**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Union Position: Employee Relations Specialist & Human Resources Business Partner

Age: 33

Gender: Male

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT** | |
| **SPEAKER** | **DIALOGUE** |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Good day Mr P thank you so much for joining me here today. Um, before we get started, I just wanted to confirm that you are aware that this interview will be recorded and transcribed for academic purposes. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, I’m aware. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | All right, great. So before we get into it, I was just wondering if you could introduce yourself for me. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay. My name is Mr P. I am a HR Business Partner and Employee Relations Specialist here at the plant in an automotive company. And I look after the logistics department, which is responsible for parts arriving here at the plant from the various locations around the world.  Also for making sure that the finished product is also shipped to either dealerships locally if the vehicle is built for the local market or for the international market. So I look at the logistics process, which includes parts and complete vehicles. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | All right, thank you. So now, let's start with- |
| **PARTICIPANT** | One more thing. In the past three weeks, I’ve also been assisting the head of employee relations. I think I must state that as well. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright, then. Yeah, thank you for the introduction. Moving on to our first question, what would you say is the level of importance given to green transitioning and sustainable practices within the automotive sector? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | If I can start here at home, I think there are multiples, multitudes of initiatives that talk to sustainability, and transition to making the world a better place in terms of the green transition. I think maybe if I can start from a logistics perspective, you will understand that when we receive parts, those parts come in packages. We have a waste management area, and a team that looks after the waste management area.  So also the waste that comes from example, the canteens, the food that we eat, and the beverages that we drink, all that waste is collected and there is an initiative. I'm not quite sure who's the other third party that the company has partnered with, to ensure that once this waste is collected, and it's going wherever it needs to go, it gets converted into bricks. I think the company might be Enviro-bricks or something along those lines, that is converted into bricks. And then those bricks are then used to build houses as a form of Corporate Social Responsibility campaign.  So if I can approach it from that basis, there's a level of very, very, very high importance that is placed on sustainability and going green. But obviously, this is also a fine balance between going completely green and balancing the employment of associates that we employ, because if we do go too green jobs, at some instances might be at stake. I don't have an example now. But that's one of the things that normally comes if you transition, that means you need to get rid of the old processes of doing things and when you transition and you want to be sustainable, you introduce new practices that may make certain categories of jobs irrelevant or redundant. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So based off your response, it's basically a very high level of importance, but it's also a balancing act at the end of the day, because I mean, it's priorities. There's also jobs affected and it's also this thing of like trying to preserve the planet. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes, correct. However, in this example, that I've just given you now, I think there's a good story to tell, because the sustainability and going green actually leads to other form of employment and the bricks are created you get people being employed to build houses, I think it's a good story to tell. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Definitely. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | And I think the company that takes employment very seriously. Also, considering the number of people that we employ here, the plant, and just generally within the company and the people who are affected by the practices within the plant in terms of employment with suppliers and other third parties. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yeah, that's very interesting. I'll definitely make a note of it. When I'm writing up, I can refer back to that example. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright. Moving on to our next question. I want to know if you can, what are the specific green strategies or practices being currently implemented by the union to promote environmental sustainability. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Um I can’t think of one that the union is also involved with his strategies that the company is implementing in terms of ensuring that there is support like for example, the wastage, collection and conversion of that waste into bricks to building of houses. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | So this is something when initiatives are they also participating in ensuring that our associates or employees participate in such initiatives as well. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright, so I'll take it as the wastage collection for the formulation of the bricks that's currently being implemented. Correct ... well that’s currently going on? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, I think maybe another example would be, there's been initiatives recently where associates have also gone out to plant trees to make the environment much better. In order more trees we have, the more oxygen has converted, the more we can breathe, clean air.  So the union in that instance, also encourages associates to participant. They are a social partner, and they think it's in their best interest to also support these initiatives. Because if it's in the best interest of associates, it should be in the best interest of the Union, because the union is mandated by associates. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Ah okay. So how do you see these initiatives evolving in the future? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I think with the way the world is going, they're going to become even more important, because when we talk about sustainability, and we talk about going green, the images that you always see is a picture of an island that used to be very beautiful and now all of a sudden, because of wastage that is not managed properly. The island is either full of waste that was not managed properly, you've got global warming, and you've got flooding in certain instances.  So I think there's a big drive at the moment to ensure that these campaigns not only happened, but happen more frequently than ever before in our history, to ensure that we safe guard and preserve the existence of the planet in general, I think that's also what we tried to do on a smaller scale. We've tried to preserve humanity by giving them shelter through houses that are built from bricks made from waste.  So in a smaller scale, you see, there's just the house. But in a bigger scale, this is preservation of, of humanity, and preservation of the world, as well. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So basically you see it … what’s the word? Escalating to a much larger scale. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, it's going to escalate to a much larger- it's going to be more frequent and it's going to be at a bigger scale than we've ever seen before. So I mean, we can start with planting one tree in a garden if you take for example.  Normally, when you have like a Nelson Mandela day, people don't plant trees … in one year, they might plant on a smaller garden. And the following year, it might be in a bigger scale, open field. And you will see also the drive in some of the international organisations, for example, where forests have been cut down, there's actually also initiative to go and plant trees where they have been chopped off because it's important to have those trees for our own existence. So I look at it in that way. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright. I know we touched on the environment and I just wanted to ask, in terms of practices with regards to moving away from conventional fossil fuel systems, can you tell me what are unions doing there? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Our plans specifically, I must also just mention that our shop stewards committee is very new. They have been in office for about the past six, seven months. So they're still being educated in terms of how our company functions.  So some of the bigger topics as much as they will increase- encourage participation. They themselves would not probably have the amount of resources and capability to have some of their own initiatives. I cannot think of one example but I think the biggest thing that I can say is that today participate where we have campaigns to do such initiatives. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Thank you. Alright, and now we're gonna move on to challenges and barriers. So I want to know, what are the main challenges or barriers faced by unions in the automotive industry, in your opinion, that contribute to implementing green strategies? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | The challenge faced by unions, I think it's the conflict between going green means all the practices are done away with. And when we took top off sustainability and things such as efficiency, this is where you start looking at. Okay, how do we look, for example, at a work- that a job that is being done by a worker and how do we restructure it so that it's not done by two workers? It's done by one.  So when you look at that, for instance, the conflict that they will normally have is, of course, there's a conflict of interest. Yes, we want to support in the initiative. But this must not be at the cost of our work. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | The main thing is it being a conflict of interest? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | A conflict of interest. They want to support initiatives, but it shouldn't come at the expense … you would be alive to the fact that a union exists, because they’re employees and those employees pay membership. So if anything, will disadvantage their workers, they will be against it. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay, follow up question on the conflict of interest, would you say this is the only factor that's hindering the adoption of sustainable practices within the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | No, I don't think so. If you look at South African context, we are considered a developing country and we have our own struggles. For example, you would look at the political landscape, you will look at our energy situation, we are not as advanced as other economies where the power supply sustainable, we have load-shedding every now and then. Right, we've got things like loadshedding.  So because of problems like loadshedding, we cannot go from in a situation where we are building, for example, a vehicle that is either battery powered for South African market, because no one is going to buy it. And if no one is going to buy it, there is no jobs because there's no return on investment in terms of customers buying. And if we're making vehicles that people are not buying, obviously, then there's no jobs. So those are some of the challenges, the electric situation, the political dynamics, and just generally the fact that with the generation that is coming in people that were born in the 80s, and I think in the 90s, and early 2000s, Union would have been the go to place for workers.  But the more economy is advancing, unions become relevant. So they need to restructure themselves in such a way that they are appealing to the older people and to the newer generation. Because more and more, for example, work in the digital space. If I can get a job and work online, I'm not out in a plant where I need to register for membership at the Union. So they need to find ways to capture those, the people that would not ordinarily go for membership of a union because they can represent themselves. People are well aware of their rights.  For example, if you look at the IT industry, it is one of the fastest growing businesses within South Africa, within the company. But it's not unionised, because the people that work there, contractors, highly skilled people, they can negotiate their own conditions of employment. And if it's not working for them, they can just resign and find another job.  So the union needs to also structure its value proposition in such a way that they continue to be appealing to the older people that would ordinarily sign up for membership that are mostly labourers in a factory, that are not informed in terms of their rights and what their rights are, to also be more appealing to a highly skilled worker that is well aware of his rights to say but if I know all these things, what else can you offer me? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | It's interesting, you bring into the generational aspect and ever thought about it from that perspective. Alright, moving on to collaboration and partnerships. Are they any collaborative efforts between trade unions, automotive companies and other stakeholders? In order to drive green transitions? I know government is a big party in this effort. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yes. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Is there any other parties? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I think maybe between companies and unions. I know recently, within the company we showcased hydrogen vehicle, a vehicle that is going to be running on hydrogen. Although this is something the union might want to oppose, they are also in support on the basis that as much as you can build an internal combustion vehicle, a car that runs on petrol or diesel, because that is what people are currently driving. And that is currently in demand.  We accept that the world is changing, and we need to move with the times. And so the partnership, this is where, for example, union would back companies to say, continue to do what you do. If you bring in new changes, we are fine, we will also back you when it comes to your engagement with governments so that we can also protect the jobs that exist within our economy. So build your hydrogen car, but also building the cars that people are buying. And if you're having issues with government in terms of topics such as claims that you would ordinarily get who support you to say, this is an essential business in the economy, because it employs so many people within the sector.  And if you are not supporting the automotive industry, as a union we will speak out in favour of our partners. And because we want to protect and sustain the jobs that are with it. So they support the introduction of new things, which is going green, they want to support the maintenance of jobs, by supporting companies that operate in this space. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | You emphasised a lot about the support and I wanted to know how effective would you say the support is between government automotive companies and trade unions? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | It can be … I'm not well-versed on the intricate details of the relationships with business, government and unions. But every now and then you would have what do you call it? Leaders from government visiting the plant, for example. Last year, within the plant there was the company invested- indicated that they would be investing some amounts of money into the building of the new vehicle, which has been released yesterday to the public.  And as a result of that, some senior members from the executive team in Germany were here. Along with that, there were also leaders from government. And, obviously, in that during those engagement, the union had requested time to also speak to all those stakeholders and to highlight what their position is, as far as the investment is concerned, and how it will change the lives of the workers and other people that are unemployed within the surrounding areas. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | You mentioned stakeholders. I know we talked about government and our company itself and the union's what other stakeholders were there. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay. Obviously, you will have suppliers. From a perspective that if you look at the fact that most of the parts that we import are from overseas, there's also partnerships to also ensure that some of the parts that we building for the car, that we are building are also manufactured locally.  So essentially, in certain instances there'll be engagement with stakeholders to the extent that we might even help them if, let's say for example, our employees internally will go to them if there's power outages might assist in terms of giving money or making a donation to buy a generator such things. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So can I say the parties involved in driving these collaborations is the government, the automotive company itself, the trade unions and suppliers. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Suppliers … Who else is involved? Yeah, I think those are the major players within the sector. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright, thank you. I'm moving on to training and skills development, I want to know, how is the union supporting its members in adapting to the changing industry in terms of sustainability. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | So we've got a forum National Bargaining Forum, where companies within the automotive industry are involved in that National Bargaining Forum. So in that, obviously, the company is a stakeholder, companies like other automotive companies are also part of that. And the other party to this agreement, or forum is NUMSA as a union.  So at an industry level, there are negotiations that happen, where obviously NUMSA will come up with proposals, demands, or whatever you want to call it, in terms of the training that should be offered to associates in order to maintain the level of skill to be to build the product, and how those employees should be empowered.  So you've got things like AMIC levels. So you've got AMIC level one where you need to have certain qualification, AMIC level two, where you need to have certain qualification, so that all at an industry level is documented in the industry, collective agreement. And obviously, internally, when you look at a plant level, the union will say, ‘Oh, by the way, at an industry level, we have this agreement’.  For example, more recently, they were saying we need to assist our associates from transitioning from one AMIC level, to another AMIC level, by the way AMIC is an Automotive Industry Qualification or Certificate. Yeah, I realised I didn’t mention that at the beginning. So for a certain AMIC qualification that you have, this is linked to a rate of pay. So the higher your AMIC level, the more qualified you are, the more money you get. And some of these initiatives progressing through AMIC, you can do as part of the training that's offered within the company. But more importantly, outside of your working time, you can do it within the with the company to also attain qualification.  So here at the company, we have a training center where we engage associates on the training, that union is also involved in terms of making recommendations to say, ‘Oh, but why not? Instead of taking 30 workers for this program? Why don't you take more?’ |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yeah, so the direction or the driving force comes from NUMSA? Correct? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah, so it's an industry thing. It's what we must do as the industry agreement sets, basic conditions of employment, so to say, but nothing prevents them- the Union from advocating for more than the basic. So if you can do more, do more. So if the standard agreement in the industry say, take 30 people, but you're a very big company, why don't you take 40, 50 or 60? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay so that's where the direction comes from. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah because if we have a workforce of 2000, and we looking to train all these people, you can just imagine if you're taking 30, and the qualification lasts a year, for all these people to be trained to a level of skill that is according to the agreement, or what NUMSA perceives to be fair, will take a very long time.  So that's why they will come up with this proposal to say do more. Or add this qualification and that qualification because it benefits the worker in the workplace, and in the event that he or she leaves to go and find a job somewhere else. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Yeah, you spoke a lot about NUMSA, can I also classify them as a stakeholder in driving sustainability within the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Ah, yes! |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Thank you, I'm moving on to the government policies and regulations. How does the government in terms of policies and regulations influence the adoption of green practices within the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay, so government will, to some extent, publish legislation, for example, your Health and Safety Act, that then dictates the basic standards that must be maintained within a company to ensure safety and sustainability of certain practices.  So, for example, there is laws around emissions. So, for example, if I'm not necessarily using the automotive industry, but in the mining sector, you are sort of limited in terms of how much emissions you can emit, even maybe here in terms of the amount of waste, to say, if this is the amount of waste that you generate, there's practices that you can adopt in terms of making sure that that waste is converted to something else in promoting initiatives such as recycling, reuse of certain material boxes, pallets, plastic.  So when those conditions are published in terms of legislation, then what must happen is that the company must then comply to meet the minimum standards. And that's how you drive sustainability and going green. And over time, those things become greener, and they encourage you to become more greener in your practices. Not so long ago, another well-known automotive company was involved in a scandal of emissions as well. It's an automotive company, where they ended up being fined by the European Union because the emissions that the vehicle must emit, must be at a certain level.  Even things like sound, you cannot have your car making so much sound that is deafening to people that are walking in the street when your cars moving by. So those are the type of legislations that when are passed. They trickle down to issues of sustainability preservation and going green. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay, so basically, the policies and regulations, state the requirements that you have to abide to in order to become sustainable. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Correct and nothing prevents you from doing additional if you can, going above the minimum. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay. Just a follow up, because I know we talked about it from government's perspective, I want to know, from the union's perspective, what role does the trade union play in advocating for sustainable policies and regulations? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | I think I don't think it's their main priority. It's not their main priority, their main priority is keeping the workers employed, and negotiating for the best benefits and pay as possible, to be able to remain relevant within any industry. I wouldn't put that as something that is top of their priority. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Okay, um, moving on to innovation and technological advancements. From your perspective, are there any specific technologies that the union sees as critical for a sustainable future in the automotive industry? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Not that I'm aware of now. But you know, with improvement in technology, there is always a threat to jobs. For example, if you look at a place like body shop, most of the work, some time back would have been manual. But with the introduction of a robot, which is better technology, means someone is no longer required. If you've got a robot that can weld, the person that was welding is no longer interested. Is no longer needed. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | It's basically taking away the human element, correct? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah. So in this specific instance, what the union would be interested in to say, okay, in order to not have a situation where the workers disadvantaged, how do you retrain this person to be able to do something else other than welding? |
| **INTERVIEWER** | So reskilling the employee. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Reskilling. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I mean, it's understandable as well because their main concern is their jobs at the end of the day, and if technology is taking that away from them, they wouldn't be too much in support of the technology. Correct. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Yeah. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Alright. Yeah, we've come to the end of our interview, I just have one more question for you, which is from your perspective of what can be done to enhance transitioning and sustainability within the automotive industry, |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Transitioning and sustainability? I think some of the practices that have been introduced can be better managed and improved with, for example, the waste collection topic. That's something that if we find better ways of doing things, we will possibly make more bricks, building more houses. Making sure that- or even making sure that there's no wastage at all.  By ensuring that when we building a product, such as a car, we do it right the first time. But also where there's gaps for improvement in terms of making our processes more efficient. If for example, we've got a forklift that runs on petrol, nothing stops us from using one that runs on electric. Yeah, I think those are the type of things that can be done to improve sustainability.  Reuse is a big topic, recycling is a big topic. And also just making sure that we comply with the minimum standards in terms of what the law says in terms of health and safety and taking care of the environment. And also, I think what is also very important, is to also educate people, but more important than anything to me is to ensure that where there is no compliance with at least the basic minimum, there must also be consequences for such behaviour. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Thank you so much for your time. Um, yes, I have actually gone through all my questions. Very, very good insights I gained today. |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Okay, yeah! |
| **INTERVIEWER** | I really want to thank you so much for your time, and you're making the time for me to actually interview you. Um, any final thoughts from your side? |
| **PARTICIPANT** | Nothing no final thoughts from my side, just all the best. |
| **INTERVIEWER** | Thank you. |