

NEWS RELEASE

SARS deputy commissioner graduates with PhD in Leadership from UP



Dr Johnstone Makhubu, Deputy Commissioner at SARS, celebrates after obtaining a PhD in Leadership from UP.

PRETORIA – Dr Johnstone Makhubu, Deputy Commissioner for taxpayer engagement and operations at the South African Revenue Service (SARS), recently obtained a [PhD in Leadership](#) from the [Albert Luthuli Leadership Institute](#) at the University of Pretoria (UP).

Dr Makhubu (46) has 24 years of experience across various sectors, including mining, manufacturing, fast-moving consumer goods, energy and tax administration. His diverse career path has seen him transition from engineering and finance into the field of tax administration.

“My career has been a journey of discovering where I can make the most impact, and I have found a fitting home in tax administration,” he says.

Dr Makhubu’s decision to pursue a PhD in Leadership was inspired by his belief in the profound impact that leadership and governance have on organisations, especially in light of the state capture period in South Africa. He recognises that effective leadership is crucial in maintaining the social contract between institutions

and the public.

“Everything in contemporary organisations rises and falls on leadership,” Dr Makhubu says. “My work at SARS requires a leadership practice that acknowledges the diverse stakeholder landscape and the trust necessary for effective interactions.”

His research delves into relational leadership within apex leader constituted multi-actor groups, focusing on how trust and resonance facilitate the emergence of effective relating and communication, which is fundamental to the flows of influence through which leadership manifests. Dr Makhubu’s study highlighted that trust and resonance at both interpersonal and inter-organisational levels are key to fostering high-quality relationships and successful leadership.

“The novelty of my research lies in its integration of resonance, trust and relational leadership, proposing a framework that advances both theory and practice,” he explains.

By applying his findings in his role at SARS, Dr Makhubu aims to address the challenges posed by a rapidly evolving environment. His insights offer strategies for promoting resonance (as opposed to dissonance) and trust among stakeholders, which is crucial for rebuilding and maintaining strong relationships.

“The insights from my study will guide resonance-based strategies to build and repair trust, and enhance multi-actor group interactions, which are vital for effective leadership and organisational transformation,” he says.

Balancing his demanding role with his PhD studies presented significant challenges. Dr Makhubu managed his time meticulously and set deadlines with his supervisors.

“The challenges were immense, but careful planning and time management were key. Having a PhD coach also provided invaluable support during the tougher times.”

In addressing the broader leadership challenges faced by public service, Dr Makhubu points to the erosion of trust, corruption and the need for social cohesion. His research provides practical solutions for these issues, offering a framework for creating dialogue platforms and rebuilding trust.

“Addressing the erosion of trust and fostering social cohesion are critical,” he says. “My research provides a framework for creating successful dialogue platforms and rebuilding trust where it has been damaged.”

For those balancing demanding roles with higher education, Dr Makhubu offers the following advice: “Plan carefully, be prepared to sacrifice some relationships and consider getting a PhD coach. Choose a study area that aligns with your interests and professional needs.”

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za