

# Analysing the role of Organisational Culture on Consequence Management in Government Departments: Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic

\*Beatah Sibanda<sup>1</sup> and \*\*Surika Van Rooyen<sup>1</sup>

\*[41473132@nwu.ac.za](mailto:41473132@nwu.ac.za)

\*\*[Surika.VanRooyen@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Surika.VanRooyen@nwu.ac.za)

<sup>1</sup>North-West University

## ABSTRACT

The study aims to determine how organisational culture contributes to consequence management using lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing evidence from two government departments in South Africa. A qualitative research approach was adopted using content analysis and mapping previous literature studies and the Auditor General South Africa (AGSA) annual reports of the concerned government departments. The two government departments studied were the departments of Health and Employment and Labour. The article suggests that the extent to which consequence management is applied is dependent on the culture of an organisation. Considering the limited studies on this topic, the study also contributes to the existing body of knowledge by setting the tone for future studies. The use of two departments limits the generalisation of the findings. The article brings a fresh perspective on how organisational culture contributes to the ineffectiveness of policies governing departments, specifically consequence management. Government departments could use the findings from this study to enforce organisational cultures that value corrective action and consequence management. Accountability is at the centre of continuing public governance debate. The study unveils a fresh perception of accountability by enlightening the role of organisational culture in enforcing consequence management. The outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic could be used by accounting authorities to prevent recurring transgressions in government departments and prepare for future unforeseen pandemics.

**Keywords:** Consequence Management, Organisational Culture, Irregularity, PFMA, AGSA.

## INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic was an unprecedented event that prompted governments worldwide to take urgent and unique decisions to combat the spread of the virus (Anessi-Pessina *et al.*, 2020). While the world dealt with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the South African government departments presented a dual pandemic of corruption in the administration of COVID-19 relief funds (Thinane, 2021). Government departments face high levels of corruption and fraud in the administration of funds (Masuku, 2019). The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA)'s requirement to enforce consequence management seems futile. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the number of financial transgressions in government departments. The predominant weaknesses in the control environments of government departments can be attributed to poor organisational culture towards consequence management (Thinane, 2021). The increase in irregular expenditure, as reported by the Auditor General South Africa (AGSA) brings the enforcement of consequence management into the spotlight.

Government departments face high levels of corruption and fraud in the administration of funds (Masuku, 2019). The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA)'s requirement to enforce consequence management seems futile. Corruption thrives where there is an intolerant culture for consequence management and lack of accountability for transgressions identified (Lindani *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic accelerated the number of financial transgressions in government departments. The predominant weaknesses in the control environments of government departments can be attributed to poor organisational culture towards consequence management (AGSA integrated report, 2021). The increase in irregular expenditure as reported by the Auditor General South Africa (AGSA) brings the enforcement of consequence management into the spotlight.

In the 2020/21 financial year, irregular expenditure increased from R109,82 billion to R166,85 billion (AGSA Media release, 2021). Cases reported against government officials increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Poor governance and accountability suggest an organisational culture that disregards consequence management for inadequate performance and transgressions by public sector officials (Moses, 2022). The recurring nature of these transgressions implies a lack of knowledge or planning on the officials, leading to ineffective consequence management.

Preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa was already exposed to a culture of uneven accountability and systems that undermined the rule of law and hindered the state's ability to effect development and socio-economic transformation (Schoeberlein, 2020). Without a culture of public ethics, values such as social cohesion, trust, solidarity, and cooperation which are intended to prevent corruption and abuse, are futile (Anessi-Pessina *et al.*, 2020). Corruption thrives where there is an intolerant culture for consequence management and a lack of accountability for transgressions identified (Lindani *et al.*, 2021). Although there is an increased call for accountability in government departments, the reportedly increased corruption in the administration of funds during the COVID-19 pandemic not only evinces an inadequate state of corrective action on transgressors but can also be viewed as undermining the rule of law.

Despite literature on transparency and accountability having gained popularity in corporate governance scholarship (Lefenya & Mathiba, 2019; Masuku, 2019; Munzhedzi, 2021; Reddy, 2016), limited studies focus on consequence management and specifically on how organisational culture contributes to consequence management. Furthermore, the current consequence management studies focus on local government (Moses, 2022; Pandelani & Phago, 2020) with little attention paid to the provincial government. To address this gap in current literature, this study aims to determine how the culture of government departments contributes to enforcing consequence management.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Consequence management**

Consequence management refers to the legislative and regulatory frameworks applied to address misconduct, fraud, corruption or unethical behaviour and poor performance of government officials (KZN Framework on consequence management, 2021). The extent to which consequence management is prioritised stems from organisational culture, which refers to the climate and practices organisations develop around the handling of their staff, the promoted values, and shared beliefs within an organisation (Schein, 2004). Organisational culture significantly impact on employees' behaviour, performance outcomes, and the organisation's external environment (Coelho *et al.*, 2022).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, public sector transgressions were common headline in the South African media, with limited reports on consequence management. Mismanagement of funds and corruption continue to increase in government departments (Masuku, 2019). Despite increased concerns from the Auditor General South Africa (AGSA) for accountability and consequence management, the repeating nature of these transgressions is alarming. In the 2020/21 financial year, irregular expenditure increased from R109,82 billion to R166,85 billion (AGSA Media release, 2021). Cases reported against government officials increased during the pandemic (Thinane, 2021). Poor governance and accountability suggest an organisational culture that disregards consequence management for inadequate performance and transgressions by public sector officials (Moses, 2022). The recurring nature of these transgressions implies a lack of knowledge or planning on the part of the officials leading to ineffective consequence management. The expectation is that government officials would learn from consequence management taken on officials who contravene their call of duty. However, evidence suggests that consequence management is either not implemented or not effective in government departments (AGSA, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic conceivably accelerated public sector transgressions and not much has been done to government officials who contravened the requirements of the PFMA through the maladministration of funds. This is evidenced by Thinane (2021) who reported how reckless South African government officials had been during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The timely finalisation and implementation of consequence management on transgressors remain central in enforcing a culture of intolerance to corruption and fraud (Anon, 2021). Consequence management can play a critical role considering the unprecedented corruption scandals in the government departments, which increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. While several corruption cases came to light, a few reported satisfactory consequences. Without government leaders enforcing strict consequence management on irregularities incurred, the system of governance misses an opportunity for reinforcement (Mvuyana *et al.*, 2020).

For instance, in provincial government, the accounting authority must ensure that corrective action is taken against government officials who contravene the PFMA. Corrective action refers to action taken against government officials who contravene their call of duty by acting in a manner that brings the department into disrepute. As per section 36 of the PFMA, the accounting authority is the head of a department and the chief executive officer of a constitutional institution responsible for effective, efficient, and transparent systems of financial and risk management, and internal control.

The pandemic has had tremendous and swift effects on many organisations' cultures. The global lockdown and travel bans have upended assumptions about the nature of work and corporate interactions. People have discovered that they don't have to be in an office, that they can get most things done remotely, the accountability and transparency at government departments suffering during this period. But it also represented a significant opportunity for researchers to investigate how such a large-scale transition in society unsettles organisational culture and how those cultures might adapt. Thus, organizational cultures are the signs and symbols, shared practices, and underlying assumptions of an organisation (Crossman, 2020).

The lack of accountability has become a culture in government departments and is identified as the root cause of poor audit outcomes (Soopal, 2020). Despite government departments being required to enforce consequence management, the increase in the number of transgressions suggests a weak or intolerant organisational culture for consequence management within these departments. On the other hand, literature on transparency and accountability has gained popularity in corporate governance scholarship (Lefenya & Mathiba, 2019; Masuku, 2019; Munzhedzi, 2021; Reddy, 2016), limited studies focus on consequence management and specifically on how organisational

culture contributes to consequence management. Furthermore, the current consequence management studies focus on local government (Moses, 2022; Pandelani & Phago, 2020) with little attention paid to provincial government. To address this gap in current literature, this study aims to determine how the culture of government departments contributes to the enforcement of consequence management.

The PFMA directs the conduct of government institutions. According to section 51(1)(e) of this Act, effective and appropriate disciplinary steps should be taken against officials who contravene or fails to comply with a provision of the PFMA. The PFMA together with the Constitution of the Republic require high standards of accountability, professional ethics, transparency, and the promotion of efficient, economical, and effective use of resources (Du Plessis, 2020). It is the role of the AGSA to ensure accountability and promotion sound financial governance practices in South Africa government departments. Despite that, the AGSA has, on several occasions, been referred to as a “toothless dog” (Lefenya & Mathiba, 2019) because of its apparent inability to enforce consequences on transgressors of the PFMA. Prior to the introduction of the *Public Audit Amendment Act of 2018*, the role of the AGSA was to ‘audit and report’, with no responsibility to enforce corrective action and recovery of losses for material non-compliances identified (Moses, 2022). The Public Audit Amendment Act gave the AGSA the power to enforce disciplinary action and ensure the recovery of material losses suffered by government institutions (Public Audit Amendment Act, No. 5 of 2018). It is in this background that the study uses the reports of the AGSA to determine how consequence management has been enforced in the selected government departments.

### **Organisational culture**

Organisational culture refers to a set of values, beliefs, and assumptions that people within an organisation share and accept, their understanding of why they do what they do and what they think is important (Schneider, González-Romá, Ostroff, & West, 2017). It is perceived as a key factor in avoiding institutional failures, including corruption (Hald *et al.*, 2021). The key to a successful organisation is a culture based on strongly held and widely shared values and beliefs that are supported by structure and strategy (SHRM, 2022). In this study organisational culture refers to the attitude portrayed by the government officials in enforcing legislated requirements.

An organisation that embeds a solid organisational culture promotes good ethical values and makes it possible for employees to make ethical decisions (Huhtala *et al.*, 2022). Likewise, an organisation that disregards ethical values subsequently creates an unethical organisational culture which breeds unethical behaviour. In government departments, unethical behaviour is often highlighted as the root cause to impeding good governance (Mokoke *et al.*, 2021). Government departments should promote ethical leadership which sets and transfers ethical standards using rewards and punishments to ensure that ethical standards are adhered to (Mbandlwa *et al.*, 2020). To understand culture, government departments need to measure the alignment of values between leaders, managers, and employees. Employees need to see leaders take actions that support those values (Laine, 2022). Thus, the value of consequence management could be displayed by leaders who enforce corrective action for transgressions within the department. Failure to enforce corrective action suggests a poor culture towards ethical values. Enforcing an ethical culture would create tolerance for consequence management as officials would regard the importance of punishment and rewards for behaviour. This article reviews the state of consequence management within government departments by analysing the culture portrayed by the two departments towards corrective action.

### **Theoretical framework**

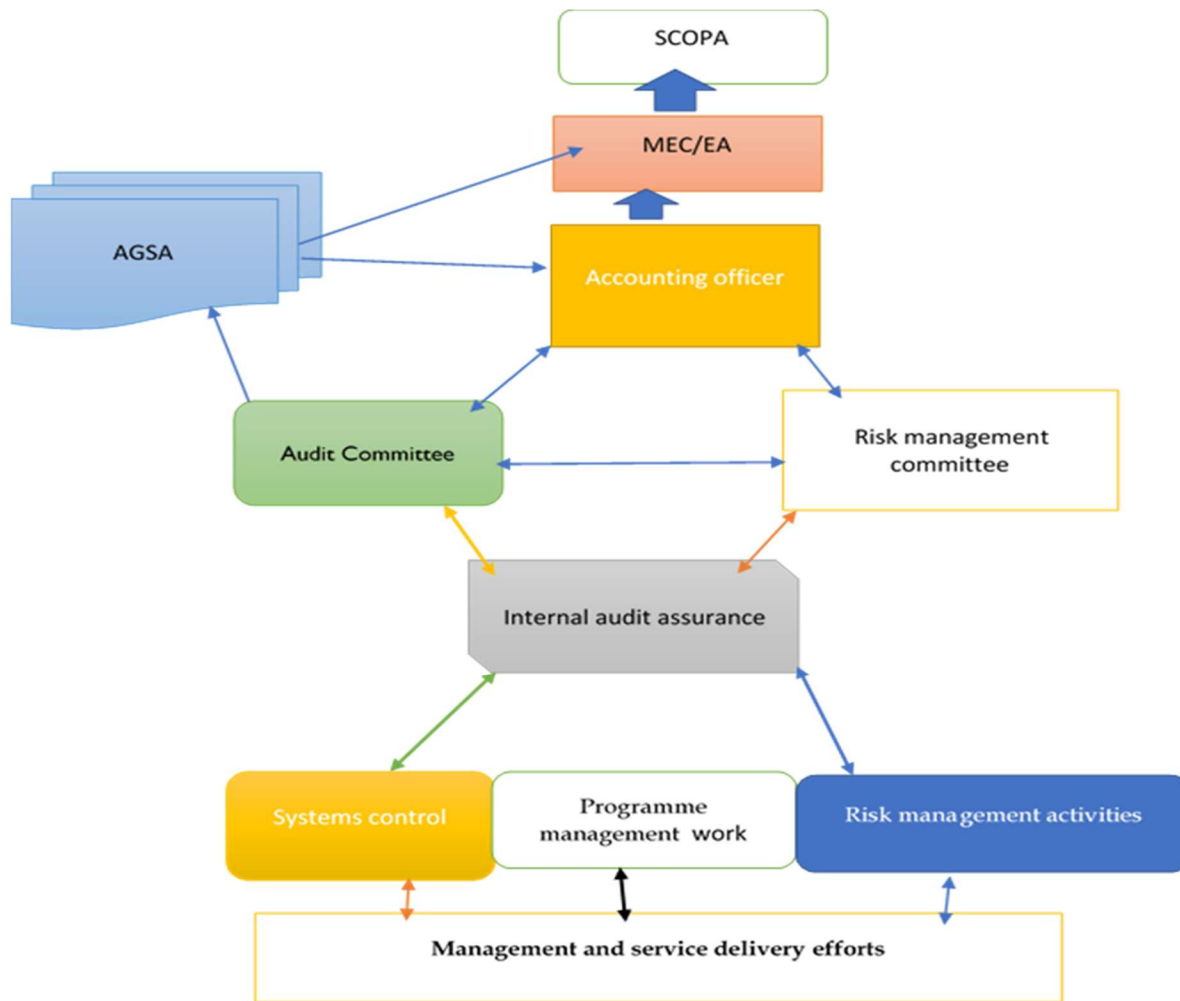
The functionalism theory which views society as a complex but orderly and stable system with interconnected structures and functions or social patterns that operate to meet the needs of individuals in a society (Crossman, 2020), underpins this study. The relevance of this theory is in the interconnectedness of society and government, as government departments' ultimate role is service delivery by ensuring that societal needs are met.

The functionalism theory suggests four functions of the government, which are planning and directing society, meeting societal needs, maintaining law and order, and managing international relations and all aspects of society to serve a purpose. The role of government departments is public service delivery which rests on meeting societal needs. It is the role of the government to deliver services (Muhanguzi, 2019) and provide accountability for the use of state funds. The four functions suggested by the functionalism theory are pertinent for this task. Failure to enforce consequence management on transgressions suggests that the government is failing to maintain law and order through the conduct of government departments, portraying an organisational culture that disregards corrective action. Consequence management ensures that all elements of this theory are interlinked in maintaining law and order for effective service delivery and accountability. Leaning on the tenets of this theory, the study unveils that corruption thrives where law and order are not maintained through the enforcement of consequence management. As already noted, South Africa already suffered from a culture of uneven accountability and systems that undermined the rule of law before the COVID-19 pandemic (Schoeberlein, 2020). Accordingly, the failure to enforce consequence management undermines the rule of law and order as consequence management is a legislated requirement.

### **Conceptual framework**

A conceptual framework synthesises evidence and assists in understanding a phenomenon under study. It is imperative to present a conceptual framework to visualise the concepts being discussed. Like every organisation, government departments have a hierarchy or structure in which they operate. The diagram below (Figure 1) presents the conceptual framework highlighting the reporting structures within government departments as synthesised by the authors.

The role of any government department is service delivery, which is depicted at the bottom of the framework. The process goes up until reporting at parliament, where the presented financial statements should align with Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) requirements. The legislative authority of a province is vested in its provincial legislature, which has the power to pass a constitution and legislation for its province through the appointment of members of the Executive Committee (MECs) (Marx *et al.*, 2018). According to the Companies Act 71 of 2008, in the governing of organisations, the board should be assisted by board committees, namely the risk management, internal audit and audit committee. The role of these committees is to assist the Auditor General in ensuring that departments comply with the legislation, as depicted in the diagram below.



The Accounting Authority in every government department has a legal obligation to enforce consequence management where there are material losses due to the negligence of officials. Section 5(A)3 of the Public Audit Amendment Act requires the AGSA to take remedial action on Accounting Officers who do not enforce consequence management. In the 2021 financial year, the AGSA reported an improved consequence management status in a few departments (Consolidated PFMA General Report 2020-21), while the majority lagged, with COVID-19 aggravating the situation. Auditees with poor consequence management are often prone to fraud and corruption as offenders are not held accountable (AGSA annual report, 2021). The AGSA continues to encourage auditees to implement adequate and consistent consequence management.

Promoting alignment to consequences and accountability is an integral part of the intergovernmental relations policies in South Africa (SALGA, 2019). The responsibility of government to ensure accountability is well-defined in the Constitution of the Republic. Despite this provision, the state of accountability in government departments is deteriorating, with limited corrective action on government officials who contravene the PFMA. An example of weak accounting structures and consequence management can be seen in the Compensation Fund, which has received a disclaimed audit opinion for the past eight years. The AGSA suggested the need to strengthen their consequence management processes to ensure officials are held accountable for

their duties (AGSA Integrated report, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented event which required emergency procurement of resources to combat the virus. This led to National Treasury relaxing the procurement guidelines (Munzhedzi, 2021). This created opportunities for financial abuse due to large amounts of money dispersed at a rate and frequency that public institutions had not operated before (AGSA Integrated report, 2020). Following the urgency to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of goods and services deviated from the normal procurement processes stipulated by the PFMA (Lindani *et al.*, 2021). This led to questionable transparency and fairness of the process, the AGSA reporting concerns, and the need to investigate procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic (AGSA Media release, 2020).

Although many cases were reported, action taken on transgressors might not have been adequate and satisfying. This brings the role of consequence management into question. The study uses two government departments as examples to study the culture of the organisation and the enforcement of consequence management.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study followed a qualitative research approach using content analysis and the mapping of previous literature studies and current research reports which illuminate organisational culture and consequence management and its manifestation. The disadvantage of literature studies, however, is that predating documents are generally not designed to serve the purposes of a present-day research study, but to rather serve some other preceding period, thus forcing the present reviewer to reflectively select from the provided data that which is relevant to their research (Deliwe Mawonga, 2019).

Content analysis is a method of coding information into various categories depending on a selected criteria and it is a common method used in examining disclosures in annual reports (Jariya, 2015). In support, data was collected from the reports of the AGSA and integrated reports of the two departments selected for the study to reveal underlying themes in the data and make valid inferences from the texts (Giles-Smith *et al.*, 2014). Evidence is drawn from the reports of the 2020/2021 AGSA and integrated reports of the selected departments (the Gauteng department of Health and the Department of employment and labour). This period was selected as the study focused on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Audited financial statements of the departments were used, thus ensuring the reliability of the data used. In the reports of the AGSA, the focus was on what the AGSA reported concerning to consequence management. In the Annual reports of the government departments, the researchers identified if there was irregular expenditure identified, whether it was condoned or not and the action taken for instances where irregular expenditure was not condoned.

The departments were chosen based on material losses reported during the covid-19 pandemic as reported by the AGSA integrated reports. The starting point was a review of the findings as reported by the AGSA. These reports were read against the integrated reports of the departments to corroborate if the departments had disclosed the transgressions and the status of consequence management.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following sections reports on the findings of the content analysis of the analysed reports.

### Overall overview for Gauteng

On analysing the reports of the AGSA, the following was observed:

The AGSA has continuously emphasised the need for effective monitoring and timeous addressing of transgressions and consequence management to create a culture of the tone at the top that shifts the focus towards preventative rather than detective controls in the prevention of irregular expenditure (Consolidated PFMA General Report 2020-21). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated financial transgressions due to the rate and frequency with which financial resources were dispersed in the procurement process. The first COVID-19 report released by the AGSA highlighted the weak control environments in which the relief funds had landed, urging Accounting Authorities to implement their recommendations and take corrective action where necessary (Thinane, 2021).

Despite this, the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) report into personal protective equipment (PPE) corruption during COVID-19 revealed that Gauteng reported the most procurement irregularity cases, with more than R6 billion worth of contracts investigated by the SIU (Majavu, 2022). This is unfortunate as Gauteng is the largest contributor to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), contributing more than a third to South Africa's economy (Statssa, 2021). With South Africa being an emerging economy, accountability and well governing of departments are at the core of building a stronger economy (Madgavkar *et al.*, 2019), hence the need to enforce accountability and consequence management.

The recurring cases of maladministration of funds in government departments and limited studies on consequence management create an opportunity for researchers to investigate the state of consequence management in government departments. It is against this backdrop that this study could be relevant. The following sections discuss examples from two departments which portrayed poor consequence management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

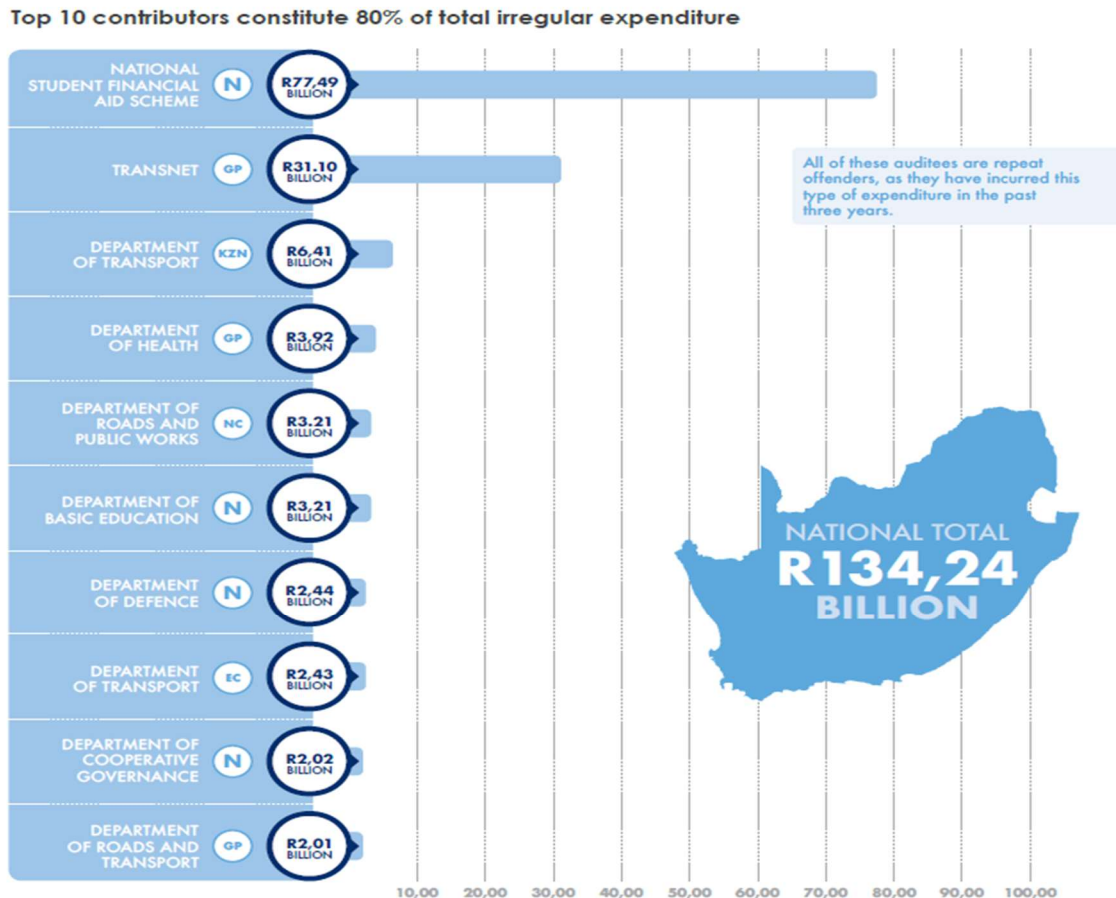
### State of consequence management in the Department of Health

The Gauteng Department of Health is mandated to provide excellent integrated health services in partnership with stakeholders and contribute towards reducing poverty, vulnerability, and disease burden in all Gauteng communities (DoH Annual report, 2020/21). The Department of Health had a crucial role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by its mandate, as the COVID-19 pandemic was simultaneously a health crisis and an extensive global economic crisis to the South African economy which was already threatened (Treasury briefing, 2020).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Health was allocated a budget of R229.7bn (Budget Review, 2020) which was further supplemented by R21.5 billion for curbing the pandemic (Supplementary Budget Review, 2020). For the Gauteng department, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic affected the collection of revenue in the 2020/2021 financial year. Only R513 million was collected (a decline of 42% from the previous year), the lowest amount ever collected by the Department during the last three years (DoH Annual report, 2020/21). The supplement in the budget and the decreased revenue collection is indicative of strained financial resources. This would ordinarily urge for effective management of the limited financial resources. From figure 2 below, the department of health is ranked as the fourth highest contributor of irregular expenditure



despite the financial strains already mentioned above.



**Figure 2: Top 10 contributors of irregular expenditure.**  
**Source: Consolidated PFMA general report: 2020/21**

Despite the strain on the financial resources, within a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, public reports from media briefings and media release from the AGSA were made on corrupt dealings by senior officials at the health ministry. The reports revealed corruption, fraud and the misappropriation of funds meant to help in the COVID-19 response (Magome, 2021). The Special Investigating Unit (SIU) probed into the contracts issued by the Department. Amongst the findings was an irregular contract issued to Digital Vibes, a company linked to the former Health minister. By August 2020, the SIU had to freeze bank accounts belonging to top Gauteng government officials such as the Gauteng Health Department’s former chief financial officer (Thinane, 2021). An approximated R132 million irregular expenditures associated with the Digital Vibes contract was reported although disciplinary steps had not yet been determined (DoH Annual Report, 2021). The AGSA integrated audit report (2021) reported the following:

*I was unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence that disciplinary steps were taken against officials who had incurred irregular and fruitless and wasteful expenditure, as required by section 38(1) (h)(iii) of the PFMA. This was because investigations into irregular and fruitless and wasteful expenditure were not performed.*

Further to the above observations (AGSA, 2021), the following was noted, which suggests that consequence management was not implemented at the required level.

- (i) The Audit Committee was concerned with the **slow implementation of consequence management** implemented by the Department against employees who contravened the PFMA.
- (ii) The Department continued to incur irregular expenditure because of poor supply chain management, resulting in material irregularities being identified by the AGSA. Whilst certain actions were in process to address the irregular expenditure, the **Department was encouraged to take further steps to prevent their recurrence.**
- (iii) **Disciplinary steps were not taken** against the officials who had incurred and permitted irregular expenditure, as required by section 38(1)(h)(iii) of the PFMA.
- (iv) **The accounting officer did not exercise adequate oversight responsibility to investigate** some identified instances of irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure and ensure that **consequence management** was enforced against liable officials.

As per AGSA, failure to investigate cases of irregular expenditure was a habitual practice in the Department of Health. There were limited requests for condonement of irregular expenditure which was mostly from legacy issues and instability in leadership, hindering current leadership from speedily dealing with the irregular expenditure (Consolidated PFMA General Report 2020-21). An inheritance of unresolved cases of irregular expenditure is evidence that consequence management is not prioritised in these departments.

Although consequence management is implemented in some instances, the above suggests that its implementation may be slow and, in some cases, completely absent. Failure to take disciplinary action is indicative of either a poor organisational inclination towards corrective action or a lack of a framework for consequence management. Together, these limits timely remedial action. The inability to implement timely remedial action is an indication of internal control weaknesses that remain unaddressed. This often results in an environment where consequence management is almost always not prioritised, a situation that allows transgressors to walk away without consequence (AGSA integrated report, 2021). This confirms findings of (Ajam & Fourie, 2016) who noted a weak culture for consequence management and accountability structures in government departments due to unclear processes of dealing with financial management misconduct. These scholars bemoaned a situation where officials often got away with a slap on the wrist.

### **Consequence management in the Department of Employment and Labour**

The Department of Employment and labour was another department which played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the impact of national lockdowns on the economy and employment, the Department had to step in and supplement income with relief funds for those whose jobs were affected. Employers registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) were called upon to apply for the COVID-19 relief funds through the Temporary Employer/Employee Relief Scheme on behalf of their employees (Department of Employment & Labour, 2020). As with the Department of Health, this Department also reported major irregularities in the administration of the Temporary Employment Relief Scheme.

The irregularities identified by the AGSA included payments to individuals who were below the legal age of employment, deceased, or working in government (as government employees were not eligible for this benefit) (AGSA, Media Release, 2020). Following the irregular expenditure identified in the financial statements, the AGSA reported that contrary to the provisions of section 36(1)(h)(iii) and 38(1)(h)(iii) of the PFMA, consequence management was not enforced against some of the officials who had transgressed, the following statement in the AGSA integrated report (2021) is poignant:

*I was unable to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence that disciplinary steps were taken against officials who had incurred irregular expenditure, as required by section 38(1)(h)(iii) of the PFMA. This was because proper and complete records were not maintained as evidence to support the investigations into irregular expenditure.*

When irregular expenditure is identified through the auditing of documents, consequence management should be enforced. Without accounting records to support transactions, it is impossible for the AGSA to audit the affairs of the Department, thus investigation or recommendations may not be made where there is insufficient or no evidence to support transactions. Together, the above findings from both departments evince the following four pertinent aspects regarding the inclination of the government departments towards consequence management.

### **Discussion of Observations**

Evidence from the two departments suggests that these government departments have a poor culture or appetite for consequence management, despite the call for accountability and consequence management. This is evidenced by the identification of irregular expenditure from the annual reports with no corrective action.

The findings of the AGSA demonstrate that the Department of employment and labour did not maintain adequate financial records which contravenes section 40(a) of the PFMA that requires government departments to keep full and proper records of the financial affairs of the Department. The South African National Archives and Records Service Act (No. 43 of 1996) requires government departments to manage their records in a well-structured record-keeping system by putting in place necessary policies and procedures that ensure record-keeping complies with the requirements of the Act. Poor record keeping suggests a culture that disregards accountability in contravention of the legislation requirements. The absence of financial records limits the audit process and as such consequence management cannot be enforced where no evidence of transgressions has come to light. AGSA relies on records to fulfil its mandate (Mojapelo & Ngoepe, 2021). Records management plays a significant role in fostering accountability, transparency, and good governance. Although governments are beginning to appreciate the significant role played by records management in governing of departments, they still need to enforce policies, standards, systems, and resources to manage records (Mazikana, 2014) effectively. Organisational culture can affect the level of receptiveness among users towards records management (Morgan, 2006).

Evidence from the two departments also suggest that there is no framework for consequence management. A consequence management framework refers to internal systems or processes that outline an organisation's approach to managing and mitigating compliance risk (NRSPP, 2019). By viewing events through a framework, managers gain context and can better apply best practices

(Marker, 2020). Although there are no requirements for government departments to have a consequence management framework, evidence has shown that organisations that have such a framework are better able to institute disciplinary action. The delayed investigation of cases and limited consequence management in government departments is indicative of the absence of a framework for consequence management.

The government gazette issued by the National School of government (2020) requires that Public Service Code of Conduct should be supported by a framework to deal with corrective action. This is because if unprofessional conduct is not sanctioned or punished, it gets elevated to a position of acceptable/tolerable behaviour. Having a clear and transparent consequence management framework demonstrates the organisation's commitment to comply with relevant laws and organisational standards (O'Connor Marsden & Associates, 2016). Accordingly, a consequence management framework would guide government departments in enforcing corrective behaviour.

### **Limitations of the study**

Useful as the insights generated by this study may be, the study is not without weaknesses. An empirical study could have benefited the study by incorporating the perspectives of the role players. Furthermore, only two provincial government departments in one province were studied. Accordingly, the findings may not be generalised. Considering these limitations, further research may be required to generate robust insights on this topic. The following suggestions on what aspects can possibly be pursued to enrich the study may be worth considering.

### **Managerial implications**

The foregoing analysis sheds light on the ineffectiveness of policies stipulated in the legislation governing government departments, specifically consequence management. This insight is important in shaping the country's efforts to recover from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in a climate marked by severe financial constraints. While the country was anticipating an end to COVID-19, another national disaster emerged due to heavy rains which caused floods in KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape Provinces. Government officials are prompted to rethink the seriousness of consequence management for officials fingered in the maladministration of funds. The ethical behaviour of government officials is challenged, urging leadership to rethink the organisational cultures of the departments. Policy makers could use insights from this study could use insights from this study in enforcing organisational cultures that prioritise compliance to legislation to prevent a repeat of the observed maleficence. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by setting the tone for future studies as it revealed a limited number of studies in this topic.

### **Conclusion and further research**

This study aimed to determine how organisational culture contributes to consequence management in government departments by drawing lessons from two Gauteng government departments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article followed a qualitative research approach using literature from previous studies, reports of the Auditor General and the integrated reports of the selected departments. The findings revealed poor enforcement of consequence management within government departments. This is in line with previous studies which noted that corruption thrived where there was an intolerant or poor culture for consequence management and lack of accountability for transgressions identified (Lindani *et al.*, 2021). To improve this, it is recommended that departments could have a framework for consequence management and enforce

an organisational culture that values ethical behaviour among their officials. While this study revealed a lack of framework for consequence management in these government departments, future studies could fill this gap by focusing on the development of a framework which could be used by government departments to enforce consequence management. Future studies could extend to other departments and other provinces, and an empirical study could be conducted to obtain the views of government officials provinces, and an empirical study could be conducted to obtain the views of government officials' views on this matter. It would also be beneficial to study the disciplinary regimes used at the provincial government level to implement consequence management to improve the enforcement of consequence management. Furthermore, a quantitative study could be conducted to gather more evidence and test the proposed framework suggested above.

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