

THE STATE OF THE **PROFESSIONALISATION OF PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT (PFM)**

IN SOUTH AFRICA

The intention is clear | A solid foundation exists.

What comes next is **systems leadership** and **aligned execution** that drive sustainable change.

REPORT: JUNE 2026

SAICA PUBLIC SECTOR PROFESSIONALISATION INSIGHTS

From Policy to Practice

SAICA is committed to strengthening professional standards in public financial management (PFM) as a pathway to a capable, accountable, and professionalised public sector. This research report examines South Africa's professionalisation journey through the PFM lens, taking stock, measuring progress, identifying persistent gaps, and outlining priorities for reform.



ABOUT SAICA AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR

SAICA

The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) is the leading accountancy body in South Africa and one of the prominent institutes globally. SAICA is a voluntary, not-for-profit member organisation that operates in terms of its constitution. SAICA is an active member of several national and international forums as part of our advocacy role and participates in knowledge-sharing and global standardsetting.

SAICA offers three reputable professional accounting and business designations from a foundational to a strategic level of accounting and business competence: Accounting Technician [AT(SA)], Associate General Accountant [AGA(SA)] and Chartered Accountant [CA(SA)]. These three designations are underpinned by the SAICA Code of Professional Conduct (the SAICA Code) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) policy to ensure the highest level of professionalism, discipline, and performance.

SAICA is at the forefront of developing and leading the highest standards of ethics, education, and professional excellence in the delivery of quality accountancy skills. This is achieved by safeguarding the professional standards of the designations on offer, advancing and maintaining the relevance of the profession, and by regulating the members' and associates' professional conduct against the SAICA Code.

SAICA in the Public Sector

SAICA is a committed partner in making a positive difference in the public sector. SAICA recognises the important role that government and the whole of the public sector must play in the prosperity of the South African society, economy and its members as enshrined in its Constitution.

As responsible and ethical leaders, SAICA members and associates form part of the various structures, entities, and spheres of government, working in the public interest towards the sustainability of the public service and the country. To this end, SAICA provides support to members and government, supporting public finance management capacity building and the professionalisation agenda for the sector.

SAICA advocates, lobbies, and influences for fit for purpose legislation, standards, policies, processes, and systems in the public sector. Members in the sector have access to guides, handbooks, tools, templates, and other resources to support them in their work.

Regular thought leadership articles and resources on emerging issues in public sector accounting, assurance, governance, accountability, risk management, technology, capacity building initiatives, and other developments affecting the work of the sector and the profession are created and managed by SAICA's Public Sector team.



AUTHORS AND DISCLAIMER

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Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this research document is complete and accurate as at the date of publication. This document has been compiled based on the survey responses received from participants and reflects the aggregated views of participants and not necessarily those of SAICA. It provides general insights on the state of professionalisation of public finance management.

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AI Use Acknowledgement:

In preparing this report, the author made use of Microsoft Copilot (Microsoft 365 Copilot) to support the survey data analysis process, specifically for drafting code snippets, response analysis and suggesting preliminary themes. All statistical procedures, interpretation of results, and final conclusions remain the responsibility of the author.



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FOREWORD



NATASHIA SOOPAL CA(SA) Head: Ethics Standards and Public Sector (SAICA)

Professionalisation of the Public Sector is crucial for South Africa to enable effective service delivery to the citizens, grow the economy and restore public trust. This report provides insights of where we stand today: a public sector with clear policy intentions, growing pockets of excellence, but persistent implementation challenges that threaten national progress.

This report offers more than data - it presents the voices of professionals who care deeply about the future of our country and who stand ready to contribute to its renewal. Many respondents, professionals working inside and alongside the system, affirm the transformative potential of professionalisation, but also highlight the realities that continue to hinder progress which includes weak accountability, skills shortages, leadership instability, and organisational cultures that undermine meritocracy and professionalism.

Despite these challenges, the message from the profession is clear and optimistic: professionalisation is both necessary and achievable. Finance professionals which includes auditors, trainees, consultants, and public sector officials overwhelmingly believe in the value that certified, ethical and competent professionals can bring to public institutions. They see professionalisation as a strategic enabler - capable of strengthening governance, improving financial management, elevating ethical conduct, and restoring public trust in government.

Professionalisation is not merely a technical exercise, it is a systems change agenda requiring ethical leadership, structural reform, accountability, and a culture that rewards competence and integrity. It requires collaboration across government, professional bodies and training institutions.

SAICA and its members remains committed to supporting government in building a highly skilled, ethical, capable and professional public sector.

Rooted in South Africa. Respected across the world.

Shaped by our lived experiences and guided by world-class expertise and leadership, SAICA collaborates to drive meaningful impact in every constituency we serve.

SAICA designations stand as a beacon of ethical leadership and problem solving, offering home-grown solutions to deeply understood local challenges. With a blend of proudly local insight and globally respected excellence in financial management, ethics, reporting, and accountability, our professionals embody the best of both worlds: African wisdom with global reach.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The public sector faces significant structural barriers, including political interference, skills shortages and mismatch, weak consequence management, and cultural resistance to meritocracy. For example, less than 3% of SAICA members and associates work in the public sector, while local government spends billions on consultants due to internal capacity gaps.

Our research reveals that while South Africa has articulated a clear **policy intent** to professionalise the public sector, implementation remains uneven and slow. Only 58% of respondents reported witnessing any professionalisation initiatives in the past three years, and just 23% rated their finance divisions as “well” or “fully” professionalised.

There is political and strategic commitment - on paper. Many respondents believe the commitment is fragile, inconsistent, or not genuine. A slight majority of respondents have, however, **seen some form of implementation**, but a large minority have **not experienced anything tangible**.

This gap between policy and practice highlights **systemic weaknesses** in leadership commitment, internal controls, performance management, and the broader governance environment. Political interference, leadership and deployment is identified consistently and by far, as the primary hinderance to professionalisation in the research. Additionally, the research outlines other barriers and challenges (such as fraud, corruption, slow decision-making, outdated systems, and a weak tone at the top) identified by respondents.

17%

Believe **finance roles** are currently **filled on merit**.

Survey insights point to significant concerns around competence, meritocracy, and accountability within public finance management (PFM). Only 17% of respondents agreed that finance roles are filled on a merit basis, and fewer than 30% that consequence management is effective at their institutions. The majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with career development pathways, training effectiveness, and the clarity of progression criteria, underscoring persistent **structural and capability deficits within the system**.

>80%

Believe **professionalisation** would have a **positive impact & major improvements** in government.

Despite these challenges, there is strong belief in the transformative potential of professionalisation. More than 80% of participants indicated that comprehensive professionalisation of PFM would have a high or very high impact on improving financial management, accountability, reducing irregular fruitless and wasteful expenditure, strengthening ethical behaviour, and

restoring public trust in government institutions. Respondents also strongly supported **certification through reputable professional bodies** such as SAICA, as a mechanism for elevating competence, enforcing ethical standards, and improving the credibility of the finance function.

The overall sentiment of the research reflects a public sector at a critical junction: the **framework(s) and intentions are in place**, and there is appetite among many professionals to contribute meaningfully to reforms. However, without decisive action to depoliticise appointments, enforce accountability, strengthen capacity-building partnerships, and embed professional standards throughout the PFM value chain, progress will remain limited.

58%

Witnessed or experienced professionalisation initiatives in the **past three years**.

58% of respondents report witnessing or experiencing the implementation of some professionalisation initiatives in the past three years, **which is positive**. Respondents representing State Owned Entities (SOEs) and other public entities generally report more formal structures, better internal governance, clearer talent processes and on average, more professionalised environments. By contrast, municipalities and government departments show lower professionalisation ratings and the highest concerns, barriers and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's public sector is pivotal to national development, yet it remains plagued by inefficiencies, corruption, lack of professionalisation and weak accountability. Despite progressive policies, legislation and frameworks such as the Constitution (1996), Batho Pele principles, and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, implementation failures have eroded public trust, stifled progress and undermined service delivery.

In 2022, government introduced the National Framework for the Professionalisation of Public Sector, structured around five pillars: pre-entry and recruitment, induction, performance management, continuous learning, and career progression. While local government is often seen as the government sphere that has experienced significant failure, various underlying issues are sighted as contributing to these challenges.

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) long identified the lack of professionalisation as a key contributing factor to challenges facing local government, and authored a professionalisation framework for local government back in 2013 to remedy this. The **implementation of this policy (similar to many others) has been limited**, and possible benefits largely missed.

South Africa's ambition to build a capable, ethical, and developmental state has placed the professionalisation of the public sector at the centre of reform efforts.

This research, based on 252 survey responses drawn from public sector employees, auditors, consultants, and others, assesses the progress, gaps, and realities of professionalising PFM across all spheres of government.

Professionalising public finance is a critical catalyst for achieving broader public sector professionalisation, reforms and advancing South Africa's developmental goals.

As the survey results indicate, weaknesses in technical competence, ethical conduct, merit-based recruitment, and consequence management within finance functions continue to undermine accountability, fiscal stability, and service delivery performance across government. PFM sits at the core of government operations, shaping budgeting, resource allocation, procurement, reporting and oversight. Its effectiveness directly influences the credibility and capability of the entire public sector.

Our research suggests that professionalising public finance is not only a technical necessity, but a strategic enabler of good governance, service delivery improvement, and long-term national development.

Respondents survey overwhelmingly believe that comprehensive professionalisation of public finance would significantly improve financial management, reduce irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure, strengthen ethical behaviour, and rebuild public trust in government institutions. The majority rate its potential impact as "high" or "very high" across all key governance areas. In this sense, professionalising public

finance is not merely an administrative reform but a strategic national imperative. It lays the foundation for clean governance, efficient service delivery, sustainable development, and the restoration of confidence in the state's ability to steward public resources effectively.

This research report highlights the urgency of moving beyond frameworks and conference speeches, to enforcement and implementation of the professionalisation agenda.

These insights highlight a contradiction: while there is strong recognition of the benefits of professionalisation across the board, implementation remains inconsistent and hampered by structural and cultural challenges. Respondents repeatedly cited political patronage, weak consequence management, and a poor tone at the top as some of the most significant hindrances.

This report provides **a reality check on the professionalisation agenda**. It highlights the urgency of moving beyond frameworks and speeches, to real and practical enforcement and implementation. The need enforce meritocracy, strengthen partnerships with professional bodies, and institutionalise continuous development. Conferences and summits should ideally focus on progress and serve as accountability mechanisms, not only to inspire hope.

The insights will inform actionable recommendations to accelerate reforms and create an enabling environment for professionals and professionalism to thrive, restoring public confidence and improving service delivery.

SETTING THE PROFESSIONALISATION CONTEXT

During November 2025, SAICA released a [research report](#) on the professionalisation of the public sector and outlining the role the accountancy profession has to play in this journey.

Professionalisation of South Africa's public sector is a critical driver for state capacity, improved governance, accountability and sustainable development, yet the reality of policy implementation has historically been marred by persistent challenges and frequent failure.

Despite well-crafted frameworks, including the recently released national framework for public service professionalisation, systemic barriers such as ineffective regulations, inconsistent will, poor leadership, weak institutional accountability, skills deficits, and uneven application of standards continue to impede substantial progress.

Framing Professionalisation

Professionalisation, as understood in this research context, demands more than the technical adoption of professional standards or merely hiring professionals (or consultants); it requires systemic transformation anchored in merit-based recruitment, ethical conduct, continuous professional growth, and robust accountability mechanisms. It must also confront historic inefficiencies, entrenched mismanagement, and the setting of the right tone by both political and administrative leaders, ultimately rebuilding institutional credibility and effectiveness of the public service.

The Role of the Accountancy Profession

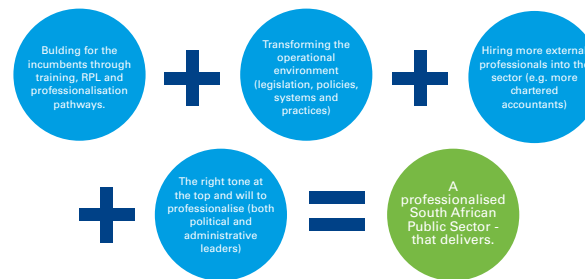
The accountancy profession, especially Chartered Accountants (CAs(SA)), brings crucial expertise in PFM,

ethical leadership, and transparent reporting, making it uniquely positioned to support public sector transformation. However, attracting and retaining such skills within government, traditionally not viewed as an employer of choice for these professionals, remains a significant challenge and requires deliberate reforms in recruitment, operating environment, and incentives among others.

There is little debate around the value that the accountancy profession brings to government, and the need for efforts to recruit and retain these professionals to strengthen PFM and service delivery.

A Suitable Model for Professionalisation

To restore public confidence and drive meaningful reform, SAICA advocates for a blended model and approach to professionalising the public sector, that is driven under **four core pillars of equal importance**:



The model requires structural reforms that transform the public sector environment, processes and practices, driven by government leaders while also attracting external expertise. It also requires government to foster

stronger partnerships with professional bodies, and other stakeholders such as civil society and business. This approach aims to set the right tone from the top and create conducive conditions for professionals and civil servants to thrive and make a meaningful impact.

Our initial insights report issued in 2025 provided an overview of the professionalisation landscape, the role the profession needs to play and served as a call to action, for members, associates and stakeholders.

Notwithstanding persistent historic implementation gaps, growing recognition exists within the profession and government, that professionalisation ought to be achieved, making reforms critical and urgent. Professionalisation is non-negotiable at this stage, and we all need to collaborate in turning policy ambition into transformative action and outcomes.

This research report represents the “next” phase of SAICA's professionalisation research and insights.

For this report, we deployed targeted surveys to assess the practical progress in professionalising the public sector, particularly PFM. We collected specific data on experiences, perceptions, challenges professional standards and certification, skills and competencies, benefits, and the institutionalisation of professional practices within the sector.

This assessment provides **insights on progress and recommendations** for refining reforms, strategies and tactics to drive collective action across all stakeholders.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY

Total Participants and Respondents

A **total of 252 responses** were received for analysis, however, note the following:

- n=252 respondents (representing the total participants)
- Participants that answered and completed the survey: 170 (65%)
- Participants that answered most of the survey questions (≥80%): 164*

* The count for ≥80% answered (164) is slightly lower than completed (170) because a few respondents reached the end while leaving more than 20% of the numbered items blank (e.g., skipping some matrix or open-ended questions). This pattern is common in surveys with long multi-part questions.

Professional Affiliation

Q1. If applicable, which professional accounting body do you hold your designation with? (Select all that apply)

- The respondent group is anchored by **SAICA affiliated professionals and trainees**. It is complemented by CIGFARO, SAIPA, SAIGA, IIA SA, ACCA, and CIMA/AICPA memberships.
- SAICA affiliates dominated the study with 57% members and associates, 34% SAICA Trainees and next largest association being SAIGA at 4%.
- A total of 18 respondent mentioned that they are **not professionally affiliated** or belong to professional bodies outside of those listed in the survey (including IRMSA, Legal Practice Council, ISACA SA and CIPFA).



WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY (CONT'D)

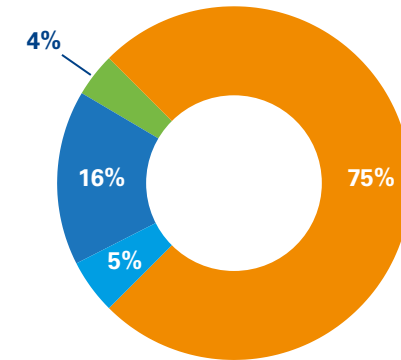
Public Sector Employment

Q2: Do you currently work in or with the public sector?

- The sample is dominated by audit oriented professionals, with 189 out of 252 respondents (75%) employed as **auditors working with public sector clients**. A total of 41 respondents (16%) work inside government.

- Yes - I work for government
- Yes - I audit public sector clients
- Yes - I work as a consultant
- No - Not at the moment

How They are Engaged with Government



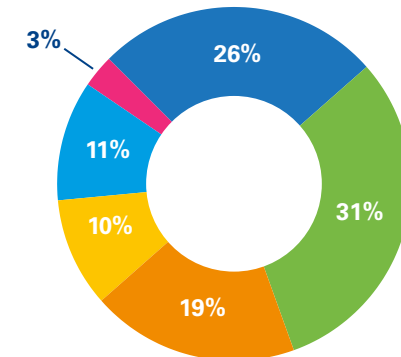
Public Sector Experience

Q3. How much experience do you have working in the public sector environment?

- 143 respondents (57%) have 0–5 years of public sector experience, which means that a higher proportion of participants are trainees and early career professionals have a keen interest on professionalisation of the public sector. These professionals bring operational and delivery insights.
- A solid mid career cohort exists as well with 48 (19%) of participants reporting 6-10 years of experience. **This group brings deep PFM experience, organisational memory and insights into long-term challenges.**
- Senior or highly experienced professionals are meaningful at 21% of total participants. They bring long term **governance, leadership, accountability, organisational culture insights and perspectives on systemic issues.**

- < 2 years
- 2 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- >15 years
- No experience

Public Sector Experience



WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY (CONT'D)

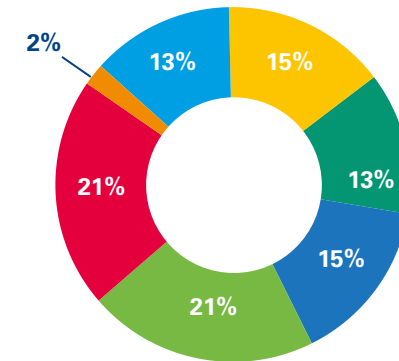
Government Sphere

Q4. In which sphere (or sector) of government do you work?

- There is a good balance of representation **across major government spheres**, indicating a reasonably even distribution of perspectives across government.
- There is also strong representation from public entities and SOEs, public universities, chapter 9 institutions, regulators.
- This means that the insights presented will be sufficiently diverse to include departments, entities and municipalities, political-administrative interface at local level, more mature finance structures at some entities and **cross-institutional insights**.

- National Department
- Provincial Department
- Municipality
- Municipal Entity
- State-owned Entity (SEO)
- Other Public Entities
- Non-Government Sector

Sphere or Entity of Government



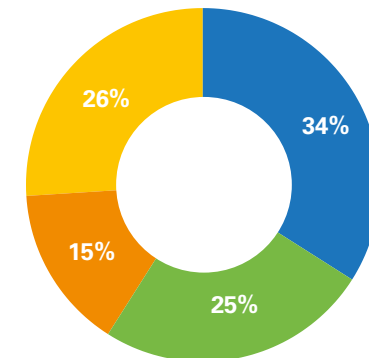
Familiarity with Professionalisation

Q5. Are you familiar with the principles and guidance documents related to the professionalisation of the public sector?

- 149 participants report **some familiarity** with professionalisation (general principles or the professionalisation framework), while 38 are not familiar with these.
- 65 people didn't answer this question. This non response may be material even though some may reflect partial completions of the survey.
- There is a need to achieve common understanding on professionalisation principles and guidance, which also needs to be communicated and translated into concise, PFM specific guidance.

- Yes - familiar with general principles
- Yes - familiar with the professionalisation framework of government
- No - not familiar with these
- No response

Familiarity with Professionalisation Principles



METHOD & LIMITATIONS NOTE

The participants of the survey are largely associated with SAICA. The majority are professionally certified or in the process of professional certification by SAICA (with some affiliated with other professional bodies). Respondents are also dominated by public sector external auditors, which is not unreasonable given that government departments, entities and municipalities typically have limited professionals certified by professional bodies (such as SAICA).

Accordingly, the outcomes of the research and insights provided ought to be interpreted with this context in mind.

The survey was distributed via SAICA communication channels (email and social media). While accessible to all SAICA members, associates and non-members, not all desirable participants may have been reached through these channels. This is an inherent limitation in the method and data collection process.

As an open link, participants had the flexibility of skipping questions so base sizes may vary throughout the results. Quotas were not applied. The results are not intended to be representative of the South African accountancy profession as a whole and percentages in the report are indicative of respondents to the survey rather than members of the profession.

The development of questions was based on the insights of the SAICA insights report on professionalisation of the public sector (released in 2025) and the challenges that confront government and stakeholders in professionalising the sector.



WHO PARTICIPATED



HOW IT WAS DISTRIBUTED



OPEN ACCESS & REACH



DATA INTERPRATATION



RESEARCH FRAMEWORK





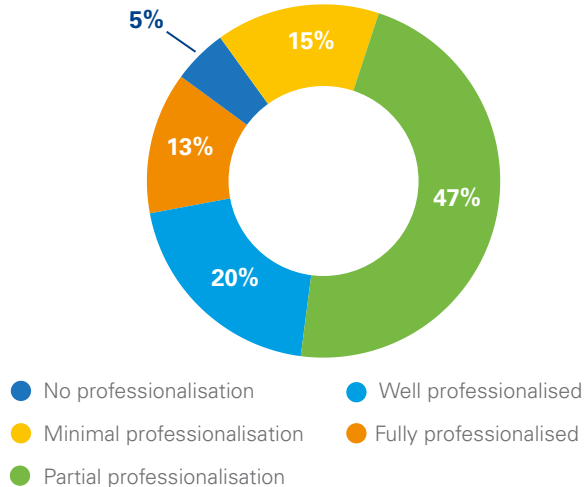
KEY INSIGHTS & FINDINGS

The findings show that while there is broad recognition of the importance of professionalising public financial management, progress is uneven due to weak meritocracy, limited accountability, political and institutional barriers, and skills gaps. Strengthened standards, collaboration, and sustained commitment are needed to realise the full benefits of improved governance, efficiency, and public trust.

INSIGHT 1: THE STATE OF PROFESSIONALISATION IN PFM

Finance divisions across the public sector remain at varying stages of maturity. Only 33% of respondents experience their finance division as “well” or “fully” professionalised. SOEs and public entities fare better, while municipalities and governments departments lag behind.

Measuring the state of professionalisation

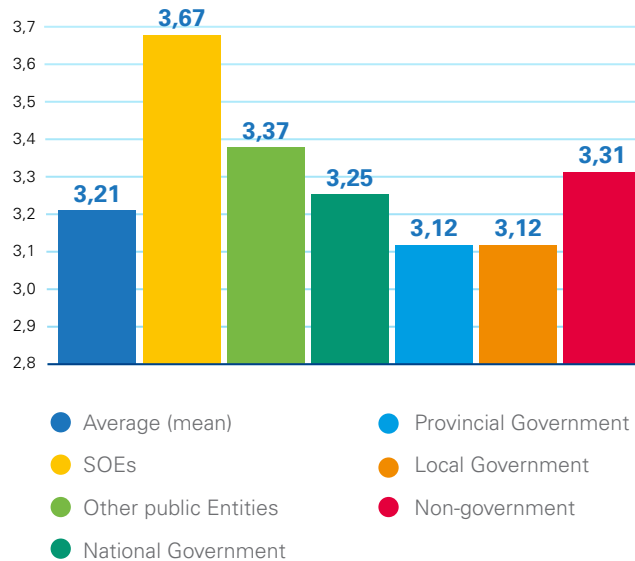


- The **modal view is “Partial professionalisation”** (47% of those who answered). Respondents generally believe that some standardised policies and qualified personnel are present, but **application is inconsistent**.

- Around one third rate the finance function is “Well or Fully” professionalised (33% combined), while roughly one fifth rate it Minimal or No professionalisation (20% combined).
- To quantify **the sentiment**, and analyse this by the specific sphere of the respondent, the five categories (1–5 index) have been mapped as: No=1, Minimal=2, Partial=3, Well=4, Fully=5 to determine:

The overall professionalisation level out of 5.

The overall mean is determined as **3.21**, which is between partial (3) and well (4), **leaning partial overall**.



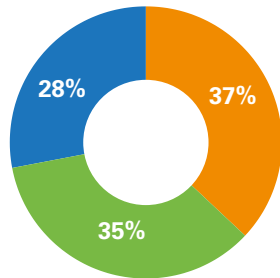
- State Owned Entities (SOEs), at 3.67 (n=18) is the strongest average rating, demonstrating more matured professionalisation levels, even though there may still be gaps needing attention.
- Other public entities are also above the overall professionalisation mean at 3.37 (n=19), however there may be even more gaps at these entities than in SOEs.
- National departments were rated 3.25 (n=20), also just above the overall mean.
- Provincial departments were rated 3.12 (n=26) below mean; indicating more “Partial” ratings, the same rating received by municipalities: 3.12 (n=25), with a heavier “Partial or Minimal” mix.
- Local and provincial government are lagging behind**, echoing persistent capacity gaps while SOEs and other public entities (e.g., regulators, public universities, etc.) fare better, with more “well and fully” ratings - likely due to stronger internal governance, specialist skills, and clearer lines of accountability.

Insight 1 continued on next page>

INSIGHT 1: THE STATE OF PROFESSIONALISATION IN PFM

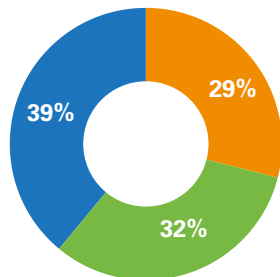
Further insights on competence and implementation of professionalization in the current system:

Technical Finance Competence



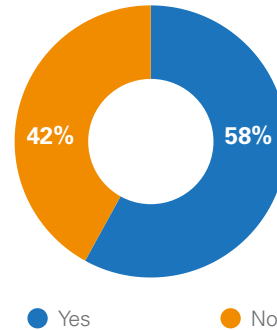
● Not present ● Neutral ● Present

Non-technical Competence



● Not present ● Neutral ● Present

Experienced or Witnessed any Implementation in the past Three Years?



● Yes ● No

Respondents see **behavioural competencies as more prevalent** than technical finance competencies in the current system. This aligns with the professionalisation level measured as “partial”.

There is more confidence about interpersonal, resilience, relational and similar competencies than about the technical ability to manage PFM demands, reporting, controls, and public finance performance.

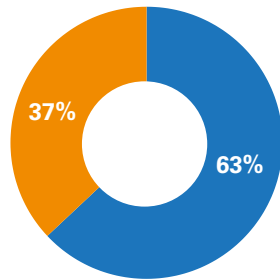
- A concerning 28% of respondents believe that the current public sector accountancy and finance workforce possess the necessary **technical competencies** to manage and improve public finance, reporting, transparency and accountability in South Africa.

- A majority of respondents note that the will and commitment exist, yet the overall professionalisation level sits at an average 3.21 (out of 5), a modal rating of “partial”. This gap signals that **policy level intent is not yet producing consistent, mature practice across finance functions.**
- 58% reported seeing some professionalisation initiatives, implying **implementation is visible but uneven** in practice and professionalisation has not reached desired levels (currently partial).
- **96% support certification** (see insight 4) in some form (with 57% wanting it for all finance staff). That strong demand likely reflects what the assessment here reveals: many teams are not yet “well professionalised”, and respondents see certification as a lever to stabilise standards, accountability and ethics.
- **Provincial and municipal finance ought to be prioritised.** They show lower average scores and a larger “minimal professionalisation” share. They need focused capacity building, leadership stabilisation, and control environment fixes. This should encompass competency based hiring, formalised standard operating procedures (SOPs), systems of internal control, disciplined performance management and continued professional development (CPD), and enforcing minimum requirements such as experienced chartered accountants for CFOs and middle management.

INSIGHT 2: WILL & COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONALISE

There is a divided sentiment on will and commitment, leaning positive, but with caution. The majority perceive will to exist, commitment to be evident (particularly through the framework, dialogues and many having seen some implementation), however, many believe will exists largely on paper.

Is there a will and commitment to professionalise?



● There is a will ● There is no will

- 63% of respondents believe there is “will and commitment” to professionalise the public sector, while 37% believe the opposite. This reflects a perception that **strategic intent exists** at the top levels of government, but that operational environments may not consistently reflect this intent.

- **Policy-level commitment is visible**, with frameworks such as the National Framework for the Professionalisation of the Public Sector (2022). Respondents note policy intent, Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) directives, Treasury and other Departmental initiatives, Presidency and audit driven reforms.
- Participants note the growing visibility of **training and capacity-building programmes** (including the National School of Government programmes, together with professional body) supported competency and capacity building initiatives.
- **Implementation, however, remains uneven** with only 58% of respondents having seen any implementation of professionalisation activities in the last three years.
- There are many environments where professionalisation reforms **“exist on paper”** but **fails in practice** due to structural, political, and cultural barriers. Professionalisation requires behaviour change, leadership alignment, and operational enforcement, all areas where respondents repeatedly noted challenges.
- Some participants **note improved appointment practices in some areas**. Some note improvements in CFO recruitment criteria and greater presence of professionals in SOEs and national departments.
- Many respondents that perceive a lack of will and commitment **cite severe, system level concerns**, including political interference and deployments, which

is the single most dominant theme in the research.

- Senior appointments are noted to be politically aligned, framework implementation “blocked” by the “politics” of the environment. Many responses explicitly state that there is **“No political will”** or “Political interference prevents professionalisation.”
- Poor leadership, corruption and weak consequence management, lack of enforcement of frameworks, lack of skills support, resistance to change, and organisational culture are also cited as **troubles facing the sector** and indicating a lack of commitment and will.

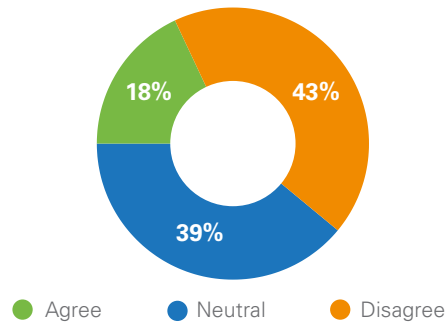


INSIGHT 3: MERITOCRACY & ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICITS

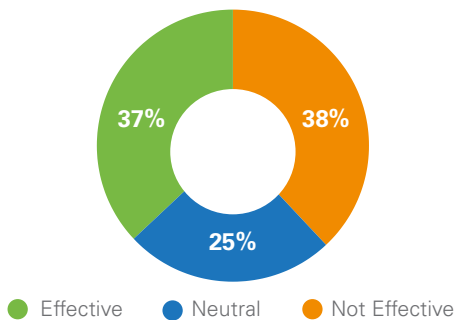


There is a serious breakdown of meritocracy and accountability, with the system perceived to reward alignment over ability, weak and uneven consequence management, and safety risks to ethical professionals, all undermining reform credibility.

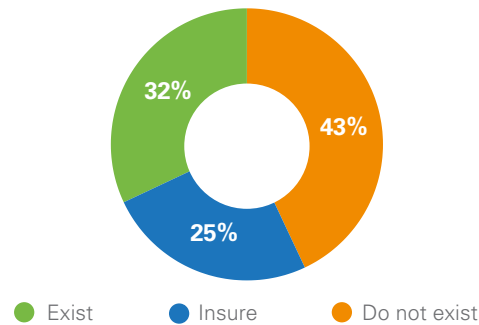
Public Finance Roles are Filled on a Merit Basis



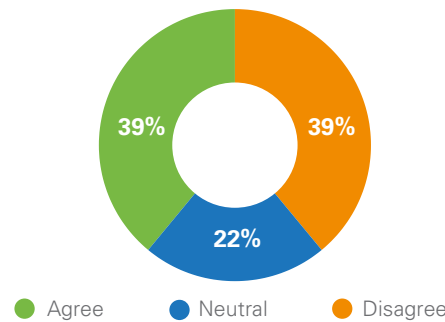
Performance Evaluations & Consequence Management



Clear & Transparent Career Paths and Progression



Employment Prioritises Certified Professionals



What does this say about meritocracy?

- Respondents do not experience a robustly merit driven system and see accountability mechanisms (performance & consequences) as **patchy and inconsistent**.

- The majority disagree that roles are filled on merit (43% disagree vs 18% agree), with a large neutral block (39%). This is a strong signal that **merit based hiring is far from being the norm** in many environments.
- The effectiveness of performance evaluations and consequence management is almost evenly split (38% not effective vs 37% effective), **undermining the perception of a fair, performance driven system**, indicating thin and uneven accountability and consequences for poor performance.
- Views on **prioritising certified professionals** are also close to balanced (at 39%), suggesting this lever is also not yet consistently applied across the system. Credible public finance professionals associated with credible professional bodies should be the norm for the sector.
- Most professionals do not feel they have a visible, consistent, or fair set of **criteria to advance** within their organisations as the majority of respondents do not experience transparent career pathways.
- Lack of clarity undermines motivation, performance, and retention while the transparency deficits **reinforce perceptions of non meritocratic appointments**. A quarter of respondents are 'Neutral', signalling uncertainty, not satisfaction.
- There is a **significant trust deficit** in how the system recruits, manages performance, grows, promotes, and develops talent.

Insight 3 continued on next page>

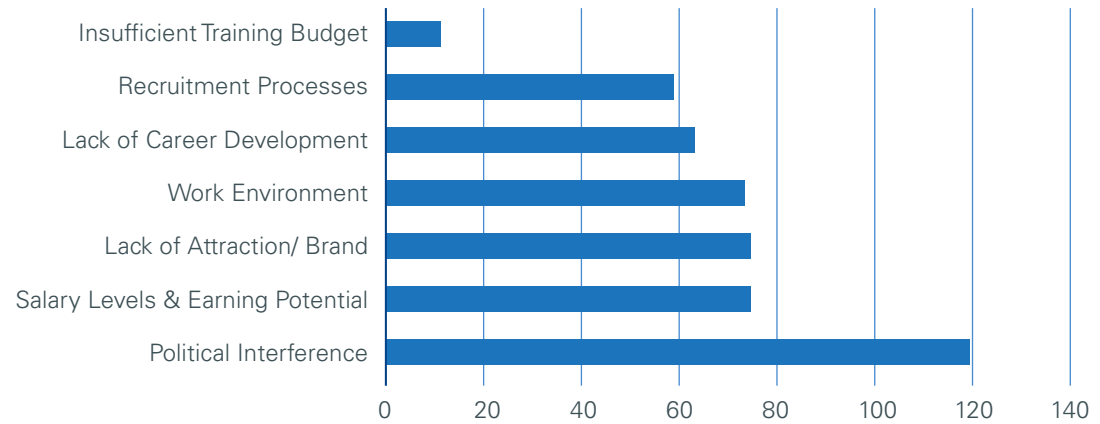
INSIGHT 3: MERITOCRACY & ACCOUNTABILITY DEFICITS

- Respondents repeatedly identified **political deployments and preference** in hiring, job specifications tailored to preferred candidates and a lack of accountability for poor performance or misconduct.

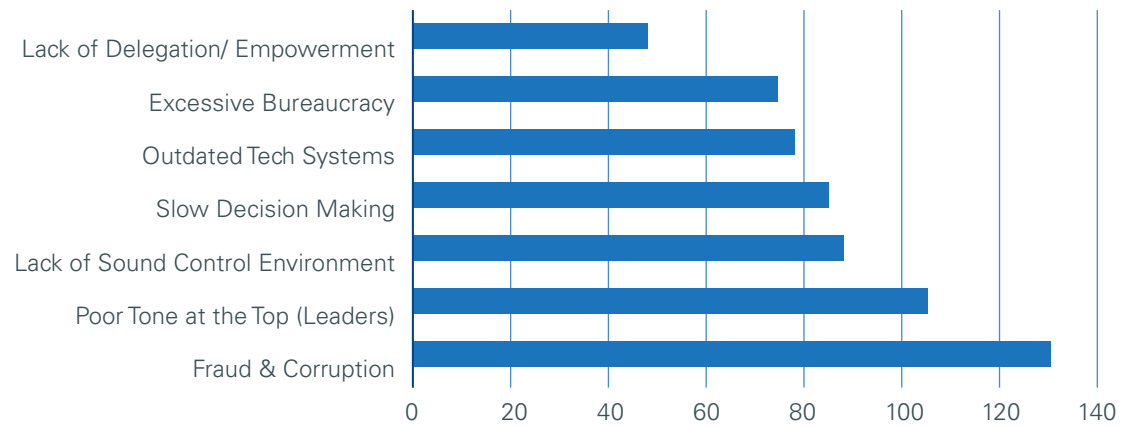
Respondents locate the root cause of weak meritocracy and accountability in political interference, **poor tone at the top, and fraud/corruption**. Together these create a low trust, low consequence environment where merit signals are crowded out. **Structural issues** such as bureaucracy, slow decisions, weak controls, dated systems further erode the ability to implement fair processes and enforce consequences.



Top Barriers to Recruiting Professionals:



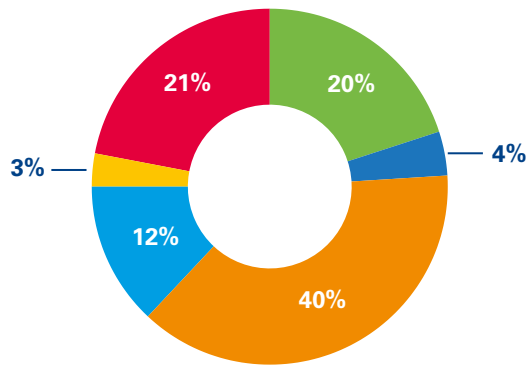
Internal processes that hinder professional practice:



INSIGHT 4: CERTIFICATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & STANDARDS

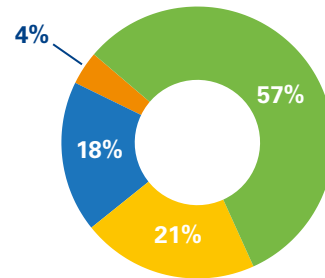
Professional body certification is seen as a core requirement for improving competence, professional standards, ethics and accountability. Many public finance units lack technical depth and behavioural competence alone cannot drive reform, while certification-linked professionalisation is expected to drive major improvements.

Best Approach to Professionalise the Public Sector



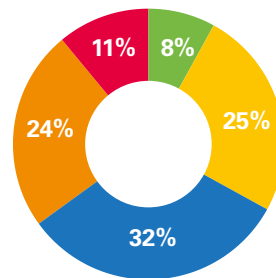
- Short Courses
- RPL
- Professional Certification
- NSG Training
- Govt Certification
- Academic Studies

Importance of Professional Certification



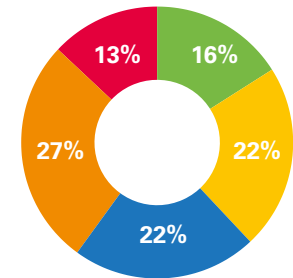
- For all public finance staff
- For leadership positions
- For seniors & managers
- Not necessary

Developmental Opportunities and CPD - Available and Encouraged



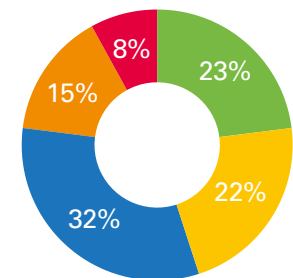
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Employment Practices Prioritise Professional Certification



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Does government (in general) pay professional membership fees?



- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Insight 4 continued on next page>

INSIGHT 4: CERTIFICATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & STANDARDS

Certification by Professional Bodies

- Certification by a professional body is overwhelmingly seen as essential, with the majority (80%+) of respondents endorsing some level of mandatory professional certification across the public finance workforce.
- Respondents are **split on whether public sector finance employment practices prioritise professional certification** by reputable bodies such as SAICA.
- 70 respondents believe that employment practices do prioritise certified professionals while 71 believe they do not, indicating that many respondents do not see certification reflected in actual employment practices.
- Professional certification **introduces external enforcement**, professional ethical codes, continuous professional development (CPD), and consequences for misconduct that could benefit government.
- Respondents identify professional certification as the most effective **capacity building approach**, outperforming all other approaches to upskilling and professionalisation, by a wide margin.
- Certification-linked professionalisation is expected to **drive major improvements**, particularly in financial management, accountability, ethical conduct, and public trust.
- While professional certification is critical, what government really needs is a **“professional culture,”** not just professional titles. Hiring a **professionally**

certified CFO may not always yield positive and sustainable results without a professional culture in the unit and those charged with governance.

- Government employers are also perceived to prioritise **experience over professional qualifications**, thus favouring **tenure over professionally certified competence**.
- Sector employers often do not weight professional designations in scoring, sometimes equating chartered accountancy to other general administrative vacancies (and vice versa), which undervalues professional certifications like CA(SA) or AGA(SA).
- This aligns with comments by respondents that candidates with strong qualifications (e.g., SAICA certification and training contracts) **struggle to secure government posts**.
- Although regulations require senior roles (e.g., CFOs) to hold minimum qualifications, respondents note that these are often circumvented without consequences, enforcement is inconsistent while some public organisations (particularly municipalities) lag significantly. This contributes to the perception that **certification is not a hiring priority**.
- There were some **positive comments** with respondents confirming that certain entities are already professionalising, with national departments improving recruitment standards, SOEs with strong governance cultures, AGSA trained professionals being prioritised and CFO offices becoming more professionalised.

- **More job adverts now require professional designations**, with clearer qualification requirements in advertisements, certification often listed as “advantageous” and leadership positions increasingly requiring CA(SA)/AGA(SA) and similar qualifications. However, this practice is not yet universal.
- Nearly half of respondents (82 of 180; 46%) agree that government does pay **professional fees** and encourage registration (compared with 41 (23%) who disagree and 57 (32%) neutral). This indicates a **net positive perception** (+22.8 percentage points) overall, but the large neutral share suggests **inconsistent implementation** by government where some workplaces fund and encourage memberships, others do not.
- There is a **policy practice gap relative to the certification agenda**. Respondents strongly endorse professional certification yet support (funding and encouragement) isn’t universal. Even though certification is valued in principle, budgeting, HR policies and practices are applied unevenly, limiting scale and momentum of registration and professionalisation.

Insight 4 continued on next page>

INSIGHT 4: CERTIFICATION, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & STANDARDS

Respondents highlight that certified professionals often do not apply to government employers due to:

- Reputational risks
- Safety risks (intimidation, whistleblower killings)
- Low salaries
- Poor work environments
- Lack of career development

Thus, even if government aggressively wants to hire certified professionals, even though there is interest, the pipeline has gotten thin and there is concern about the risks above.

This over time translates to a shortage of **highly competent, professionally certified people working in government.**

Continued Professional Development (CPD)

- Respondents are split on the **culture of professional development** and availability of CPD opportunities to officials.
- Despite 63 respondents agreeing that CPD is encouraged and supported, most respondents judge the current initiatives as unsuitable (No = 105 vs Yes = 65) and ineffective (No = 119 vs Yes = 51), pointing to a **quality and impact gap rather than a pure access problem.**

- There is a strong demand for structured, profession-led CPD, with the majority of respondents wanting **better coordination between government and professional bodies.**

How should professionalisation be approached?

- Professionalisation emphasises the **need to improve the capabilities** of the workforce, developing their skills, and ensuring that they adhere to high professional standards.
- It also focuses on employing and retaining public servants who are qualified, competent, ethical, and able to perform their functions diligently, reflecting a shift toward a meritocratic, non-partisan public administration aligned with constitutional values.
- Respondents support professional body certification as their **preferred approach** to professionalising government, with academic study and government certification as second and third choice.
- SAICA's **model to professionalise** the public sector emphasises four core areas: building capacity for the incumbents, transforming the environment and culture, infusing professionals into the sector and setting the right tone at the top.
- The current public finance culture is still **far from consistent professionalism as most** organisations sit at "partial professionalisation," highlighting implementation gaps according to our research.

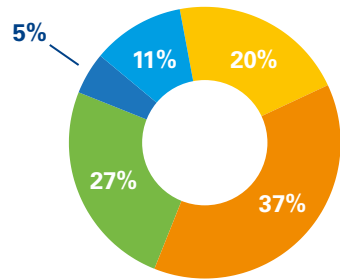
- There is **inconsistent application of professional standards** in the sector, while political interference was cited as a major barrier to professionalisation (undermining factor) and erodes professional standards. The tone being set at the top requires attention.



INSIGHT 5: CONTRIBUTION BY THE PROFESSION, BENEFITS TO GOVERNMENT

Accountancy and finance professionals in the public sector contribute to improved transparency and accountability in the sector, drive the adoption of best practices in PFM and reporting while upholding ethical and governance standards.

Contribute to Upholding Ethical and Governance Standards



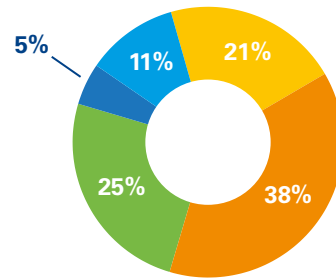
● Strongly Disagree ● Disagree ● Neutral
● Agree ● Strongly Agree

- A combined 63% of respondents believe that accountants significantly **strengthen ethics and governance in the public sector**.

This highlights the value of integrating certified professionals into key PFM roles and in the governance ecosystem, in improving transparency, fraud prevention, decision integrity and compliance.

- Ethical leadership** is viewed as more consistent within the profession than within government structures. Professional codes of conduct (e.g., the SAICA Code) impose external accountability that government can leverage to counter corruption and ethics failures.
- Ethical competence is a competitive advantage the public sector could harness more effectively, given widespread concerns about corruption within the sector. The profession offers a **stabilising ethical anchor**.

Contribution to Improved Transparency and Accountability

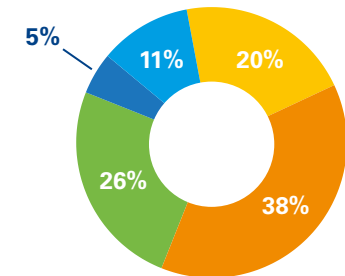


● Strongly Disagree ● Disagree ● Neutral
● Agree ● Strongly Agree

- With 63% agreeing that professionals contribute to transparency and accountability through reporting, respondents clearly believe accountants materially improve **disclosure quality, reporting accuracy, assurance and oversight**.

- This supports **better PFM** and audit outcomes, reduces financial misconduct, strengthens service delivery and oversight by Treasury, Parliament, Municipal Councils, and civil society.
- Accountability is strengthened when professionals are involved. The profession's training in legislation, governance, reporting standards, adaptability, decision making, internal control, and assurance directly **improves accountability mechanisms**.
- Transparency gaps** remain where professional capacity lacks. Increasing the professionalisation of finance units will address persistent issues such as late and poor quality reporting, poor record keeping, and inadequate disclosure.

Professionals Drive the Adoption of Best Practices in PFM & Reporting



● Strongly Disagree ● Disagree ● Neutral
● Agree ● Strongly Agree

Insight 5 continued on next page>

INSIGHT 5: CONTRIBUTION BY THE PROFESSION, BENEFITS TO GOVERNMENT

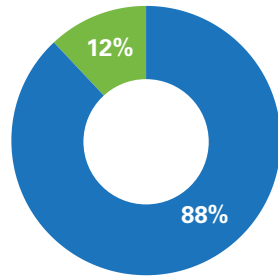
- **Professionals are drivers of best-practice**, with a solid 63% agreeing that the profession advances modernisation, standards adoption, and improved financial processes. This includes improvements in budgeting, internal controls, asset management, reporting, SCM, and risk management.
- **Best practice adoption is inconsistent across the public sector**, with 20% of respondents neutral (and 16% negative, suggesting major variation between well capacitated environments and those lacking professional capability (e.g., municipalities).
- Professionals bring **global standards into the public sector** because they are trained in international (and internationally aligned) reporting and assurance standards, disciplined financial management practices and governance processes.
- The same professionals available to government are also well **respected and trusted by the international job market**. This can strengthen financial sustainability, improve service delivery, and promote continuous improvement.



INSIGHT 6: GOVERNMENT & PROFESSIONAL BODIES

There is a need for better coordination, cooperation and collaboration between government and professional bodies in delivering training, capacity building initiatives and ultimately professionalisation.

Cordination, Collaboration and Cooperation



● Needed ● Not Necessary

- There is overwhelming support (88%) for stronger collaboration between government and professional bodies on training and capacity building.
- This matters because respondents judge current **training as unsuitable and ineffective** (see insight 11). The strong call for better coordination logically aligns with these views: if training is not fit for purpose or impactful, **co-designing and co-delivering with professional bodies is seen as a key remedy**.
- All respondents agree directionally (at varying levels) on

the need for collaboration between government and professional bodies. Auditors (who see capability gaps up close) are the strongest advocates, followed by government officials.

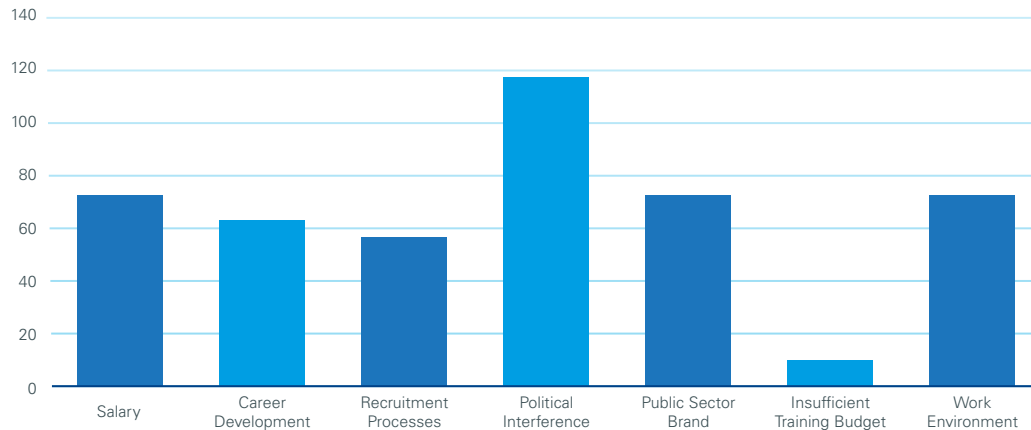
- **Coordination gaps are widely felt as respondents** and stakeholders perceive **fragmentation** between government training pipelines and professional standards or practice needs.
- **Professional bodies are seen as enablers** of relevance, quality, ethics, and CPD rigour, addressing concerns that training is seen as **generic, inconsistently applied, and insufficiently practical** (see insight 11).



INSIGHT 7: BARRIERS TO RECRUITING HIGHLY SKILLED PROFESSIONALS INTO PFM

If government aligns recruitment with professional standards and addresses environmental barriers, it will significantly improve its capacity to attract and retain highly skilled professionals such as chartered accountants, needed to stabilise and transform PFM and elevate the delivery of services.

Barriers to recruiting skilled professionals into PFM roles



- **Political interference is the single greatest barrier by a wide margin.** With 119 selections, political interference is by far the most cited challenge in recruiting skilled professionals into PFM roles. This includes political deployments, patronage, biased shortlisting, and politically influenced appointment panels.
- Professional independence would **improve financial credibility**, reduce irregular fruitless and wasteful expenditure, and restore trust in PFM and financial governance.

- Professionals often perceive **public sector financial environments** as high risk (fraud, intimidation, political pressure), under resourced and bureaucratic, **slow to reward competence** and lacking modern systems and professional culture.
- Respondents also note career **progression and recruitment processes as major structural barrier**, including slow, bureaucratic hiring cycles, poor alignment between job requirements and actual competency needs, selection panels lacking technical expertise, limited pathways for advancement or recognition and the failure to appropriately value professional designations (e.g., SAICA, CIGFARO, etc.).
- Respondents also highlight a **reputation and association risk**, due to the brand positioning of the sector, citing that many may not wish to be associated with some government employers.
- Across our research, respondents highlight that barriers such as **political interference, weak organisational culture, unattractive conditions**, and flawed recruitment systems directly undermine the professionalisation of public finance.
- **Insufficient training budgets** are also cited explicitly as one of the barriers to attracting and retaining professionals in the public sector.

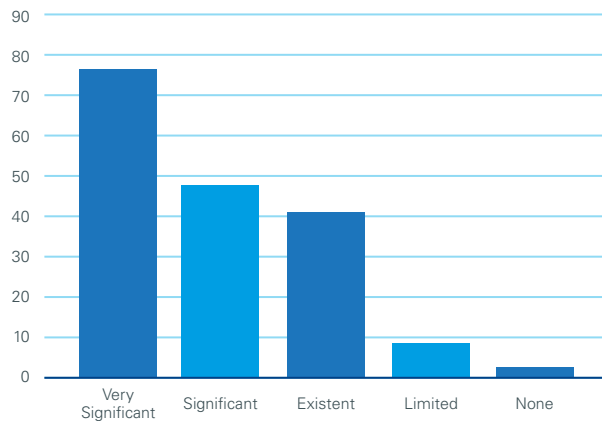


INSIGHT 8: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The Impact of Political Leadership

The vast majority rate political interference as having a significant or very significant impact on hiring, promotion, procurement and other critical decisions. This is not necessarily a negative thing, however where inappropriately used, political influence has harmful consequences.

Significance of political interference in decisions



- **Political interference is a systemic reality, not an exception.** Nine out of ten respondents say interference is at least existent, and seven in ten rate it significant or very significant. This is consistent in our research, with decisive political leadership seen as critical to enable professionalisation, but currently a major barrier.

- **Interference correlates with broader control environment weaknesses.** The research highlights internal obstacles that typically supports interference (e.g. fraud and corruption, poor tone at the top, slow decisions, weak controls, etc). These conditions degrade the day to day experience for professionals and increase risks and challenges.
- Leadership professionalisation is seen as a key lever to curb interference. Capacitation as well as professionalising **political and administrative leadership** were identified as key elements of professionalisation by respondents.
- Ethical, qualified, and accountable leadership is the “gatekeeper” for professionalisation. Depoliticised HR, procurement and decision making are a catalyst for consistent standard setting professionalisation across departments, entities and municipalities.
- Respondents expect comprehensive professionalisation to deliver high or very **high improvements in financial management, accountability, reducing irregular expenditure, fiscal stability, ethics, culture, service delivery and public trust**, the exact outcomes political interference undermines today.

Political interference is not a single event; it is a catalyst that weakens layers of governance.

It distorts leadership signals, breaks accountability chains, erodes institutional competence, corrupts organisational culture, and ultimately undermines the

very systems required to protect public resources and deliver services.

Respondents note the importance of political leadership, highlighting that if this is not effective, professionalisation efforts will continue to struggle, as environmental transformation may never be achieved.

The **ripple effect of a poor political and leadership tone** at the top are severe.

- **Governance breakdown begins at the top:**
 - Merit-based processes are sidelined, creating a culture where rules are optional or selectively applied.
 - Ethical standards erode because political actors override institutional safeguards intended to ensure fairness and accountability.
 - Senior managers mirror the behaviour from above, weakening internal governance norms. This ultimately becomes a culture, with officials accepting this as the way of work.
- A weak leadership cohort **cannot set standards, enforce controls, or model professional conduct**, amplifying systemic failures:
 - Underqualified or misaligned individuals in CFO, SCM, and PFM (or general and senior management) roles.

Insight 8 continued on next page>

INSIGHT 8: THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

- Environments where competent technocrats are marginalised or pushed out
- High turnover of skilled professionals due to intimidation or political or other pressure
- Without strong leadership **reinforcing controls and enforcing discipline**, financial misconduct, irregularities, and procedures manipulation flourish. The breakdown of control enables:
 - Non-compliance with laws, regulations, policies, norms and standards,
 - Unreliable information for decision making, leading to poor decisions and services,
 - Poor PFM practices and audit outcomes, indicating poor financial practices and resource management,
 - Loss of public trust and system credibility, leading to tax payer dissatisfaction.
- **Organisational culture degrades** as fear, risk aversion, and tolerance for misconduct take root:
 - Officials (staff) and whistleblowers stop reporting wrongdoing due to fear,
 - Compliance becomes performative rather than meaningful,
 - Ethical professionals exit, while those who remain normalise dysfunction,
 - Institutional courage collapses, reinforcing impunity.
- **Systemic institutional failure** takes hold, weakening governance, collapsing capability and worsening service delivery. It also perpetuates wasteful practices, non-compliance (and irregular expenditure) which also contribute to institutional distrust from professionals and the public.

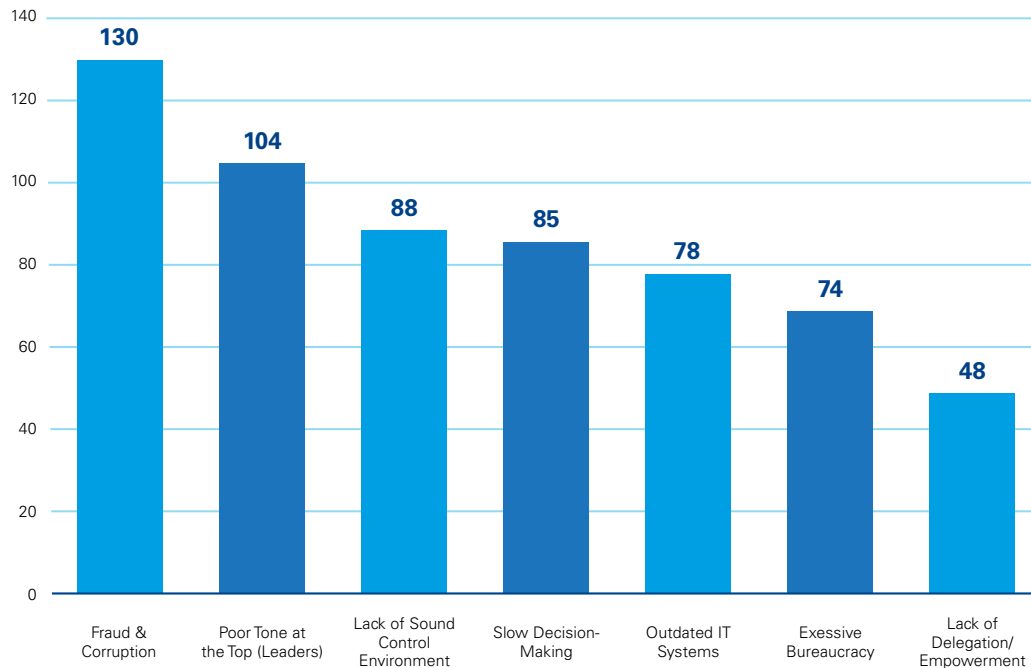
POLITICAL INTERFERENCE + WEAK TONE AT THE TOP = SYSTEMIC INCAPACITY



INSIGHT 9: INTERNAL PROCESSES HINDERING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Internal processes hinder professional practice primarily because they are slow, highly bureaucratic, politically vulnerable, poorly controlled, technologically outdated, and badly led. Data points to a system where qualified and committed professionals struggle to operate effectively. Strong policy frameworks exist, but implementation is inhibited by systemic structural weaknesses and low accountability.

Internal Hinderances and Barriers



- Poor governance, ethical conduct and accountability failures places strain on professional practice. Fraud and corruption, poor tone at the top and weak control environments are **primary blockers of professional practice**, far outweighing pure “process” irritants.
- 104 respondents cited **poor leadership tone** as a critical hindrance. This often manifests in weak ethical leadership, tolerance of poor performance, lack of consequence management, failure to enforce rules fairly, undermining of merit-based practice. Leadership dysfunction creates a trickle-down effect, weakening organisational integrity.
- **Operational friction, including lack of speed and red tape** forms the second big cluster of blockage. Slow decisions, excessive bureaucracy and lack of delegation together are symptoms keeping professionals from exercising professional judgement, adopting best practice, resolving audit findings or executing timely.
- **Systems gap is material and persistent** also create a stumbling block. The mention of outdated technology systems signal that professionals are held back by legacy finance platforms that undermine reliable reporting, automation efficiency, data integrity and real-time monitoring, and perpetuate weak document management and poor data lineage for compliant reporting.
- Respondents expect comprehensive professionalisation to have high or very high impact on financial management, accountability, reduced irregularities, ethics, service delivery and public trust.



INSIGHT 10: GENERAL BARRIERS & CHALLENGES TO PROFESSIONALISATION

General Barriers and Challenges to Professionalisation

Responses to an open-ended question barriers and challenges in professionalising the public sector reveal a clear and consistent narrative: professionalisation is less a technical challenge and more a governance, culture, and political challenge. The barriers are systemic, deeply embedded, and well-understood by practitioners on the ground.



Word cloud: top challenges hindering professionalisation in the public sector

Based on aggregated response patterns, the **top obstacles to professionalising** the sector are (in order of frequency):

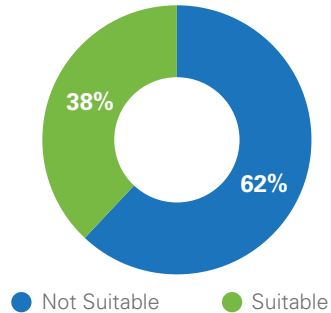
1. Political interference and deployments (the most dominant theme)
2. Corruption, fraud and ethical failures
3. Weak accountability and lack of consequence management
4. Poor leadership, tone at the top
5. Skills shortages and unqualified or incompetent personnel in key roles
6. Bureaucracy, inefficiencies and outdated systems
7. Resistance to change and toxic organisational culture

- Respondents overwhelmingly identify political interference, corruption, and weak accountability as the primary obstacles to professionalising the South African public sector.
- While policy exists to guide professionalisation, deep-rooted governance, cultural, and capacity issues impede implementation. The hindrances highlighted by respondents align with broader systemic issues flagged across our research.
- The findings suggest **professionalisation cannot succeed** if reforms focus only on **skills and training only**. The root problems are **governance-related**, requiring systemic interventions.
 - Technical fixes alone (training, summits, policies, infusing professionals) are insufficient.
 - Political reform and governance strengthening must accompany technical reforms.
 - Leadership reform and the correct tone at the top is a critical lever to achieving set goals.
 - Professional bodies should play a larger role in imposing external accountability.
 - Whistleblower protection must be strengthened and central to support ethical professionals and officials.
 - Incentives, rewards for excellence. Consequences for poor performance (carrot and stick).

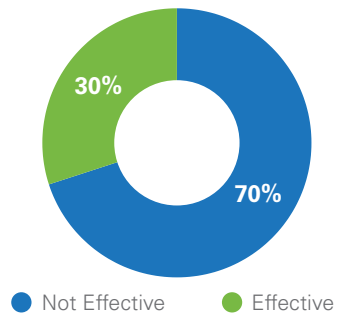
INSIGHT 11: TRAINING AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Training and capacity-building interventions are failing to meet professionalisation needs. Current training programmes are regarded as insufficient, poorly coordinated, inadequately funded and misaligned with the competencies needed to professionalise PFM.

Suitability of Training Programmes



Effectiveness of Training Interventions



- The majority (62%) believe **current training offerings are not suitable** for developing the competencies required to professionalise the sector. Feedback from respondents is that training is:
 - too generic and outdated (at times),
 - inconsistently implemented,
 - poorly aligned with real operational challenges,
 - lacking sufficient depth for technical finance roles,
 - Not tailored to practical public finance needs,
 - Not sufficiently linked to daily challenges like weak controls or ethical dilemmas.
- An even stronger majority (70%) report that existing **initiatives are not effective**, with reasons commonly highlighted in open ended responses including the following:
 - lack of practical relevance,
 - insufficient resources and budgets,
 - outdated or inconsistent training materials,
 - failure to embed learnings into organisational performance,
 - poor monitoring and evaluation of training impact.
- The insights **indicate a systemic gap between training provided and capabilities required** for achieving PFM excellence and professionalism.
- This result aligns with broader criticisms about weak. **Insufficient and ineffective capacity-building systems** across government.
- Respondents want **structured, competency based pathways, multi-year development** journeys, no

ad hoc workshops, summits and interventions.

- **Insufficient training budgets** are also cited explicitly as a barrier to attracting and retaining professionals in the sector.
- **Fragmented training ecosystem** and poor coordination also characterise the sector. There is a dominant view from respondents for the need for government to collaborate better with professional bodies such as SAICA.
- Respondents highlight a **lack of structured entry level capacity building** for professionals, limited support or mentorship for trainees, ineffectiveness of the internship programmes and reliance on consultants due to internal skills gaps.

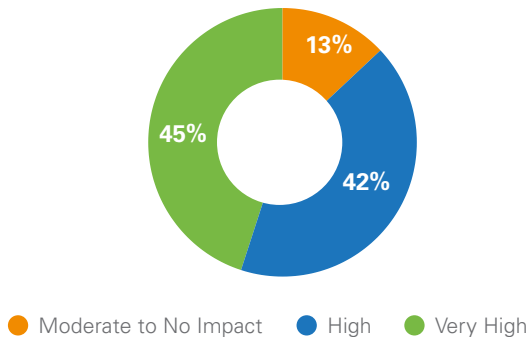


INSIGHT 12: EXPECTED IMPACT OF PROFESSIONALISATION

There is confidence in the benefits of professionalising public finance. Across all impact categories, respondents believe that professionalisation will produce improvements. Professionalisation could transform the sector, restore fiscal stability, strengthen ethics, and improve service delivery, if implemented consistently.

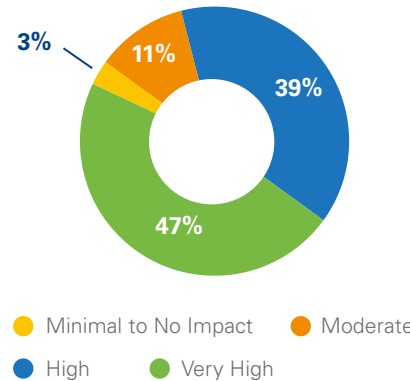
- Financial and governance levers dominate:** Respondents expect to see the strongest impact around PFM, ethics, trust and irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure as they believe professionalisation addresses the root causes of poor performance in these areas.

Financial Management, Reporting and Transparency



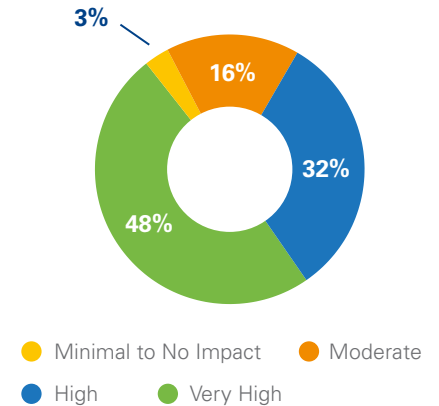
- Professionalisation would lead to significant (high or very high) improvements in core financial management and transparency if implemented.
- There is low scepticism as no respondent chose “No or Minimal impact,” signalling broad confidence that professionalisation will directly enhance reporting, control environments and transparency.

Accountability



- Accountability gains are also expected to materialise, with 84% foreseeing a high and very high impact.
- A negligible percentage (0.6%) believe professionalisation won't move the accountability needle, underscoring trust in standards, certification, and consequence management.

Reducing Irregular, Fruitless and Wasteful Expenditure



- The majority of respondents (80%) see professionalisation as pivotal for cutting the **concerning levels of IFWE**. The AGSA reported the following figures in their latest General Reports (for the 2023-34 financial year audits):
 - Municipalities have incurred irregular expenditure of at least **R87.03 billion** (and possibly more as 40% of municipalities had completeness issues) since 2021-22. R28,94 bn was incurred in 2023-24 alone.
 - Municipalities incurred a total of **R17,65 billion** in fruitless and wasteful expenditure since 2021-22 (and possibly more as 9% of municipalities were qualified on the value of this expenditure disclosed). R5,27 bn was incurred in 2023-24 alone.

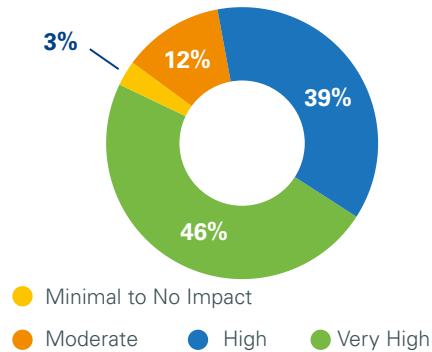
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INSIGHT 12: EXPECTED IMPACT OF PROFESSIONALISATION



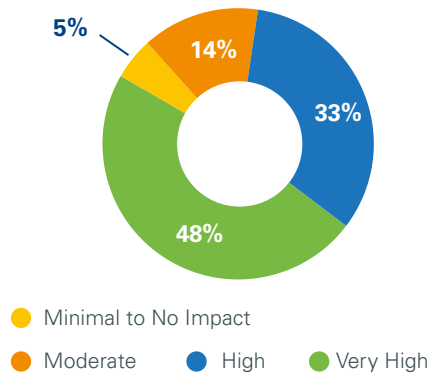
- For National and Provincial Government, irregular expenditure incurred every year since 2018-19 has remained high, totalling **R406,83 billion** over the term of the previous administration. R49,53 and R42,58 bn was incurred in 2023-24 and 2024-25 respectively.
- Fruitless and wasteful expenditure incurred over the previous National and Provincial Government administrative term totalled **R10,34 billion**. In 2023-24, the total fruitless and wasteful expenditure for all auditees was R3,54 bn, marking a significant increase from the previous year. The figure reduced to R1,42 bn in 2024-25.
- Some caution remains, with a notable 16% selecting “Moderate,” implying **complementary reforms** (e.g., stronger enforcement, control environments, effective governance and accountability) will be **needed alongside professionalisation** to curb IFWE.

Fiscal Management and Financial Stability



- There is broad confidence (84%) on potential gains to fiscal discipline and stability that will result from professionalisation.
- South Africa's fiscal position is characterized by a revenue shortfall, planned spending, and a long-term structural crisis, with low growth, missed targets, shortfalls, poor government spending practices and general underperformance.

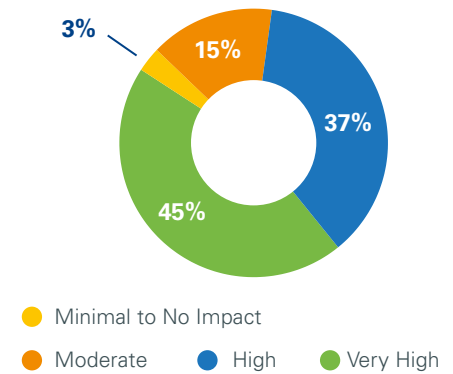
Ethical Conduct, Responsibility and Standards



- Ethical conduct and leadership reforms will go a long way in restoring public trust and building confidence in the work of government. Embedding ethics more effectively will also transform PFM.
- Professionalisation is expected to entrench ethical behaviour and standards in the public sector.

- **Change management will still be needed as 14%** of respondents choose a “Moderate” impact, indicating that ethical codes, workshops and certifications must be paired with enforcement and culture change to be impactful.

Public Sector Culture and Working Environment



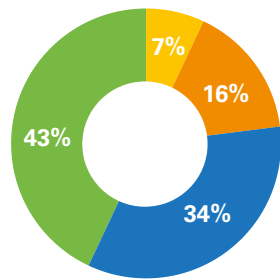
- Government strategies, policies, plans and any other well intentioned initiatives are documents are almost always **eaten by the dominant “culture” of the sector for breakfast**. This leads to implementation challenges that characterise government.
- The South African public sector is a diverse, high-pressure environment shaped by performance issues, resource constraints, socio-economic challenges and evolving political dynamics that heavily influence engagement and service delivery.

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INSIGHT 12: EXPECTED IMPACT OF PROFESSIONALISATION

- Often, the organisational cultures of most government entities struggle to fully support effective strategy execution, delivery as well as employee and citizen engagement.
- Professionalisation is expected to have a high or very high impact on the culture and working environment of government, reflecting faith that professional norms reshape behaviour.
- But culture moves slowly. Many answered “Moderate” (15%), recognising that culture change requires time, leadership consistency, visible consequence management and accountability – which currently lack in the sector.

Service Delivery Outcomes

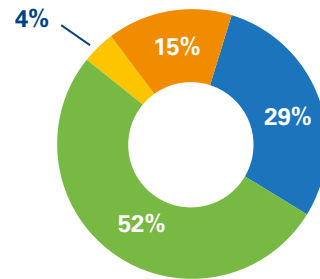


● Minimal to No Impact ● Moderate
● High ● Very High

- A stronger and professionalised PFM turns every Rand into **real service gains** by reducing waste, ensuring efficient financial operations, compliance that speeds up delivery, and ensuring communities feel the impact where it matters most.

- When finances are managed with discipline and foresight, this **clears the path for service delivery** and forward-planning, unlocking faster responses to community needs, higher quality outcomes, and greater public trust.
- The sentiment is strong but slightly less emphatic. 77% expect high or very high service improvements to result from professionalisation - slightly lower than for the other areas, hinting at the **many non finance drivers of service delivery**.
- A combined **23%** choose **minimal or moderate**, signalling dependencies on operational capacity, infrastructure, and frontline management beyond finance reforms. **Room for complementary reforms.**

Rebuilding Public Trust and Confidence



● Minimal to No Impact ● Moderate
● High ● Very High

- Multiple national surveys (Afrobarometer, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), Edelman) show a long term downward trend in trust in national, provincial and local government since the mid 2000s, with several indicators reaching their lowest levels in the early 2020s
- A recent survey by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) revealed that South Africans’ trust in government institutions has declined to some of its lowest levels. There is a **trust deficit** in almost all government institutions, including the Parliament.
- A **2025 Edelman study** found that South Africa was one of only two countries holding elections to see a significant increase in overall trust. The coalition government, improved power supply, and a cautious optimism surrounding the capabilities of government and business contributed to this according to Edelman Africa CEO (Karena Crerar).
- The upward turn found by the Edelman study followed **decades of declining public trust**, but represents a crucial and much needed glimmer of hope.
- **Trust is seen as recoverable** by respondents, with 81% expecting a high or very high impact on public trust to result from professionalisation.
- Trust, however, requires consistent, visible improvements in ethics, financial stewardship, governance and services over time. This may be the reason 19% of respondents expecting a minimal or moderate change.

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INSIGHT 12: EXPECTED IMPACT OF PROFESSIONALISATION

- Trust in institutions is a fundamental requirement for the proper functioning of society, particularly in a democracy. Trust in public institutions manifests itself when citizens assess them as promise-keeping, accountable, efficient, competent, fair, and honest (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021).

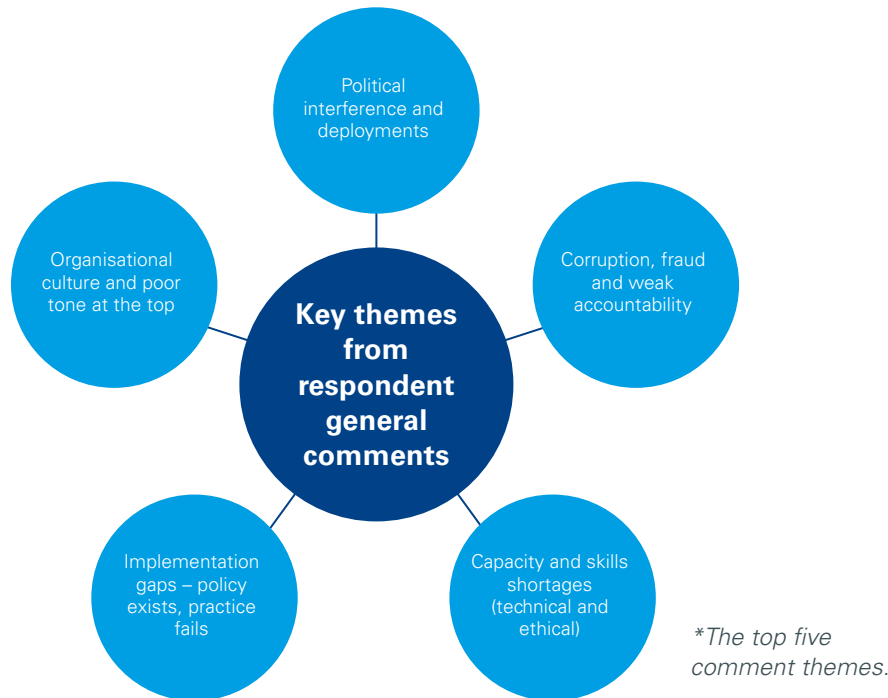


INSIGHT 13: GENERAL COMMENTS & INSIGHTS

General Comments and Insights

Participants were asked to provide any additional opinions and insight they have on the state of professionalisation of the South African public sector and PFM in particular. This section unpacks the responses and provides overall comments and insight.

Key Themes from the General Comments Open Ended Question



Theme 1: Political interference and deployments

By far this was the strongest theme. Respondents repeatedly link political appointments, patronage networks, nepotism, and deployment to deteriorating professionalism in the public sector. This is described as the root cause of governance failures. **Comments include:**

- political manipulation of processes and the system-wide effect of this,
- job and work specifications tailored for preferred candidates,
- political pressure undermining CFOs, SCM practitioners and ethical staff,
- politically protected non performers facing no consequences.

Theme 2: Corruption, fraud and weak accountability

Corruption and impunity dominate comments. The AGSA has consistently been reporting on poor consequence management, and the impact this has on progress and accountability. Many respondents explicitly state that professionalisation cannot succeed without strong enforcement mechanisms. Respondents emphasise:

- systemic corruption at senior levels,
- weak systems of internal controls,
- lack of consequence management,
- whistleblower risk and fear,
- audit findings repeated for years without any consequences.

Theme 3: Capacity and skills shortages (technical and ethical)

Respondents highlighted inadequate technical and ethical competence across many institutions, especially municipalities, along with difficulty attracting or retaining professionals. They also note that technical qualifications are insufficient without ethical leadership, highlighting the following:

- severe shortages of competent finance, SCM, and other professionals supporting governance,

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INSIGHT 13: GENERAL COMMENTS & INSIGHTS

- municipal and SOE capacity collapse,
- reliance on consultants,
- promotion of unqualified individuals over qualified professionals.

Theme 4: Implementation gaps – policy exists, practice fails

Although frameworks such as the 2022 National Framework exist, respondents stressed that execution is slow, fragmented, inconsistent and not supported by accountability or resources. There has also been the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1995), the 1997 White Paper for Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele White Paper), the Public Service Charter (2013), and the NDP Diagnostic Overview report (2011).

This “policy-practice gap” is a major obstacle and concern. Policies, directives, research, conference and summit resolutions or recommendations will not be implementable without decisive leadership. Many comments also note widespread training structures and interventions, but:

- implementation of policies or best practice is inconsistent and at times non-existent,
- progress is slow and there is no accountability for poor implementation,
- councils and departments are “dragging feet” on implementation,
- fragmentation between institutions (DPSA, NSG, PSC, COGTA, SALGA, Treasuries).

Theme 5: Organisational culture and poor tone at the top

Culture is the biggest predictor of failure or success. Indeed the culture of the public sector is eating any strategy, plan or policy of government for breakfast. Leadership at both political and administrative levels was described as inconsistent, unqualified, resistant to change, self-interested, and frequently undermining professional norms. Respondents also identify the following key challenges:

- low motivation and poor work ethic,
- “survival-driven” rather than service-driven behaviours,
- leaders modelling poor discipline and ethics,
- culture accepting underperformance as normal.

OTHER PERTINENT THEMES THAT ARE EMERGING FROM THE COMMENTS:

Theme 6: Need for merit-based recruitment and professional certification

Many believe professional body membership (e.g., SAICA, SAIGA, CIGFARO) should be required for finance roles; recruitment should be based on competence rather than connections or tenure.

Theme 7: Resistance to change

Staff resistance, “we’ve always done it this way” mindsets, complacency, and environments hostile to professionalism and ethical professionals were commonly referenced. Change initiatives face internal pushback.

Theme 8: Limited training, capacity building and career development

Respondents noted inadequate CPD, insufficient training budgets, lack of structured growth pathways, and over reliance on consultants rather than internal capacity.

Theme 9: Resource constraints, bureaucracy and system inefficiencies

Excessive red tape, outdated IT systems, slow decision making, lack of delegation, and weak control environments were said to hinder professional work and ultimately service delivery.

Theme 10: Service delivery failure and declining public trust

Respondents linked poor professional standards, professionalism and governance directly to deteriorating service delivery, worsening audit outcomes, and loss of citizen confidence.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

A Systemic Blueprint for a Professional, Accountable, and Depoliticised Public Sector

Data reveals a clear roadmap for reform. Respondents' top priorities include depoliticised recruitment and decision making, compulsory professional certifications, strengthening consequence management, including external enforcement and improved career mobility, pipelines, and public sector attractiveness among others.



Respondents consistently call for reform that is structural, systemic, and depoliticised environments.

- Professionalisation is not a technical programme, it's a **systems change initiative**.
- It demands **coordinated reform across the ecosystem**: leadership, HR, governance, culture, training, oversight and professional bodies.

- South Africa must adopt an iterative, **flexible national, multi-year implementation plan** with clear milestones, stakeholders (including professional body) roles and solutions for incumbents and the culture.

Government Should Prioritise the Following Recommendations:

1. Depoliticise recruitment and strengthen meritocracy

Establish mandatory, independent, competency based recruitment systems or monitoring process for all senior financial, core service delivery, governance, and oversight roles (e.g., CFOs, SCM Heads, Internal Audit, Technical Service Heads, Performance Information, etc.). Introduce external observers from professional bodies and other stakeholders.

2. Mandate professional certification for critical public finance roles

Establish mandatory, independent, competency based recruitment systems or monitoring process for all senior financial, core service delivery, governance, and oversight roles (e.g., CFOs, SCM Heads, Internal Audit, Technical Service Heads, Performance Information, etc.). Introduce external observers from professional bodies and other stakeholders.

3. Enforce consequence management through external oversight

Create an independent enforcement mechanism to strengthen accountability where internal processes have proven weak. Based on transparency and accountability principles, institutions must open themselves up for scrutiny and consequences, while respecting privacy and confidentiality laws and regulations.

Introduce mandatory reporting of disciplinary outcomes for finance and SCM roles to professional bodies, balance this out with equivalent reporting and disciplinary processes for other role players (so as not to only have consequences for finance and SCM). Link repeat governance failures to performance penalties for executives and accounting officers.

Recommendations continued on next page>

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

4. Build a capable and attractive public sector talent pipeline

Reposition the public sector as a career worthy destination through mobility pathways, structured career programmes, and competitive professional environments. Expand public sector training offices for professional programmes such as SAICA. Re-engineer the internship programme by collaborating with professional bodies, other state institutions (mobility) and industry stakeholders to strengthen career development, flexibility, credentials and marketability of early-career professionals.

5. Invest in leadership development and ethical governance programmes

Professionalisation requires ethical, technically competent, values driven leadership. Introduce compulsory leadership pathways for senior managers, unambiguous support from political leadership, focus on transformational leadership, collaboration and leveraging the support of partners such as professional bodies. A weak "tone at the top," resistance to change, and ethical leadership failures are major inhibitors of reform.

Introduce ethical leadership certification and CPD, annual declaration and once support is provided in the ecosystem, implement stringent consequences for failures.

6. Strengthen protection for professionals and whistleblowers

Implement robust, externally monitored protection mechanisms to safeguard professionals who uphold standards. Ensure that legislation reforms accompany these efforts. Whistleblowers and ethical professionals report fear, intimidation, and lack of institutional support, undermining professionalisation efforts and culture. Establish secure, anonymous reporting channels and provide legal, psychological and financial support for those affected. Ensure that reports are acted on to protect the credibility of the process.

7. Embed national, standardised competency frameworks across the state

Roll out sector specific competency frameworks for areas such as finance, SCM, internal audit, and performance information. This should be extended to other areas. The frameworks must be linked to credible industry professional bodies, job descriptions, professional standards, and performance compacts. This will eliminate inconsistent competency practices.

Integrate competencies and professional body certification into recruitment, training, performance assessments, and promotions.

8. Establish a joint training governance forum (with national coordination)

Create a single, coordinated training governance structure across DPSA, NT, NSG, SALGA, COGTA, SALGA, AGSA, and professional bodies. Respondents emphasise fragmented training, limited impact, and poor alignment with real competency gaps and implementation on the ground.

9. Targeted provincial and municipal capacity-building interventions

Deploy tailored, localised support models for municipalities and provinces, where capability deficits are most severe. Collaboration should include DPSA, NT, NSG, SALGA, COGTA, SALGA, AGSA, and professional bodies (as necessary). These models should not only involve training workshops and conferences, but models that create sustainable transformation of the environment. Establish a municipal finance academy run with professional bodies such as SAICA and create provincial capability task teams for crisis level municipalities.

10. Implement a public, shared monitoring and evaluation framework

Respondents repeatedly call for visible progress tracking, transparency, and system wide accountability. Using a robust method backed by government institutions, professional bodies, civil society, academia and other stakeholders, publish an annual professionalisation scorecard for transparency and accountability. This should be data and evidence driven, and include criteria such as public trust, service delivery impact and professionalism experienced by citizens. The scorecards should inform consequences, rewards and accountability. The annual reporting by departments, entities, and municipalities should not be to increase the reporting and compliance burden, but drive change and impact. Align DG, HOD, CFO, MIM and political leadership performance compacts with professionalisation indicators.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The public sector knows what needs to be done - but struggles to do it.

The frameworks exist; the policy intent is clear; the talent pipeline is emerging. Implementation is the problem.

- **Professionalisation is fundamentally a governance and leadership issue**, not merely a training and professional standards issue. Without depoliticised, ethical, and sound leadership, that sponsors comprehensive competence, no amount of training will succeed.
- **The biggest levers for change are structural, not operational:** merit-based recruitment, consequence management, depoliticised HR and decision making, ethical leadership and coordinated national professionalisation architecture
- **Municipalities remain the weakest link**, followed by provincial the national government who fare slightly better, but also with room for improvement.
- **Professionalisation must blend technical and non-technical** competencies and encompass professional certification, academic studies, relevant and impactful training, policy and culture reforms, ethical leadership and accountability to be credible.
- **The goal is not simply more professionals in government**, but the systemic embedding of professionalism within governance culture, leadership practice, and institutional design.

An emphatic 88% of respondents want stronger government - **professional body collaboration** on training and capacity building. This is not a marginal tweak; **it is a systemic ask** that aligns with widespread perceptions that **current interventions** (including internship programmes, upskilling and training sessions, workshops and conferences) are **not suitable and not effective**. The data supports moving quickly to a collaborative, **competency based, and accredited training and professional development ecosystem**, especially to support local government, build provincial government momentum, and meet the expectations of early career professionals and wider citizenry.

Respondents see professionalisation as a strategic enabler that can turn around the state by addressing root causes of dysfunction.

The overall state of professionalisation

Professionalisation is broadly understood and supported across the public sector, yet progress is fragmented and uneven. This aligns with recurring findings from AGSA audits, PSC capability reviews, and Commissions set up, all pointing to systemic capacity erosion rather than isolated failures.

Leadership is a pivotal variable: everything rises or falls here

The insights are clear, leadership failures will mean professionalisation failure. A lack of ethical leadership, instability, interference, incompetence, fear-based management and a general poor tone at the top undermine every reform initiative. Comparative evidence confirms that professionalisation begins at the top: ethical, accountable, and technically competent leadership is the linchpin of sustainable institutional capability.

The core structural barrier: a politicised administrative state

The defining obstacle is political interference in administrative decisions. Evidence shows that political deployment and blurred political-administrative boundaries have entrenched dysfunction. Both global and national reviews (OECD, World Bank, Commissions, PSC) indicate that professionalisation cannot take hold until merit-based appointments and depoliticised governance structures are institutionalised. Reform of the political-administrative interface is therefore a prerequisite, not an outcome.

Ethical and governance decay as capability constraints

Persistent corruption, weak internal controls, and poor consequence management have become systemic. Research consistently links ethical erosion to diminished state capability. Strengthening ethics infrastructure, whistleblower protection, enforcement mechanisms, and ethical leadership is essential for restoring public trust and professional culture.

Concluding Remarks continued on next page>

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Multi-dimensional capacity weaknesses: culture and technical

There is a dual deficit in the environment: technical and cultural. Technically, the state lacks core competencies in finance, SCM, performance management, and oversight. Culturally, fear, complacency, and resistance to change undermine professional behaviour.

Weak and fragmented training and CPD systems, poor leadership development, and unattractive employment conditions further compound the problem. Building capability thus requires an integrated talent, competency, and learning ecosystem aligned to performance outcomes.

Positive momentum exists, but it is not yet transformative

Encouraging signals include the growing role of SAICA-trained professionals, improved awareness on CFO competency, training office expansion, and enhanced AGSA powers. These form a credible foundation for transformation. However, progress remains fragmented due to a lack of coherent system leadership and aligned execution across government.

Future Research Should Focus On:

- Institutionalising a depoliticised, ethics-driven leadership model.
- Developing professional frameworks for capacity development to support leadership reform.
- Changing organisational culture and strengthening a performance culture in the sector.
- Examining the relationship between government and professional bodies.
- Designing clear career pathways in the sector.
- Reforming internship and training programmes in the sector.



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