**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Union Position: Employee Relations Specialist

Age: 41

Gender: Male

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| **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT** | |
| **SPEAKER** | **DIALOGUE** |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Hello, how are you? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Good and you? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Good thanks. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Which context does your research take place in, if you follow what I’m saying. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I think for the purposes of this research just local yeah. Just local. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Local okay, sustainability. If I look at the word just to dismantle your topic, I will start by looking at what do we mean by sustainability? And also, look perhaps the automotive industry and then we look at the unions themselves and in particular now in the automotive industry it's only NUMSA. Mostly 90% of associates are from various normal automotive companies, which is the top seven that is locally based. I will not talk about those who are not having plants within South Africa. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | So if you look at the sustainability of those, you look at one. Remember in South African context, if you're looking at trade unionism, if I may put it that way. You are looking at their mobilisation in terms of collective bargaining, because the strength of the trade union in South Africa is collective bargaining. And how do you effectively win as a union you’ll have to have at least a lot of membership, so that if, for example, you want to move to strike, you can strike if you don't have numbers. That's the first one. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yes. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes, that's the first one because if you look at maybe your Section One of the Labor Relations Act, it talks about things- I don’t have my liberations with me now. It talks about generally the collective bargaining at the sectorial platform. It also talks about collective bargaining at the national level, and also to formulate policies around how to collective bargain, maybe you just go and just to read Section One of the Labor Relations Act. That will give you context of how unions are structured generally.  But now zooming into the automotive, these seven companies what they did, as back as, if my memory serves me well the year 2000. If my memory serves me well but just check when the National Bargaining Forum was created, you know the NBF? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yes. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Just check when was it created? I think that's around year 2000. If it's not earlier, or maybe 1994. Just check the years, I may not be correct, yeah. What they've done at the national level, even though it's not a formal national bargaining forum like a bargaining Council. You know, the difference between the, you know, what's a bargaining council, right? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yes. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah cause in terms of their statute, you will have the statutory councils, you have the bargaining councils that are created in terms of the Labour Relations Act, but the NBF that we have, it's not yet there. But if we look at the NBF currently, they are striving towards formulating the Bargaining Council for the automotive industry, that will include your tyre, that will include your what do you call this? The garages, the motor. The call it the motor sector. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay, that's very interesting. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah. So the sustainability now if you're looking at that sustainability, it may only be one component, which is the automotive, which is your car manufacturers, but it will also encompass your tyre and your motor and other components that tell us to form one bargaining council because so that you can have cars, you'd have to have manufacturers like your … what is this company, that is manufacturing wiring?  Is a logistics company within the automotive that has a company kind of … I forgot its name now. There's always components companies that feed the auto, they feed the auto cause if you need to develop cars, you must have tyre industry. Without tyres, you won’t have a car do you follow that? So they are sustainability moves now not to be in the individualistic approach. So what they do so that they can still have that relevance and to sustain themselves for the unforeseen future. They are mobilising themselves in that form of creating collective bargaining. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I know they’re working with other automotives if I’m not mistaken? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I know they are the operative in SA. I'm not sure about others and the likes but here at the company we don't have such. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | You see we are working very much closer as a supporting logistic company for parts. They're always bringing parts to us. So now, once to answer maybe in a very concise in terms of sustainability. There's another challenge for the unions.  You'll see the body shop and assembly, body shop and the paint shop putting more robots. Initially in the past, it used to be manual labour, which is employees will do maybe the 80% of their work for example the spray booth. It used to be people who are spraying us, right. And then recently, there's current times is no longer people are spraying cars right? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yes. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | And recently, now in current times, it’s no longer people who are spraying cars it's robots. So what does that mean? It means that those people who are doing that jobs were replaced by the robots. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So it's basically job scarcity, right? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | In a way yes because what is happening now, is that robots are replacing WARM BODIES and then that will also have an impact on the numbers of the union because remember, if you're currently in the company, the union membership is direct associate. And that's almost majority of the workforce. Direct workforce, who are working with the production.  So if then what do you call it, the change … the induction of robots there’s a tenth that they're using for that. It goes to an extreme, it means that a lot of employees will be reduced, maybe by a quarter that will have an impact on the sustainability of the trade union. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | That's a big number. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I'm just making the example. I'm not saying that it will really go that, but the more we are, revolutionised the production of cars into implementing of robots or putting robots into our plants, the more we take away the warm bodies, the more now the unions are shrinking in terms of numbers. So when you answer your question, and for your paper, you must check the economic impacts the innovations or what do you call this? There’s a term and it's just slipped my mind now.  The technological advances in terms of instilling robots and all those things, it has an economic impact, one by a reduction of warm bodies. Two, it will also impact on the numbers because currently if we were to make an example with NUMSA. In order for NUMSA to be able to negotiate for terms and conditions of associates at the company, they must have 50 plus 1%. Anything below that? Their rights in terms of the labour relations will be reduced. Do you follow that? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I also just want to touch on the robots. So it can be both a barrier and a challenge but it also forms part of the technological advancements. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes, unfortunately, you're quiet spot on because if you look at the companies within South Africa, they've got all a similar challenge. The majority of these companies, if you look at them, they are not African based companies. They are originally from Europe, like your Germany and also America and so then China, Japan.  So the intensity of the of the challenges in terms of their economies, it directly affects us because remember, the reason that they are still giving us cars because wage labour as compared to them. So it's cheaper for them to produce these cars in Africa, for the African market and also to take some of the cars and sell them in Europe. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | So but now if then, then with the economic challenges, and the fact that we cannot have technology included in our systems. We are becoming very much cost- our costs are higher, getting higher than them cause with them with the going upwards efficiency and cost savings. But in Africa, you cannot do that. You still have to use a 100 people instead of using 10 people to build a car because with them, you will put robots instead of using a 100 people you will use 10 people with us it's vice versa. To build that car, you're looking at 100 people instead of 10 because you cannot put robots because of the economic effect that it will have precisely what you said earlier.  It's having benefits and certain challenges, but for us, it put us in a predicament because the more we don't include technology or innovations of technology, the more we become expensive. I’ll make an example. You are building a car for the European market, mostly you are building a car which is the extra that we're building. We're building it for America. You're building it for German and the whole world and then America is building the same car and it’s position between Europe and we’re at the far tip of Africa. So the logistics cost of taking parts from Europe to Africa, and then you build a car and send it back to America. It's more costly. If you follow you those discussions.  So for them, it might be easier and better to just build the cars in Europe, because they're all central in Europe, our market if you look at our market our market is not that large or huge for us to call it to, to argue our case and say we are relevant. To say we are still relevant. The only thing that makes sense to be relevant is government rebates and government incentives to make building of a care cheaper here. But that's now an economic part of it, and then how is it linked to the sustainability of the unions but if you change the status quo, you are maintaining the sustainability of the unions, but if you change the status quo into robotics, and all these things, it simply means that the unions will shrink in the next decade or so. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I just want to touch on what you said of government. So I picked up from our conversation earlier in the beginning, you mentioned the national bargaining council as a partner and government. So I wanted to ask, what other collaborative efforts are there between trade unions and the automotive industry? Are there any other stakeholders that can help drive sustainability? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay do you know NEDLAC? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I've heard of it? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | NEDLAC is a tripartite party for me, let me put it that way. That involves the business, the government and then the labour and the trade unions, which is in the form of COSATU and the rest, you know that COSATU is a combination of all these unions right.  So, when there are policy formulations, they are happening at the level of NEDLAC whereby discussions are taking place there so that they can be a dialogue and collaboration between government, business and labor. It happens at that level, NEDLAC. So the influence happens there. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright, so it starts at NEDLAC? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | It can start from the ground floor, but any policies that are required they will be put as an agenda at NEDLAC and then they will be debated there. Until the laws and everything are formulated for the parliament to do to create them. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay and, in your opinion, this is such a difficult question to ask, but how effective would you say are these collaborations between NEDLAC, government, I mean the company or other automotive companies, how effective would you say these collaborations aren't achieving sustainability? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | For me? Can you repeat your question for me, how are they what? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | How effective have these collaborations been? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | So far remember, you have to wait. When you’re dealing with this question, you have to deal with it from the historic situation, as to before 1994 and after 1994 but you don't have to go back to that level. But when you answer it, you must have that background as to how things were before 1994 and how things are currently.  Right. So to answer you directly on the effectiveness I will say, they are still playing a very effective role because if you look at the nature of our economic environment, as much as we are post-apartheid era, but economically, the economy is not yet at the equal state whereby you can safely state that the workforce which is employees, are having a very loud voice on policy formulations. Because individually you will not be able to achieve that. As individual employees. If we were to be individualistic in approach, we will not be able to influence the government, we will not be able to influence business. But the fact that we got trade unions, they are specialists in terms of being a voice of the majority of the employees to influence business, to influence the government in policy formulation.  And now if I'm talking about now narrowing down, not generally but to auto which automotive, remember I mentioned NBF. If, for an example, there was no NBF, there was not going to be a uniformity in terms of an employee of skills level four at one company, will be earning the same amount of skills level four in another automotive. Do you follow that? Remember NBF created a certain rate or amount hourly for specific levels for level one, level two, level three, level four, level five, level six and seven for the hourly rated employees right. So whoever is in level one, is level in Mercedes-Benz is earning the very same amount as a skills level one in the company because of that NBF because if then the NBF was not there.  The employees of one automotive company, the one that is not making a lot of cars in the economy, they would have been disadvantaged because they are not selling as so the financial muscle of the company and said company is not at the same level. But because of the NBF, and that is between NUMSA for all seven, and then the management of all the seven they have formulated that NBF to collectively bargain. To make the union or trade unions as effective in the automotive industry. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So the NBF kind of standardises everything across the board? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Precisely because if you've got an NBF, maybe when you've got time you can just pass by to the plant and then I'll give you the NBF book so that you can just read through and see what the 80% of our liberated employees, that are the bargaining unit of NUMSA.  Their terms and conditions are standardised by NBF. And if any plant wants to have different terms and conditions, they should not be less favourable but what the NBF is saying they can be either more but not less. It creates a law of rights, does it make sense? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | It does. So while we're talking about NBF, I noticed you were talking about the skills and how it standardizes everything. So I wanted to ask, one of my questions is how is the union supporting its members in adapting to the changing industry requirements? Because I know we talked about like, introduction of the robots and like the loss of the manual labour, but how is it helping them with that? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | If you look at NBF again, you'll see that there's a training portion. There's what we call those in the automotive industry. We've got that a SETA. I'm not sure whether you heard about it. You can Google it’s called merSETA. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yes, I've heard about it, I think one of my talent management colleagues mentioned it. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, merSETA is responsible for training and development of the associate within the automotive and other related industries. Right. So the union is playing an active role, in terms of making sure that at least its members within the automotive are receiving training of any kind, whether within the trades, in the industry, or otherwise, but mostly they have been pushed for a while, lot of robotics, and things like that, that our associates will always go in and acquire skills to make sure that at least they are coming in with the updated their knowledge in terms of what is the point within the industry.  And also that training is guaranteeing that their level of survival in terms of economic skills, they are not far worse. They are not left behind. So hence if you look at the NBF, it also talks about a three-year cycle like negotiations for wage increases for an example. Now we are at the end of the last year, as of last year for cycle. Next year there will be negotiations for the next three years, whereby the parties will agree to say that for the next three years, this is how we are going to increase the salaries of the hourly paid associates.  You see now the effectiveness of the union how it comes in. As long as it's having the likes of NBF as a central bargaining forum it manages to deal effectively with the employees in various plants and also create what to call it, a sectoral bargaining structure. It's quite a mouthful. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I was about to say, I’m scribbling here. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah I understand, you will not be able to capture everything within this hour that we scheduled. It should have been, I don't know your timelines. You should have been maybe continuous three sessions, because you need to have a clear how these things link and interact to each other so that you can be able to understand and define the sustainability of the unions.  Because for the next two decades, it's my opinion that the union needs to be there or maybe less than that but beyond that. Beyond two decades, which has 20 years I think they will start to fade because remember now also if you look at the calibre of the employees that we have, are different from the calibre of employees that we used to have before. Majority if not all of them, are literate. The companies are no longer taking associates who are not having matric. And currently if you go around the lines, it's very few employees who are having only matric. The majority who will have a matric plus, a certain diploma or certificate or things like that, to show the level of literacy around the workforce.  Some of them having degrees for that matter, but because of they couldn't find jobs within their market. They ended up coming to work on the line, you understand. So that also has an impact on understanding cause, even though objectively and constructively it might enhance how union negotiate and then address the issues.  Unlike before in the past, it will only be the limited number of people which is the shop steward that will have knowledge. But the rest of the employees don't have knowledge, they only listen to what the unions are saying. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Because they’re not directly involved. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes, but now, they understand issues, economic issues, they are politically involved in all these things. So they understand the dynamics that are happening there. So they are able to influence the union. So also the union has the responsibility now that, any policies that they are coming up with any suggestions or things like that they have to make sure that at least they are making economic sense for its members. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I want to just jump, sorry to initiatives and practices because I know we were talking a lot about robots being introduced into the plant, but I wanted to know, are there any other green strategies or practices currently being implemented by the union to promote environmental sustainability? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I will not say yes. However, the union is always, what I can say it's always looking at management's responsibility, right. To go with what is compliant, required in terms of green energy and all these other required things. Right, but the union what they will do, they will guard against policy implementation that will have a negative impact on the employees.  For example, any suggestions that clean energy or things like that, they will have to at least a union will always interrogate them to see whether what impact will it have? What impact will it have to its members? You understand and trying to mitigate any risk of negative impact on its members.  They don't initiate but they're always like a police guard. They're always acting like police, to make sure that the management is not really doing things that will negatively impact on the massive scale of employees. I'm not sure it makes sense what I'm saying. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | No it does because, as you said, they're sort of like gatekeepers, in a sense where they're protecting the best interests of their people.  Alright, so in short I could put it as just researching and investigating the new policies and strategies that come up so that they can in time mitigate any risks or consequences. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | So when you're writing your piece, you will have to substantiate, you must make an example you must find you must find the green energy projects, right? And look as to what changes that are coming with that and then, are these changes having some impact on the workforce are there any maybe reduction of jobs or things like that, so that if then there are even if in the slightest scale and then you will check as to the union in particular and these in sector which is NUMSA.  What is NUMSA’s response to that suggestion? I'm not sure I’m making sense. You should not leave it vague. It's a pity that I don't have something out of my mind right now. But maybe I can think of something later in depth such as to say, look at this initiative that came as a result of the green energy implementations and what was NUMSA’s response to that? So that when you are making that statement at least you can have some kind of context linked to that. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Definitely. I think it's important to have an example just to emphasise the importance of what is being said. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, but maybe what I used to do, what do you need to submit this? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I'm hoping to finish off my interviews this month or latest the first month of July. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay. Was what I was going to say was, I don't think will make justice to have one session out of it. Unless from your side. Are you comfortable that from what I gave you, you'll be able to go and make more research and then try to coordinate it into a very structured approach in order to respond. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I think let me transcribe what I've gotten from the session and then if need be, I'll arrange for a follow up. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay, I’ll hear from you and then you can only set up this |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I'd love to come to the plant or to have it face to face. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | No, as and when you are but just check with me that would I be here it was sometimes out of this plant. But 80%, I’m always here. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright. No problem. I'll definitely get in contact with you. But I do want to just finish off I think I've got two or three questions left.  So I know we touched on the government policies and I just want to ask like, how do the government policies and regulations influence the adoption of green practices within the automotive industry? I know they drive them but I was just wondering if you can provide a bit more context for me. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I haven't gone to that extent of exploring or anticipate, because I'm trying as I'm sitting here, I'm trying to think year 2000. There was a policy taken on the green energy, but then it was something that remote. We all didn't think that it would be impacting us quickly as it did. I haven’t, at some point I was out of the automotive industry. So I might have missed some other developments. Maybe this question, can I ponder over it? And then try to go and find some examples to be able to give you a proper response and contextualise it. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Sure no problem I just made a note. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I'll do it within maybe the next 24 hours. It's just that I came back to the automotive industry last year. I have been out of it for plus past 15 years. Because I was here, not the company in the automotive 1998 and then left in 2004. I left to follow my legal career and other industries. I came back, I think last year in June. So now I'm catching up again. I might have missed in between. So hence I’m saying let me go back and see in between that period cause I'm definitely sure there were changes that were affected by the green energy initiatives and policies. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | No problem. I'll also just do a little bit of research on my side. I wanted to start off with this question but I already know you are so passionate about it, but I just want to know from your perspective, what is the level of importance given to green transitioning in the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | The level? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yes. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | How do you want it, percentages or one out of 10? Because if you look at the evolution from petrol, diesel, to electrical or hybrid cars, that will use petrol and electricity. You'll see that there's been a major change by the automotive companies to comply with the green energy initiatives. Because currently, even with the company, I'm not sure what that mean. I'm just responding in context, but if you look at the models that are being produced going forward, in the next five years, we'll have 50 plus percent of electrical cars, but it depends.  It depends on the region. When I'm talking about the region, I'm talking about whether is it Europe or Africa, or Asia, but I know that in respect of Europe, I think by 2030, it must have achieved is it 100% or 80%, of diversion from petrol propelled cars to electric cars, but in Africa, we are not yet ready for that. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So in short, there's a very high level of importance placed on sustainability in the automotive industry. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Precisely, yes. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay. Other than that one question with regards to policies and regulations. I do have one more question just to close. From your perspective, what can be done to enhance transitioning and sustainability within the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | That's a tough one because if I’m advocating for the speedy transition, I will have to also consider the impact that it will have in the economy of the region. That do I make sense. For an example, look at our region as Africa, right, and in particular, the SEDAC, let me not talk about Africa. Let me talk about SEDAC, which is your Zimbabwe, your Namibia and towards South Africa. And look at the economic activities. And then if now, you advocate for the rapid transition to the initiatives of green energy will Africa be able to sustain its population? That's a rhetorical question. I'm not expecting you to answer that. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | It really had me thinking though. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes, of course, that was the purpose I wanted you to think. But if you compare now, let’s talk about South Africa. South Africa, they majority of people are not working, right. They are depending on the government, subsidies, government grants and all these other things, though, they are living in their meagre wage, yeah. We had to introduce the Minimum Wage Act, you know, for the domestic and all these other people, to show that the government is trying to protect the incomes or trying to create incomes for the majority of people.  Now with the known impacts of the initiates of the green energy, it simply means that we move to more. For example, if you look at the trains, before the trains, we're using coal, right? We're using coal to prepare their engines for the trains, but now we moved by 50%, not to coal but to other green energy initiatives to make sure that we comply. You understand and what did that cost in the coal mines? It closed them down.  Similar if you look at them current petrol and all these other things, sectors. If for example, you rapidly move to the green energy and make sure that you electrify your cars. What is the future of the garages that we have and how many people are working in those garages? Does it answer your question? Did I miss something or I answered outside context? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | No, no, you answered it's fine. I just wanted to know from your perspective, what could have been done? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | From my perspective, look yes of course, we can see the effects of climate change because of we are not doing enough to look at the environment and this green energy initiatives are intended to protect the environment, right. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yeah. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah. So now, the more we delay the more harm we do to the environment. But at the same time, how do we balance that harm or that movement to make sure that at least we're not leaving our people worse in terms of economic scales. So as much as it's a necessary initiative. I believe, personally, that we need to find alternatives to balance the impact that it will have. How it happens, I can see that if I were to predict, come in a decade lot of things would be electrified.  We’ll have robots, we’ll have all these things that then the majority of people will have to find other ways of finding employment. Are we ready for that? That's a question because the population instead of, of shrinking, it's expanding. If the population was depreciating, if I may put it for a lack of a better word, was being reduced in terms of numbers. For example, in South Africa, we are plus minus 60 million. If we were to be 30 million, for example, cut it by half. Right? I think this green energy initiatives, we're going to work more effectively, you understand? But now, the more you move that direction, you are reducing the economic activities of this population, which will create more problems. Does it make sense? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yeah that’s really some good food for thought. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, so I'm not saying it's a wrong thing. Make no mistake, but how do you find the balancing line? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | It is a balancing act at the end of the day. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright. Oh, one more thing. So I know we talked a lot about robots in this discussion. But I wanted to know apart from robots being used on the assembly line, are there any other specific technologies that the unions see as critical for sustainable future in the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I would have to go and ask them because where I'm sitting, I don't think they've got an interest. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Honest that’s my honest, but I may be wrong, but I don't think they will oppose remember, for them to be sustainable in the motor industry. They need numbers. So if you reduce numbers, you will reduce their sustainability. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Makes sense cause numbers have influence right? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes. So but I'm not saying that they may not be doing anything. Maybe they are but as to how they do it I may not be having a clue as to what they are doing. Hence I'm saying maybe I need to go and ask them. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | No problem. Yeah. Alright. Thanks so much for your time today. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | No problems and you let me know if further clarities maybe, maybe some of my questions are not really answered them succinctly. But you can always advise. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Sure, no problem. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay. Pleasure. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Enjoy your day. Thank you. Cheers. Bye. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Bye. |