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THE HEART OF HR: CHAMPIONING A HUMAN-CENTRED FUTURE IN THE AGE OF DISRUPTION



***Presented at the SABPP Free State Regional AGM
By Prof. Freda van der Walt***

We live in a time marked by relentless change, such as technological revolutions, shifting demographics, geopolitical instability, social justice movements, and the rapid redefinition of workplaces. From AI and automation to hybrid work and talent migration, the HR landscape has become a space of both complexity and creativity. Disruption, once feared, is now our daily reality. But amidst all this disruption, human beings still yearn to be heard and valued. As HR professionals, we must acknowledge that we are the custodians of people and culture, and increasingly, the creators of meaning. Furthermore, we are called to create workplaces where employees can be themselves and contribute to organisational success.

Over time, we have learned that strategy and technological advancements alone are insufficient to steer the uncertainty we face. What truly matters is our capacity to lead from the heart, which enables us, as HR professionals, to champion humanity in the workplace. However, to be human-centred does not mean rejecting progress or accepting substandard work and justifying unethical behaviour. Rather, it is the ability to balance innovation with inclusion, and to lead with purpose and alignment.

This begins with recognising that behind every job title is a person with unique strengths and needs. A human-centred approach also challenges us to develop policies that are inclusive and fair. Furthermore, organisational transformation should be well-planned and executed to ensure that we create environments where employees feel a sense of belonging and where well-being is a shared value.

So, how do we put this into practice?

Empathy at scale: Empathy requires that we design employee experiences that reflect both emotional intelligence and contextual sensitivity. This means being intentional about every stage of the employee journey, from onboarding and daily interactions to performance feedback, talent management, and offboarding. Through this approach, we can create experiences that are aligned with both employee needs and the organisation's values.

Purpose-driven strategy: To create a purpose-driven strategy, we as HR professionals must ensure alignment between organisational values and societal impact. Employees want to know that their work contributes to something meaningful. Consistently, research shows that people thrive when they experience their work as a calling, not just a job or a career.

Psychological safety and trust: Many organisations are struggling to build cultures based on trust and psychological safety. While structural and procedural improvements are necessary, a more profound shift is needed, one that acknowledges the importance of the psychological contract. This unwritten contract shapes expectations between employer and employee, playing a critical role in how fairness and care are experienced. Therefore, greater emphasis must be placed on honouring this contract by embedding two key ethical foundations:

- The ethics of care, which values empathy, compassion, and interpersonal responsibility; and
- The ethics of equality, which prioritises fairness and justice.

When these are in place, we create more trustworthy environments where employees feel valued and secure.

Agility without anxiety: To prepare employees for change, HR professionals must help them build the mindset and develop the necessary strengths to adapt and lead with confidence. True agility is fostered in environments where fear of the unknown is absent and growth is embraced. Furthermore, leaders should be equipped to lead with confidence and to become agents of change. Often, this means adapting their own leadership styles toward being more inclusive and responsive to diverse needs. By training and supporting leaders in this way, organisations can foster cultures where agility and psychological safety are mutually reinforced.



Growth mindset and continuous learning: Ultimately, it is essential to promote a growth mindset. HR should therefore champion learning not as a once-off event, but as a daily practice and a way of thinking. When employees continue to grow and learn, disruption becomes less threatening and will be seen as an opportunity to innovate and develop.

It is therefore evident that the HR function has never been more vital, not only within organisations, but in society at large. This is mainly attributed to the critical role we play in supporting employability and relevance. When people are continuously developed, they are less likely to become disconnected from the economy or burdened by unemployment. In this context, the SABPP's role extends not only to professional regulation but also to protecting the dignity of work and the dignity of workers. As such, we should never forget that our policies significantly influence people's lives, and our decisions impact not only employees but also their families, communities, and future generations.

In closing, I want to leave you with this reminder: humanity is not a weakness; it is indeed our superpower. In a world that is moving faster than ever before, HR professionals must lead with their hearts. We should, therefore, not be satisfied with merely managing change, but we should champion it. And above all, we should champion a future where technology enhances humanity rather than replacing it.

As Albert Camus once said:

"Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present."

Give this moment your all to ensure that the heart of HR continues to beat strong through disruption and complexity, giving others hope and a purpose.

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHT

**Dr Nandipha Sishuba from Nelson Mandela University |
Former Chairperson of the Eastern Cape Committee**

Congratulations to Nandipha Sishuba on obtaining her PhD, an inspiring statement to the value of lifelong learning for HR professionals and a powerful example for those of us committed to continuous development.



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PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE APPLIES TO STRIKING WORKERS



BY **Ivan Israelstam, Chief Executive of Labour Law Management Consulting.**

Central to South Africa's law of discipline is the entrenched principle that discipline of employees who have not committed gross offences must be progressive. **This means that, where employees commit less serious offences, they must receive a series of corrective counsellings and warnings that become progressively stronger if the earlier corrective measures are not effective in ending repeated misconduct.**

The main purpose of giving warnings is to remind employees of the employer's standards of conduct and work performance and to give them a chance to improve.

A disciplinary warning is an oral or written statement made by an employer informing the employee that his/her conduct or performance level is not acceptable and that any further failure to meet the required standards will result in stronger measures being taken. In this sense a warning is not a punishment. Instead, it is a notification that further corrective measures could follow.

Where an offence is very serious or a final warning has already been given, then in some case, a warning is unlikely to have the desired effect, and stronger discipline may be appropriate.

The question then arises as to whether an employee may be dismissed for a repeat offence after having received a final warning for a similar offence. The answer to this question is 'yes' provided that there is no reasonable alternative corrective action to the dismissal and the final warning is valid.

Many employers try to comply with the above legal requirements, especially when 'normal' misconduct has occurred. However, much fewer employers recognise that the principle of progressive discipline also applies when employees go on strike.

In the case of *Shave and Gibson Packaging vs AMITU* (Lex Info 28 May 2025. Labour Appeal Court case number DA21/23) 72 employees were fired for picketing in a non-designated area. This was considered their first offence. None of them had received warnings for similar offences. Despite this the Labour Appeal Court decided that their misconduct was so gross as to merit dismissal for a first offence. This was because the employer had offered the employees a reasonable place to picket, the Labour Court had interdicted the strikers from picketing in the prohibited area and the CCMA's strike rules had confirmed that the picketing was to be confined to the demarcated area. Despite this the strikers had flagrantly disobeyed these requirements.

The Court therefore upheld the fairness of the dismissals. However, employers must not assume that this outcome means that all picketing related dismissals will be upheld. Employers will have to prove in each case that its strike rules were known to the strikers, were reasonable and consequent on real operational needs of the employer.

Also, where the employer has not obtained an interdict its chances of success in court will be reduced. This is because disobeying an interdict serves as a strong aggravating factor, something that employers are likely to need in view of the fact that many arbiters sympathise with the right of employees to picket. Therefore, in some cases, defiance of strike rules might require that a final warning be given before errant strikers are dismissed.

RESEARCH SURVEY ASSISTANCE



I am Dr Thuli Ngonyama-Ndou and I am conducting a research study titled "The use of artificial intelligence in HRM: Insights from HR Professionals in South Africa". This study aims to explore the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in human resource management (HRM) and to understand its impact from the perspectives of HR professionals. I am seeking participants who are currently working in HR roles and have experience or insights related to the use of AI in HR processes. Participants should be HR Professionals registered with SABPP in the categories of HRP, CHRP and MHRP. Your participation will involve an online interview which will take approximately 30-45 minutes. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all responses will be kept confidential. The study has received ethical clearance from UNISA, ref: 8219. Should you be willing to participate, kindly use the attached link to complete your details: [Body](#). Upon receiving your details, the researcher will contact you.

For enquiries, please contact Dr Thuli Ngonyama-Ndou, engonytl@unisa.ac / 012 484 1463

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Employment Equity Amendments – Practical Implications for South African Employers in 2025



By **Rene Deysel, LabourNet**

1 | Legislative landscape

The Employment Equity Amendment Act 4 of 2022 took effect on 1 January 2025, supported by two new regulations issued on 15 April 2025: the Employment Equity General Administrative Regulations, 2025 and the Sectoral Numerical Targets Regulations. These instruments tighten compliance, create sector-specific targets and streamline the official forms used for analysis, planning and reporting.

2 | Key Changes at a Glance

From 2025 only companies with 50 or more employees remain “designated employers”; the turnover test falls away, easing the burden on small business. Self-set numerical goals are replaced by five-year sector targets for the four management tiers, although firms may still motivate “justifiable reasons” for deviations. All four statutory forms (EEA 2, EEA 4, EEA 12 and EEA 13) stay in force but now reference those targets; EEA 2 and 4 are still filed annually, while EEA 12 and 13 must be ready for inspection. The definition of disability is broadened to cover sensory and intellectual impairments, consultative forums must now include recognised trade-union or bargaining-unit representatives, and labour inspectors will benchmark progress against sector targets with greater depth as the pool of regulated employers shrinks. An EE compliance certificate is also compulsory for all state contracts.

3 | How many employers remain in scope?

The 25th CEE Annual Report confirms that 29 269 EE reports were filed in the 2024 cycle, covering 7.7 million employees. From 2025 forward, enterprises with 1–49 employees fall outside Chapter III unless they are organs of state or are expressly designated by a collective agreement. Director-General notification data show that 68.4% of non-submission applications in 2024 came from firms with fewer than 50 employees. Applying that proportion to the current reporter pool suggests that only around 14 000–15 000 employers will remain designated. The result is a leaner designated employer group and, for those still in scope, deeper inspections and tighter scrutiny of “justifiable reason” defences.

4 | Sector targets in practice

Eighteen sector tables prescribe five-year benchmarks for African, Coloured and Indian men and women at Top, Senior, Middle and Junior Management levels; a uniform 3 % target for persons with disabilities applies across all sectors. Employers must weave these figures—or a duly motivated variance—into their EEA 13 plan and show steady progress toward 2030.

When is a shortfall permissible?

Regulation 16 lists seven “justifiable reasons” an employer may raise without incurring penalties:

1. Insufficient recruitment opportunities.
2. Insufficient promotion opportunities.
3. Insufficient target individuals from designated groups with the relevant qualifications, skills or experience.
4. A CCMA award or Court Order.
5. Transfer of business.
6. Mergers or acquisitions.
7. Impact on business-economic circumstances

A variance must be evidence-based and time-bound. Inspectors expect employers to attach supporting data—vacancy adverts, skills-shortage statistics, restructuring notices—and to outline remedial steps in the EE plan, ensuring the shortfall narrows over successive reporting cycles rather than remaining static.

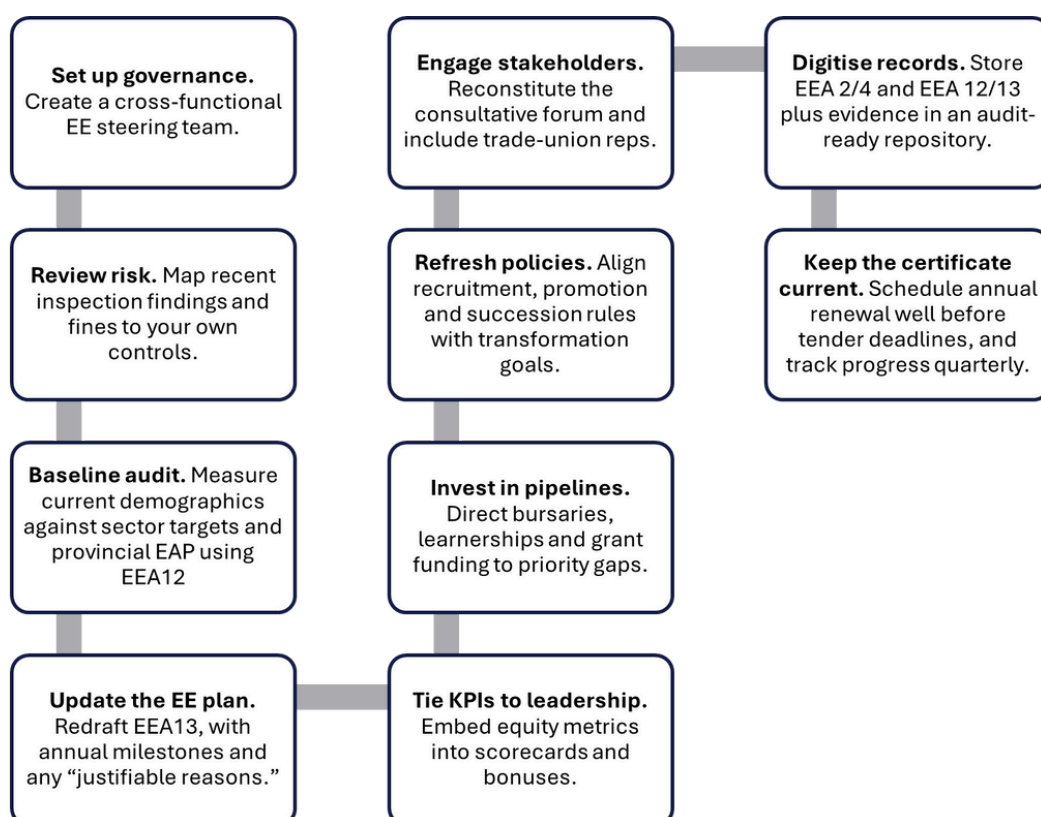
5 | Operational impact

Inspectors now want annual evidence that promotion, retirement and hiring forecasts will close each sector-target gap, so employers are replacing ad-hoc spreadsheets with interactive dashboards that link HR and payroll data. Any shortfall claimed under the “scarce-skills” defence must be backed by documented searches, bursaries or learnerships, turning mentorship pipelines from optional extras into compliance safeguards. Training budgets therefore shift from generic spend to targeted succession funding, with discretionary-grant applications steered toward the occupations showing the widest gaps. For organisations that bid on state work, an expired EE compliance certificate can keep them off tender lists for a year, so supply-chain teams now monitor certificate renewals as closely as ISO or tax-clearance dates. Finally, because the small-business exemption removes thousands of former reporters, labour inspectors have more capacity to probe data accuracy, consultation records and year-on-year progress at the larger firms that remain in scope.

6 | Conclusion

The 2025 amendments elevate employment equity from a periodic reporting exercise to a continuous strategic discipline. Organisations that integrate updated forms, broadened disability definitions and sector-specific targets into workforce analytics and skills pipelines will not only avoid penalties but also strengthen their competitiveness in a market where transformation credentials increasingly influence investment, talent retention and access to public contracts.

Proposed Designated Employer Implementation Framework



HR Audit

Did you know that a HR Audit helps organisations to ensure an integrated, aligned, and well-governed approach to people practices. The HR audit evaluates an organisation on the People Practices and Governance Standard (PPGS), which sets out the standards for good people practices. The HR audit provides an independent report that helps HR leaders to benchmark their performance and drive the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of the HR function. It helps bring more clarity to the role of HR and its contribution

For more information please contact Tshegofatso Tshidada on **011 045 5400** or email tshegofatso@sabpp.co.za

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Applications close 15 July 2025:

Find out more and apply via the GIBS website: www.gibs.co.za

REGIONAL HIGHLIGHT

EAST LONDON IDZ

SABBP congratulates the East London IDZ on successfully completing the rigorous HR Audit process, proving their persistent commitment to professionalising the IDZ department and raising the standard of people practices.



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HOW ARE THE RISING CORRUPTION LEVELS IN SOUTH AFRICA THREATENING YOUR BUSINESS?



In 2000, a mere 25 years ago, South Africa was rocked by the shocking news of cricket captain Hansie Cronje's corruption conviction. The scandal made headlines worldwide, symbolising a moment of national shame and awakening us to the dangers of corruption. Fast forward to today, and the landscape has changed dramatically, corruption has become more widespread, more complex, and more entrenched in all sectors of society.

Recent reports highlight the troubling reality. Thirteen years since its inception, Corruption Watch (CW), a leading South African non-profit organisation, has received over 46,000 complaints about corruption. In its latest annual report, "Accountable Together," released on 27 March 2025, CW reveals that in 2024, it received only 546 complaints—a noticeable decline from 2,110 complaints in 2023.

However, CW clarifies this isn't indicative of an actual decrease in corruption, but rather the result of resource reallocation during a transitional period, meaning many cases remain unreported or undiscovered.

The situation is reflected globally. Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows South Africa maintaining its lowest score since 2012, at 41 out of 100, signalling persistent corruption issues. CW's data indicates that the highest complaints relate to maladministration (34%), fraud (21%), employment irregularities (16%), bribery/extortion (15%), and procurement irregularities (13%).

The sectors most affected include policing, which accounts for 13% of complaints, followed by the business sector at 12%, basic education (11%), and state-owned entities (7%). These figures underscore a broader crisis—a systemic failure in governance, accountability, and ethics.

Corruption not only hampers growth but also erodes trust, perpetuates inequality, and destabilises institutions. For companies operating in such an environment, the risk of inadvertently employing individuals connected to corrupt activities or being complicit themselves is high.

How Companies Can Minimise Corruption Risks

What can HR and risk professionals do to safeguard their organisations? The answer lies in proactive, comprehensive pre-employment screening tools:

- Identity Verification: Ensure candidates' identities are legitimate through digital ID verification systems, reducing the risk of false credentials. With the proposed 10,000% increase in the price of verifying a South African ID, the fear is real that companies may skip this step, which could have dire consequences.
- Background Checks: Conduct thorough criminal record checks, employment history, and reference verification to uncover any previous involvement in corrupt activities.
- Asset & Financial Checks: Utilise financial due diligence to detect potential links to illicit transactions or assets that could pose risks.
- Anti-bribery & Corruption Screening: Incorporate specialised assessments designed to identify behavioural tendencies or red flags linked to corruption.
- Ongoing Monitoring: Implement continuous screening and monitoring of employees in high-risk positions to detect changes in behaviour or new risk windows.

Corruption in South Africa has evolved from isolated scandals to a systemic challenge threatening our institutions and economy. While government efforts continue, organisations must take responsibility for safeguarding their workplaces.

By leveraging advanced pre-employment screening tools and fostering an ethical culture, companies can significantly reduce their exposure to corruption and contribute positively toward a more accountable society.

Jenny Reid
Founder



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From Conflict to Culture: Rebuilding Dignity in Mining Workforces



By Arjen de Bruin, Group CEO at OIM Consulting

In South Africa's mining sector, the legacy of distrust between leadership and labour runs deep. It's shaped by a long and painful history – one that still echoes today in strained workplace relationships, safety risks and a culture of fear and silence.

But this much is clear: rebuilding dignity in the mining workforce is vital for operational success. It's not about being soft – it's about being building bridges between people from various backgrounds and cultures. Because without dignity, you don't get trust. And without trust, you don't get performance.

Conflict has roots. So must culture.

At OIM Consulting, we've seen how quickly operations can spiral into conflict when grievances are ignored and communication breaks down. In some environments, the default mode is blame; a constant tit-for-tat between unions and management, supervisors and teams. This creates toxic environments where fear drives behaviour and mistakes go unspoken.

In these mines, people aren't working with each other. They're working against each other.

It's not always overt – sometimes the culture just feels "off." Teams start avoiding accountability, doing only what's required, not speaking up. And when trust is broken, it doesn't take much to tip operations into chaos.

Mindset change must come before performance.

That's why we don't start with output. We start with mindset. Because the real barrier to productivity often isn't a broken machine – it's a broken culture.

What we've found is that many of the so-called "operational" issues are actually human ones in disguise: misalignment on goals, low engagement, leaders who never learned how to lead. You can't fix that with compliance checklists or productivity drives. You fix it by re-establishing trust, clarity, and mutual respect; in other words, dignity.

We work with mines to reset the culture, moving people from historical grievance to shared purpose. That starts with listening. It includes clear role alignment and structured coaching. And it centres on the belief that everyone, from the drill rig to the boardroom, wants the same thing: a better life.

Five building blocks for restoring dignity and performance.

Our approach to rebuilding dignity and performance is anchored in the following five elements:

1. **Set purpose and direction** – Everyone must understand the bigger picture. When people know where the business is heading and how their work contributes to that journey, they start to find purpose and pride in what they do.
2. **Align role, performance and behaviour** – The right people must be in the right roles, working at the right level and fairly recognised for their contribution. Accountability thrives in an environment where expectations are clear and meritocracy is part of the culture.
3. **Develop leadership and intellectual capital** – Strong, consistent leadership is the cornerstone of a high-performing culture. That means building credible, values-driven supervisors and ensuring there's depth and continuity in your leadership pipeline.
4. **Execute with discipline and excellence** – When teams are well led and aligned, they perform. They hit targets, meet deadlines, and hold one another accountable – not because they're being forced to, but because they care.
5. **Drive process excellence** – Dignity and discipline go hand in hand. Customer-centric processes, accurate data, and a culture of continuous improvement provide the structure needed to support lasting change.



One mine we worked with had experienced a violent strike and there was zero trust between leadership and labour. Through our culture alignment programme, we reset the tone; not by ignoring the past, but by focusing on the future. People realised their personal goals could only be met through company success. That mindset shift unlocked real change.

Culture is a lever. Dignity is the hinge.

You can't coach pride into someone. But you can create the conditions where pride can grow: through structure, leadership, consistency, and care. We've seen it time and again: when supervisors are supported and dignity is restored, teams start to thrive.

This isn't a quick fix. It's a deep fix. And in today's volatile mining landscape, it might just be the most strategic one you can make.



FACT SHEET JUNE /JULY 2025

by Dr Ajay Jivan

In the uncertain times we find ourselves in, it becomes important to consider how we approach and navigate the evolving landscape. This means paying attention to how we understand and resolve the issues and problems that we encounter or are confronted by. Within our respective organisations we find a range of issues and problems that we need to address, including people governance and management issues. In this Fact Sheet we will explore what problem-solving is and explore the differentiation of simple and complex problem-solving. We will illustrate how this differentiation takes shape within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the SABPP HR Competency Model. Thereafter, we will outline the different processes for simple and complex problem-solving. Following this we will explore two other categories of problems using the Cynefin framework, that is, complicated and chaotic problems. Then we will outline an example of problem solving for complicated problems.

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