoused in its value statement.
P2	"The department takes time to finalise disciplinary cases which leads to long suspension before these cases are followed."	Disciplinary code not effective and efficient.

Participants from the Immigration section were investigated on their perceptions on organisation's punitive code and envisaged ethos practice. P1 shared that the disciplinary code penalises any conduct or behaviour that does not align with the ethical code, and consequently reinforces the ethics and ethos espoused in its value statement.

5.3.4.2 Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Table 5.17: Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Main question: In your experience does the organisation have regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*This policy prohibits employees from accepting any gifts or payments in kind which may pose potential risks to the Department. Unfortunately, the department where I work does not have a risk compliance officer to regularly monitor and identify ethical risk areas.*"*	Policy present, no compliance officer

Another participant from the Immigration section was quizzed on their experience on the organisation's regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas. P1 advised that the policy is present but there is no compliance officer.

5.3.4.3 Easily accessible safe reporting channels

Table 5.18: Easily accessible safe reporting channels

Main question: Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Home Affairs has a Whistleblowing Policy that encourages staff members to report any concerns safely, as outlined in the policy. It aims to ensure that any staff member who makes a disclosure will not be penalised or face any occupational detriment as a result.*"*	Safe reporting channels implemented

Main question: Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	*"*If the department can ensure the safety of whistle-blowers and conduct its own investigation in verifying the information provided before it can take action against the employee implicated. That will reduce the time of long suspension and also provide accuracy in the disciplinary process.*"*	Need to make the channel effective and efficient (transparent)

The participants' views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels, such as protected disclosure and whistleblowing, within the DHA were investigated. P1 and P2 agreed that safe reporting channels exist in the DHA. However, P2 cautioned that the channels should be improved (efficiency and effectiveness).

5.3.4.4 Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Table 5.19: Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The department is facing several challenges, including staff shortages, unethical behaviour, and budget constraints. These issues if not addressed create gaps in systems and procedures, thereby opening the door to nefarious activities such as corruption. I believe the department is not doing enough to train its employees in ethical principles, standards, and decision-making. This is evident from the numerous reports of corruption that continue to appear in the media.*"*	Not enough training

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	*"*Ethical principles would help in ensuring that as public servants we always conduct ourselves in a respectful manner, with no room for irregular conduct.*"*	Training would help – respectful manner, ethical behaviour,

Participants from the Immigration section described ethics training as inadequate but necessary for respectful conduct, lawful decision-making and efficient service delivery. P1 linked insufficient training to staff shortages, budget constraints and continuing reports of corruption, while P2 emphasised that training could help officials recognise and avoid irregular conduct. The evidence does not establish that training is absent; rather, it indicates that participants perceived its frequency, reach or practical application as insufficient. Regular case-based training on confidentiality, document verification, conflicts of interest, gifts and the lawful exercise of discretion would therefore be more responsive to the risks identified in immigration work.

5.3.4.5 Environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Table 5.20: Environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Central to its function, Home Affairs handles sensitive information about people's lives. To overcome its challenges, Home Affairs requires highly trained individuals who have undergone rigorous security clearance to handle sensitive personal information.*"*	Environment with highly trained employees

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	"Working environment should be user friendly starting from the management to the staff. Employees should feel safe at work, and if they are feeling otherwise the management must resolve those challenges for smooth operating."	Safe working environment

Participants from the Immigration section were investigated on the environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of employees at the DHA. P1 noted that the Department should aim for highly trained employees advocating that would enable a good environment for employees to do their work effectively and efficiently. P2 advocated that a safe working environment would impact the conduct and behaviour of employees at the DHA.

5.3.5 Group E: Civic Services

5.3.5.1 Organisation's disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Table 5.21: Organisation's disciplinary code alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Main question: In your view how is the organisation's disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	"The department's disciplinary code is indeed in alignment with the code of ethics because they always apply the principles of discipline management for public servants. For example, employees have union representatives to also have options to be represented in cases of disciplinary."	Aligned.

Main question: In your view how is the organisation's disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P3	"The department's disciplinary code is aligned with the code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice by outlining clear consequences should and employee violates the rules and principles."	Aligned.

P2 and P3 from the Department's Civic Services shared that the organisation's disciplinary code was aligned to its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice.

5.3.5.2 Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Table 5.22: Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Main question: In your experience does the organisation have regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	"The departments must improve their decision-making strategies and find the best possible ways to curb risk factors within its structure. Those who are on strategic positions must work hand in hand or involve those who are in operational level to strategize in mitigating risks in the department."	Process needs improvement
P2	"I believe they do but unfortunately they are not available to every corner of South Africa due to financial constraints."	Present only in certain districts of the department
P3	"Yes, my organisation does have ethical risk areas."	Present

Participants from the Civic Services' views of the organisation having regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas were investigated. P1, P2 and P3 confirmed that the Department has regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas. In caution, P2

advised that the regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas are not processed in all the districts where the Department operates.

5.3.5.3 Easily accessible safe reporting channels

Table 5.23: Easily accessible safe reporting channels

Main question: Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The department must also encourage its employees to report wrongdoing, and those whistle-blowers must be protected.*"*	Protected disclosure encouraged.
P2	"If it involves the employees complaining about the management, it must go via union representatives, however when it's about the working environment then the management is responsible for that. *"*	Union representatives
P3	"I believe our department has good access to reporting channels. The department has a toll-free number where we report wrong doings without disclosing our identity. *"*	Good access to reporting channels – toll-free number.

The views of participants from the Civic Services Unit on safe reporting channels (such as protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA were established. P1 advised that protected disclosure should be encouraged, while P2 advocated for the inclusion of union representatives in the process, and P3 suggested that the Department should implement good access to reporting channel, such as through toll-free numbers.

5.3.5.4 Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Table 5.24: Perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	"Good on paper but not on implementation because, it start at the top and if those on managerial level lack good ethic, they won't be able to impose them on subordinates."	Good on paper but not on implementation
P3	"Training helps employees to improve their performance and integrity."	Improve performance and integrity.

Participants from the Civic Services Unit's perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making in DHA were investigated. P1 reported that the training was good on paper but not on implementation, while P3 outlined that the training is significant for the Department as it assists employees with ethical principles, standards, and decision-making.

5.3.5.5 Environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Table 5.25: Environmental conditions affecting the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	"Some managers are dictators in the workplace."	Dictatorial managers.

Main question: In your own view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P2	*"*One of the conditions that affect officials is that they are expected to deliver services while they don't have enough resources. For example, there is a shortage of staff, old computers and old buildings. *"*	Scarce resources.
P3	*"The Ermelo office is very cold, and the building is not user-friendly. These conditions affect staff morale."*	Very cold Ermelo.

Participants from Civic Services identified management style, re shortages and physical working conditions as influences on conduct and morale. P1 referred to dictatorial management, while P2 described staff shortages, outdated computers and ageing buildings that make service delivery more difficult. P3's reference to Ermelo's cold conditions is relevant insofar as an inadequately heated, poorly designed building may reduce physical comfort, concentration and staff morale; the climatic condition itself does not explain unethical conduct. The finding is therefore interpreted as an infrastructure and occupational-environment concern rather than as a direct cause of misconduct. Together, the responses indicate that respectful supervision, adequate staffing, functional equipment and a safe, suitable office environment support officials' capacity to serve the public consistently.

5.3.6 Group F: Information and communication technologies

5.3.6.1 Disciplinary code aligns with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Table 5.26: Disciplinary code aligns with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

Main question: In your view how does the organisation's disciplinary code align with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	"The department's disciplinary code is aligned with its code of ethics providing clear, consistent, and fair procedures to address misconduct, thereby upholding the organisation's values and fostering a culture of integrity and accountability."	Disciplinary code aligns with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice

A participant from the ICT shared his view that the organisation's disciplinary code aligns with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice.

5.3.6.2 Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Table 5.27: Regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

Main question: In your experience does the organisation have regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	"The department usually conduct audits and sampling where they randomly pick an application from a specific office to check if it complied with the department's regulations and standard operating procedures. In that way ethical risk areas are being identified."	Regularly

A participant from ICT shared his view of the Department's formal identification of risk areas, highlighting that the Department usually conducts audits to identify ethical risk areas.

5.3.6.3 Establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels

Table 5.28: Accessible safe reporting channels

Main question: Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*The department has a hotline where officials can report wrongdoing and remain anonymous in doing so.*"*	Safe reporting Channels implemented.

A participant from ICT's views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (such as protected disclosure and whistleblowing) within the DHA were positive, as he highlighted that proper reporting channels have been implemented in the Department.

5.3.6.4 Training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA

Table 5.29: Training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making

Main question: What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Employees who feel they can trust their employers and colleagues are more likely to be productive and motivated. A strong ethical culture can also help prevent and resolve workplace conflict. However, the DHA still lacks on that regard especially on conducting regular training on ethics and code of conduct. The only time where officials are being reminded of ethical principles and code of conduct is when they are being charged with misconduct.*"*	Ethics training was perceived as irregular and reactive.

The ICT participant reported that ethics and code-of-conduct training was irregular and tended to occur reactively when misconduct was addressed. The account does not demonstrate that training is entirely unavailable; it indicates a perceived lack of regular, preventive learning opportunities. This distinction is important because an isolated participant's perception cannot establish Department-wide provision. At the Ermelo office, scheduled refresher training and practical discussion of information security, system access, confidentiality and escalation procedures could reinforce an ethical culture before incidents occur.

5.3.6.5 Environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Table 5.30: Environmental conditions that affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA

Main question: In your view, which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the DHA?		
Participants	**Verbatim quotes**	**Coding**
P1	*"*Leadership, rules, organizational culture, political interference, power struggles, management systems and the psychosocial work environment (stress, workload). To make a reference, the workload in the DHA is too much and vacant posts are not being filled as a result officials are overworked and that has a negative impact on their behavior.*"*	Leadership, rules, organisational culture, political interference, power struggles, management systems, workload

P1 was quizzed on environmental conditions affecting the conduct and behaviour of employees at the DHA. The participant outlined that leadership, rules, organisational culture, political interference, power struggles, management systems, and workload affect the conduct and behaviour of employees at DHA.

5.4 Consolidated research findings

The first finding is that the Department's disciplinary code is generally perceived to align with its code of ethics and intended public-service ethos. Participants from most units described the code as a common framework that identifies misconduct and provides sanctions, while participants from Supply Chain Management questioned its practical alignment and participants from Immigration referred to delays in finalising cases. The evidence therefore distinguishes formal alignment from implementation: a code may reflect ethical values, yet inconsistent or delayed application can weaken its credibility. Adherence at the Ermelo office depends on officials understanding the code and on managers applying procedures fairly, promptly and consistently.

The second finding is that ethical-risk identification and reporting mechanisms exist but are experienced unevenly across units. Participants referred to annual risk registers, audits, application sampling, internal communication, a hotline, the Department's website and access to managers or union representatives. Other participants described risk identification as reactive, isolated or limited by the absence of a compliance officer, and expressed concern about confidentiality and retaliation. These differing accounts indicate a gap between the formal existence of controls and employees' confidence in their accessibility and effectiveness. An integrated office-level process is therefore required to record risks, assign responsibility, monitor corrective action and communicate reporting outcomes without exposing whistle-blowers.

The third finding is that participants regarded ethics training as important but inconsistent in frequency, reach and practical value. Workshops and induction were reported in some units, while other participants stated that training benefited head-office officials more than provincial employees or occurred mainly after misconduct. Training was associated with integrity, respectful service, lawful decisions, customer trust and the ability to manage complex situations. The evidence supports regular scenario-based learning that addresses the risks attached to each function, including procurement conflicts, document fraud, confidential information and use of ICT systems. Training should be reinforced

through supervision and performance discussions so that ethical standards become part of routine work rather than a response to breaches.

The fourth finding is that environmental conditions influence the context in which officials exercise judgement. Participants identified hierarchical or dictatorial management, limited leadership support, workload, pressure to meet targets, political pressure, power struggles, staff shortages, outdated equipment, unsuitable buildings and workplace stress. They also identified coaching, mentoring, autonomy, transparent leadership and a safe environment as potentially supportive conditions. These accounts do not remove individual responsibility for misconduct; instead, they show that adherence is strengthened when officials have clear guidance, adequate res, reasonable workloads and confidence that ethical concerns can be raised. The combined findings answer the research questions by locating adherence in the interaction between formal rules, implementation mechanisms, and the daily organisational environment.

5.5 Mapping of themes



Figure 5.2: Envisaged ethics and ethos at the South African DHA Ermelo office

5.6 Summary

This chapter presented the analysis and consolidated findings derived from the 15 participants. The sample represented six units and consisted mainly of experienced officials, which supported context-rich accounts of the Ermelo office. Four central findings emerged. First, the disciplinary code was generally perceived as aligned with ethical values, although implementation and the finalisation of cases were not consistently satisfactory. Second, ethical-risk and reporting mechanisms existed, but their visibility, integration and perceived safety varied across units. Third, ethics training was valued but regarded as uneven and insufficiently preventive or practical. Fourth, leadership, hierarchy, workload, targets, res, infrastructure and workplace relations influenced the conditions in which officials exercised judgement. Chapter Six draws conclusions from these findings and presents recommendations linked directly to the study's objectives.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter consolidates the entire research study and brings the study to its conclusion. The aim of this study was to explore the adherence to ethics and ethos by officials at the Ermelo DHA office.

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations based on the findings discussed in Chapter Five. The discussion in this chapter includes a summary and interpretation of the study findings. The recommendations provide practical solutions to the gaps identified.

6.2 Conclusions based on the research objectives

The main objective of the study was to explore officials' adherence to ethics and ethos at the South African DHA's Ermelo Regional Office.

The primary objectives of the study were achieved through the following secondary objectives:

i. To examine how ethics and ethos are reflected in the disciplinary code, ethical-risk processes, reporting channels and ethics training at the Ermelo Regional Office.
ii. To identify the environmental conditions that influence the conduct and behaviour of officials at the Ermelo Regional Office.
iii. To recommend measures through which the authorities at the Ermelo Regional Office can strengthen adherence to ethics and ethos and curb bribery, fraud and the irregular issuing of documents.

6.2.1 Conclusions based on the organisation's disciplinary code aligned: Ethics and envisaged ethos practice

- **Alignment of the code of ethics and envisaged ethos**

The participants (P1, P2) advised that the disciplinary code of ethics was aligned and universal throughout the Department, while P2 from Human Res Division advised that the Department's disciplinary code of ethics was aligned and universal throughout the Department. However, some participants admitted to the disciplinary code not being effective and efficient as the employees would want it to be. This is supported by Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021), who note that there is an inconsistent use of disciplinary action amongst different public institutions, which has probably led to employees at the DHA not trusting the system on correcting employee deviant behaviour like taking bribes to speed up the processing of document or issuing fraudulent documents.

- **Penalises any conduct or behaviour not in alignment with ethical code**

One participant from the Human Resource Management Division advised that the disciplinary code penalises conduct that is inconsistent with the ethical code. Public-service officials are guided by a code of conduct intended to promote exemplary behaviour (Republic of South Africa, 1998b). The findings nevertheless show that the existence of sanctions does not by itself establish effective implementation, particularly where disciplinary cases are delayed or rules are perceived as inconsistently applied. Discipline should operate as a fair and progressive process that corrects unwanted conduct, reinforces expected standards and supports organisational objectives (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021).

- **Reinforces ethics and ethos**

One participant (P1 – Human Res Division) advised that the Department's disciplinary code of ethics reinforces ethics and ethos. This was pleasing to note, as it reflected an awareness of the organisation's disciplinary code. Considering the above, Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021) caution that for discipline to be effective, disciplinary actions should be promoted as a progressive method to correct unwanted behaviour and foster a desired behaviour on an employee in a fair, reasonable, transparent, and consistent manner.

6.2.2 Conclusions based on regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas

- **Ethical risks areas identified, isolated, and not efficient and effective**

P1, P2, and P3 reported that there is regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas in the DHA. However, the implementation on the ethical risks areas processes are isolated (P3 – Office of the Manager) according to branches.

The participants revealed that the formal identification of ethical risk areas in the Department was not efficient and effective (P1 – Supply Chain Management) and that there is no compliance office (P1 – Immigration section). In this regard, proper implementation of formal identification of ethical risk areas is encouraged to yield improved service delivery, sound labour relations, and eliminate employees' exploitation by the management. Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021) advise that it would be preferable if the cases were reported monthly that oversight must also be strengthened, and that cases of misconduct must be addressed by taking immediate action, evaluating the investigations early, and conducting follow-ups to ascertain if the matter has been concluded.

6.2.3 Conclusions based on accessible safe reporting channels

- **Channels developed but not satisfactorily**

P1 (Supply Chain Management) and P1 and P2 (Immigration section) encouraged the Department's authorities to further improve the safe reporting channels as they advised that the current channels are not satisfactory. Effective and efficient safe reporting channels would enhance ethics and ethos needed to be incorporated as a culture in the South African DHA. Effective and efficient safe reporting channels not only improve compliance and the practical adoption of safety protocols but also contribute to a stronger, more proactive safety culture. It empowers employees to participate actively, report concerns, and collaborate on continuous improvements, ultimately leading to reduced incidents and a safer work environment (Burhan, Khan & Malik, 2023).

- **Channels promote transparency, trust, accountability and empower employees and citizens**

P2 from the Immigration section shared that effective and efficient reporting channels should promote transparency accountability and empower employees and citizens. Burhan, Khan and Malik (2023) note that transparency, trust, accountability, and empowerment are critical components in the successful implementation of safety reporting channels and foster trust, minimise resistance, and encourage active participation from employees, managers, and other stakeholders.

6.2.4 Conclusions based on training: Ethical principles, standards and decision-making

- **Training needs to be efficient and effective, and be based on ethical principles, standards and decision-making**

Employees in the DHA shared that the Department training needs to be improved to be efficient and effective, while some participants noted that training in the Department need to be based on ethical principles, standards, and decision-making. The study findings are supported by Maile and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022), who advise that organisational ethics management needs to incorporate various aspects of ethics into the Department, such as ethics training, code of conduct, establishing an ethics committee, promoting ethical behaviour, and disciplinary measures as interventions to encourage good conduct. Continuous employee training and development initiatives in the Department of Home affairs at the Ermelo office could prove significant as old and new employees would be reminded of the effective and efficient way of performing their assigned tasks ethically and respecting the guidelines and codes of conduct for civil servants in public service.

- **Comply with laws and regulations**

Participant 1 (P1) from the Supply Chain Management shared that training should comply with the laws and regulations. This is in line with the guidance on legal frameworks and

labour laws that govern institutions. Maile and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022) posit that South Africa's public services' main challenges emanate from the employees' conduct not being in line with the code of conduct. The guidance from Maile and Vyas (2022) about employees' conduct in the civil service is important as it calls for managers in these government departments to make sure that they have mechanisms within their structures to monitor the conduct of employees. Managers in the civil service departments can even consider disciplinary proceedings for employees that do not abide by set institutional rules while consequently rewarding employees who excel in their assigned tasks.

- **Impact customer loyalty and trust**

The participants shared that training will impact customer and trust. Garavan et al. (2021) found that training is positively and directly related to organisational performance, which conversely relates to customer satisfaction.

- **Equip officials with the knowledge**

P3 from Supply Chain Management stated that training equips officials with knowledge. This finding is consistent with evidence that training can develop employees' competence and align workplace behaviour with organisational requirements (Garavan et al., 2021). For the Ermelo office, a strategic training plan should therefore connect ethics learning to the Department's operational risks, employee roles and service-delivery objectives.

6.2.5 Conclusions based on environmental conditions: Conduct and behaviour of employees

- **Induction (coaching and mentoring)**

The participants noted the importance of employee induction impacting the conduct and behaviour of employees, particularly the significance of induction through coaching and mentoring. Boman (2022) advises that employee induction and onboarding set the tone for the expected conduct and behaviour of employees in the host organisation.

- **Autonomy, unethical environment**

P1 and P2 from the Office of the Manager advised that autonomy affects the conduct and behaviour of employees. The study findings are supported by Pattnaik and Sahoo (2021), who contribute that leaving employees to do their work without much supervision enables flexibility and autonomy. Khoshnaw and Alavi (2020) state that giving employees autonomy allows the opportunity to be innovative, a civil service that will allow employees to be innovative as they do their work will improve service delivery as employees can introduce intervention measures as they see fit.

- **Toxic/overly hierarchical culture**

P3 from the Office of the Manager reported that a toxic or overly hierarchical culture impacts the conduct and behaviour of Home Affairs employees. Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021) support the findings of the study, confirming that most public institutions environments do not offer opportunity for collegiality, coaching, mentoring, and guidance on the right conduct and interventions to enable principled workmanship.

- **Pressure to meet targets, unrealistic goals**

P3 from the Office of the Manager shared that the pressure to meet targets or unrealistic goals have an impact in their conduct and behaviour. Dlamini et al. (2020) contend that not only should organisations provide their employees with unambiguous goals and objectives, but they should also be able to provide a path on how employees may attain these set goals and objectives efficiently and effectively. Additionally, Mahlasela and Chinyamurindi (2020) warn on the dangers of organisational pressures and unrealistic goals by asserting that job overload in government departments has become a norm, but this should be reflected on as it affects productivity and employees.

- **Leadership and supervision**

P1 (Civic services) and P3 (Supply Chain Management) advised that leadership affects how employees efficiently and effectively fulfil their assigned tasks. This is supported by Al Halbusi et al. (2021), who confirm the importance of how leaders lead and influence the rest of their subordinates in motivating them to fulfill their assigned goals and

objectives. Consequently, Burhan et al. (2023) warn that for any leaders to successfully lead and incorporate a good culture in their structures, they would need to be ethical and principled in their leadership practice.

- **Re constraints**

P2 from the Civic Services noted that re constraints in the Department could impact the conduct and behaviour of the employees. Re constraints could be in the form of human res or financial constraints. When these res are in abundance or scarce, employee conduct and behaviour could be influenced conversely. Thokala et al. (2025) confirm that scarce res impact the efficient and effective service delivery to consumers.

- **Transparent, accountable, and ethical environment**

P1 and P2 from the Human Re Management Division revealed that a transparent, accountable, and ethical environment affect the actions of employees as they engage with their job tasks and activities. In the context of ethical environments provided to personnel, Burhan et al. (2023) postulate that the outcomes of ethical environments include moral obligations and moral convictions, which all consequently impact employee conduct and behaviour.

6.3 Contribution of the study

This study contributes a context-specific account of how formal ethics arrangements are experienced within a regional DHA office. It shows that adherence cannot be inferred from the existence of a disciplinary code alone; it depends on consistent implementation, visible ethical-risk management, trusted reporting channels, practical training and an environment that supports lawful judgement. By comparing experiences across six operational and support units, the study identifies both shared concerns and uneven implementation within one office. The findings therefore add empirical detail to public-administration debates on the relationship between ethical systems, organisational ethos and service delivery, while providing the Ermelo Regional Office with evidence for targeted operational improvements.

6.4 Limitations of the study

The study was delimited to the DHA's Ermelo Regional Office and to officials with at least three years of service. Its findings cannot be statistically generalised because the sample was purposive, later supplemented by snowball referrals, and drawn from one office. Referral networks and voluntary participation may have favoured officials who were more accessible or willing to discuss ethics, while the single ICT participant limits the breadth of that unit's perspective. The use of face-to-face and online interviews may also have produced differences in rapport and depth despite use of the same schedule. In addition, the study relied on self-reported perceptions and did not triangulate these accounts with service users, disciplinary files, risk registers or observation. The conclusions should therefore be interpreted as a detailed account of participants' experiences rather than as verified prevalence estimates of misconduct.

6.5 Recommendations

Future research should examine ethics and ethos across several DHA offices and include a larger and more diverse participant group. Comparative studies could include service users, former officials and documentary evidence such as anonymised disciplinary outcomes, training records and risk registers. This would permit stronger assessment of how institutional arrangements differ across settings and would address the limits of a single-office, self-report design. Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are made for the Ermelo Regional Office:

- The Ermelo Regional Office should provide officials with bounded autonomy: discretion within clear legal, procedural and supervisory limits. Managers should clarify the decisions that officials may take independently, the cases requiring escalation and the records needed to justify exceptions. This can support responsive service and responsible innovation without weakening accountability (Khoshnaw & Alavi, 2020).
- The office should strengthen ethical leadership through coaching, mentoring and regular supervisory discussion of real work dilemmas. Managers should model respectful conduct, explain decisions, respond consistently to breaches and

ensure that performance pressure does not reward shortcuts. These practices can reinforce an ethical climate in which employees understand both expected outcomes and the lawful means of achieving them (Al Halbusi et al., 2021).

- The office should establish an integrated ethical-risk process that consolidates risks identified by all units, assigns responsible officials and review dates, and records corrective action. Risks involving conflicts of interest, bribery, document fraud, unauthorised system access, confidentiality and procurement should be reviewed periodically and communicated to staff. Office-level monitoring should complement provincial risk registers and audits.
- The DHA should assess staffing, ICT equipment, heating and building conditions at the Ermelo office and prioritise res according to service and ethical risk. Workloads and performance targets should be realistic and should include quality and compliance measures, not only transaction volumes. Adequate res do not guarantee ethical conduct, but they reduce avoidable pressure and support consistent application of required procedures.
- The office should publicise confidential and anonymous reporting routes, explain how disclosures are assessed, and protect whistle-blowers against occupational detriment. Reports should be acknowledged, investigated promptly by appropriately independent officials and followed by proportionate action. Periodic anonymised feedback on resolved matters can strengthen confidence that reporting leads to fair and accountable outcomes.

6.6 Summary

This chapter presented conclusions and recommendations linked to the research objectives and the findings reported in Chapter Five. It concluded that formal ethical arrangements are present at the Ermelo Regional Office, but adherence is affected by uneven implementation, limited confidence in reporting, insufficiently regular training and organisational conditions including leadership, workload and res. The recommendations address these findings through bounded autonomy, ethical leadership, integrated risk management, adequate res and protected reporting. The study's aim of exploring officials'

adherence to ethics and ethos at the Ermelo Regional Office was therefore achieved within the stated limitations.

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Appendix A: Interview schedule

UNISA university of south africa

ANNEXURE A: INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Before we start, I would like to ask for permission to record the interview. Thank you for making yourself available for this interview session. The purpose of this interview is to investigate and explore envisaged ethics and ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: Ermelo Regional office.

This research is conducted as a requirement for the completion of the researcher's master's degree in Public Administration Human at the University of South Africa. The interview will last for approximately 30- 45 minutes. To ensure confidentiality, you will be given a nickname (pseudonym or *nom de plume)*. Is there anything else you would like to know before we start?

PART A:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (ALL PARTICIPANTS)

1. Age

18 - 29	
30 – 39	
40 – 49	
50 – 59	
60 – 65	

2. Gender

Male	
Female	

3. Level of seniority

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

Senior Executive	
Senior Manager	
Middle Manager	
Other (Functional Head and below	

4. Number of years in the Department of Home Affairs: Ermelo Regional Office

1 - 5	
5 – 10	
10 or more	

PART B: Semi-structured Interview Questions

5. In your view how is the organisation's disciplinary code in alignment with its code of ethics and envisaged ethos practice.

6. In your experience does the organisation have regular and formal identification of ethical risk areas?

7. Please share with us your views on the establishment of easily accessible safe reporting channels (e.g. protected disclosure and whistle-blowing) within the Department of Home Affairs.

8. What are your perceptions on training on ethical principles, standards and decision-making in the Department of Home Affairs?

9. In your own view which environmental conditions affect the conduct and behaviour of individual officials at the Department of Home Affairs?

.....

Thank you for taking time to participate in the study!!!

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Appendix B: Ethical clearance letter

UNISA university of south africa

College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management

Ref #: 7197
Name: Mr Bheki Maseko
Student #: 55063136

Date: 21/05/2025

Dear: Mr Bheki Maseko

Decision: Ethics Approval from 21 May 2025 to 20 May 2028

Researcher: Mr Bheki Maseko

24 DE Jager street

ERMELO

55063136@mylife.unisa.ac.za 0836487354

Supervisor: Dr Promise Raseala

Email address: raseaps@unisa.ac.za

Adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional Office

Qualification: Masters in Public Administration

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management for the above-mentioned research study Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management and it is in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management .
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (20 May 2028). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.
5. Kindly note that the College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management requires the submission of regular progress reports to be submitted {monthly, quarterly, annually}. Inline with section 7.2 of the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics (2024).

Note

The reference number 7197 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof. Maijane Mashamaite
Chair of College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management
E-mail: mashamm@unisa.ac.za



Prof. Maelekanyo Christopher Mulaudzi
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of College of Economic and Management Sciences_ERC Public Administration and Management
E-mail: tshilmc@unisa.ac.za

Appendix C: Permission letter from the organisation

home affairs

Department:
Home Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

P/BAG X 9047 Ermelo 2350
24 De Jager Street, Mpumalanga, Ermelo 2350
Tel: (017) 819-1150

06 January 2025

Research title: Adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional office

To whom it may concern

Permission letter to conduct research at the Department of Home Affairs

This letter serves to confirm that **Bheki Maseko** under supervision of DR **Promise Raseala** may conduct research on the premises of **Department of Home Affairs** and may make use of the department data and information. The student is registered for a Master's degree in Public Administration. The data generated during the research may be used to compile the thesis.

The **Department of Home Affairs** hereby commits to providing the necessary research support in the form of facilities, data and face to face interviews.

Yours sincerely

Vusumuzi Mabaso
Senior Administrative Office
Telephone number: 017 819 1150
Email address: Vusumuzi.Mabaso@dha.gov.za

DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS
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2025 -01- 06
ERMELO (01)

Appendix D: Participant information sheet

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: 7197

11 March 2025

Title: **Adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional office**

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Bheki Maseko and I am doing research with DR Promise Raseala, Senior Lecturer at the UNISA in the Department of Public Administration and Management towards a Master's degree in Public Administration at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled, Adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional office.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of the study is to investigate the adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional office.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

The reason you are invited to participate in the study is because of your extensive experience within the Department of Home Affairs, also the Directorate/unit that you work in qualifies you to participate in the study. The contact details of all the participants were obtained from the Senior Administrative Officer for Ermelo regional office (Mr. Vusumuzi Mabaso). All your answers will be treated as confidential, and you will not be identified in any of the research reports emanating from this research. Furthermore adherence to the Protection of Personal Information Act no 4 of 2013 will be adhered to. Approximately 15 to 20 officials will participate in the study.

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WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may however choose not to participate, and you may also withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

The interview will be approximately 30-45min of your time and will explore topics such as:

Your experiences as an employee regarding adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional office. The challenges and opportunities for fostering adherence to Ethics and Ethos in the South African Department of Home Affairs: The case of the Ermelo Regional office.

The interview will be conducted face to face and via Microsoft teams, it will be recorded and used solely for academic purposes.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may however choose not to participate, and you may also withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

A sense of empowerment, as well as an increase in knowledge that came about as a result of the study, could be beneficial to the participants.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There could be minor inconvenience as the interview will approximately take 30 to 45 minutes of the participant's time. However there are no risks involved.



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WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your privacy will be respected. No one will be able to connect you to the answers you give.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Data will be stored in a password protected hard drive and will be stored in a locked safe, at 24 DE Jager street, Ermelo for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any payment or reward, financial or otherwise, and the study will not incur undue costs to you.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

Approval has been requested and awaiting feedback from the Research Ethics Committee.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request. A copy of the final dissertation will be available in the library at the Muckleneuk Ridge Campus of the University of South Africa, Pretoria.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, please contact my supervisor, DR Promise Raseala, (raseaps@unisa.ac.za) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Please sign below to indicate your willingness to participate in the study.
Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



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Appendix E: Consent form

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the (Face to face interview)

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname……

Participant Signature……Date……

Researcher's Name & Surname: Bheki Maseko

Researcher's signature……Date……

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Appendix F: Editor's certificate

