




Chapter 3

Strategic Communication in Local Government Collective Bargaining: Proposing Solutions to Challenges

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The South African Constitution identifies local government/municipalities as one of the three spheres of government. However, on collective bargaining matters, the local government sector bargains within a distinct bargaining council separate from those of the national and provincial government spheres. The Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC), for instance, oversees collective bargaining for the national and provincial government. On the other hand, collective bargaining for local government take place through the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC).

This chapter is mainly concerned with analysing collective bargaining challenges in the local government sector and proposing solutions to these.

In August 2022, what looked like a peaceful local government employee strike at the small town of Middelburg in Steve Tshwete Local Municipality, Mpumalanga Province, ended in a deadly shooting. In a confrontation between striking municipal employees and a private security company, one employee was shot and killed while five others were admitted to hospital with gunshot wounds. The employees were demanding better wages and working conditions, among other demands (SAMWU, 2022b). That killing of a Steve Tshwete Local Municipality employee is not unprecedented in South Africa's labour relations. In 2011, a clash between the City of Tshwane's striking bus and refuse workers led to the

death of a municipal employee who was a trade union member (M&G, 2011).

In 2020, in another local government labour-relations-related confrontation, the City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality dismissed 52 employees for what the trade unions called an act of silencing union leadership and members for voicing their frustrations. The SALGBC ruled against the municipality's decision and instructed that the employees be reinstated as of May 2022 (SAMWU, 2022a). In a separate case, also in 2020, the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality claimed that the fixed-term contract of 627 employees had expired and dismissed them. Again, the municipality's decision was overruled by the SALGBC. The trade unions criticised the municipality, claiming that employees are led by people who have no sympathy or empathy (Moatshe, 2022).

These are a few instances of labor relations cases that showcase the difficulties in collective bargaining within the South African local government sector. All these cases came after the World Economic Forum (WEF) had ranked South Africa the worst in the world for competitiveness in labour-employer relations cooperation. Of the 137 countries included in the WEF quantitative study, South Africa was ranked last (WEF, 2017).

The local government collective bargaining data presented in this chapter is based on qualitative research conducted in 2020 and 2021 in South Africa's Gauteng Province. Research participants interviewed for this study comprised representatives from two local government collective bargaining trade unions, the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (IMATU) and the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), as well as the local government employer organisation, SALGA, and the SALGBC. Semi-structured interviews were carried out simultaneously with an analysis of official, publicly accessible documents produced by the three collective bargaining stakeholders, namely: the employer organisation, trade unions, and the bargaining council.

The stakeholder theory was utilised to understand the complexities surrounding conflicts and the dynamics of relationships among stakeholders in local government negotiations. Based on this study and its findings, this chapter identifies and discusses the dynamics of collective bargaining challenges in local government sector; proposes strategic communication principles as to address these challenges; and defines and contextualises the concept of strategic communication in relation to local government collective bargaining. It also explains the bargaining process, identifies and briefly outlines the roles of local government collective bargaining stakeholders, and describes and explains the 'new stakeholder' concept.

Background: Strategic Communication in Collective Bargaining

As one of the objectives of this chapter is to propose a strategic communication approach as an answer to collective bargaining challenges, it is appropriate to commence with an explanation of the concept of strategic communication. Since 2007, when the first journal in this field was published, the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, a myriad of definitions of the concept have come forth. I take a critical view of some of these definitions to create an understanding of the field.

The seminal work of Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič and Sriramesh (2007:3) defines strategic communication as a "purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission". In the realm of the collective bargaining function, as highlighted in the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, the mission of local government is to encourage employee involvement in workplace decision making and effective problem solving of collective bargaining disputes. In the local government cases discussed in the introduction to this chapter, engagement among collective bargaining stakeholders appears to have failed to achieve the expected mission.

Strategic communication has the potential to strengthen engagement among local government stakeholders and, in turn, improve employee involvement in decision making and dispute resolution. As a field of study, strategic communication has always been interdisciplinary in nature and, as such, can make an impact in the industrial relations field (Verwey & Benecke, 2021). Most importantly, strategic communication research has consistently sought to outline commonalities across the several disciplines that engage in this interdisciplinarity (Holtzhausen & Zeffass, 2013).

Strategic communication goals, as applied in this chapter, are to encourage collaboration, co-creation, meaningful dialogue and creation of trust among collective bargaining stakeholders. These goals are proposed to mitigate the identified collective bargaining challenges. This sets strategic communication apart from integrated communication by emphasizing how organizations can effectively communicate across various organizational initiatives while considering future strategic actions (Mahoney, 2011).

Zeffass and Huck (2007) highlight the role of strategic communication in building trust among an organisation's stakeholders, and argue that, strategic communication, as a practice, makes a multifaceted contribution. Besides from establishing trust among stakeholders, it develops organisational reputation and manages symbolic connections with stakeholders. Unlike the kind of communication that supports daily activities in an organisation, Strategic communication readies an organization for an unpredictable future. It stands apart from other fields of communication by prioritizing the fundamental elements crucial for achieving organizational success (Zeffass & Huck, 2007).

According to Farwell (2012), strategic communication, from a modernist perspective, is a type of engagement that involves psychological operations, propaganda, public affairs and public diplomacy. Psychological operations and propaganda refer to the type of communication aimed at

distributing selected content to recipients with the intention to influence their thinking and ultimately the behaviour of their governments and other stakeholders. Psychological operations and propaganda are not characteristic of the field of strategic communication as understood for the purpose of identifying and addressing collective bargaining challenges. The act of concealing information for the purpose of influencing stakeholders is not a suitable mechanism for reducing conflict in an organisation.

On the contrary, in organised labour settings characterised by stakeholder activism, openness and transparency between trade unions and employer organisations becomes a significant component of engagement.

An effective strategic communication analysis can identify the challenges confronting an organisation through research and suggest possible opportunities for how these can be resolved (Hallahan, 2015). In such instances, 'strategic communication is understood as a multidimensional and post-modernistic stakeholder engagement approach that promotes transparency, openness, collaboration and knowledge-sharing for organisational success and conflict mitigation' (Shabangu, 2021). Contrary to the modernistic perspective characterised by control and manipulation, a post-modernistic perspective encourages a dialogic matrix (Overton-de Klerk & Verwey, 2013). In a collective bargaining environment, strategic communication encourages labour unions' and employers' cooperation to conduct a smooth engagement. Strategic communication examination reveals that such communication is post-modernistic and interdisciplinary in nature and encourages 'new stakeholder' behaviour.

Local Government Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is the backbone of public sector labour relations, most processes of which can either be bolstered or weakened through collective bargaining. It establishes a forum where labour unions and employer representatives discuss terms of employment and associated matters in a broader

societal context (Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus & Jordaan, 2016). In the local government sector, the SALGBC brings together representatives involved in collective bargaining and guarantees their compliance with the collective bargaining regulations outlined in the Labour Relations Act, the SALGBC Constitution and the Main Collective Agreement.

Local government collective bargaining happens at two separate levels – national and divisional – depending on the nature of contractual agreement or labour issue under discussion. Collective bargaining issues that are managed at a divisional level are: acting allowance, standby allowance, night work allowance, shift allowance, special leave, emergency work, long service bonus, additional paid sick leave, measures to manage the taking and accrual of sick leave, administrative measures for the taking of leave and legal indemnification (SALGBC, 2015).

The SALGBC comprises the following thirteen divisions in totality: Gauteng; Johannesburg Metropolitan; Cape Town Metropolitan; eThekweni Metropolitan; Western Cape; Eastern Cape; Free State; KwaZulu-Natal; Limpopo; Mpumalanga; Northern Cape; North-West, and Tshwane Metropolitan Division (SALGBC, 2017/ 2007?). Each division has divisional committees that are made up of an equal number of trade union and employer representatives.

In researching local government collective bargaining, this chapter's data was collected at the three divisional levels in Gauteng Province, namely Johannesburg, Tshwane, Gauteng – which includes the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, the Sedibeng and West Rand District Municipalities. These three divisions comprise bargaining committees that are given powers to settle collective agreements relating to terms and conditions of service or any other matter referred to them. It is mostly the efficiency of these bargaining committees that contributes to the success of collective bargaining within a specific division. The collective bargaining process's success is determined by a peacefully reached and formally written agreement called a Collective Agreement,

which binds collective bargaining stakeholders for a number of years or until a particular matter necessitates changes (Shabangu, 2021).

The main objectives of the Collective Agreement are to promote employee participation in decision making; promote fair treatment of employees; promote and maintain industrial peace; create uniform procedures for all stakeholders covered by the agreement; and to ensure effective labour relations (Finnemore & Koekemoer, 2018; SALGBC, 2015). The collective bargaining challenge is that there is little or no adherence at all to these objectives within the collective bargaining network. The perceptions about the concept 'collective bargaining' varies from one labour relations stakeholder to another. Employees, for instance, look at collective bargaining as a monetary value-creating platform for members of a labour union and good working conditions. Employers, on the other hand, regard collective bargaining as a process embarked upon when a need arises for engagement on employment conditions and salaries (Heald, 2016). Numerous scholars in labour relations offer varying viewpoints on the predominant interpretation of collective bargaining.

According to De Wet (1987) and Du Doit (2007), the idea of collective bargaining was initially brought forward by Beatrix Potter Web, the British labour movement pioneer, in 1891. According to the Webbs (1896), barter between groups of workers or stakeholders and between individuals must be heralded by some form of negotiations, through authorised representatives. Fox (2006) and Bendix (2019) concur. Similarly, in the local government sector of South African, collective bargaining occurs between representatives of the employer organisation (SALGA), recognised labour unions (SAMWU and IMATU) and the bargaining council (SALGBC).

Local Government Collective Bargaining Challenges

Collective bargaining in the local government sector starts from a structure called a Local Labour Forum (LLF) (Shabangu, 2021). One stipulation in the Collective Agreement mandates

that each municipality must create an LLF structure, which fosters dialogue between representatives of employers and employees. Issues that an LLF can engage or consult on, according to the Main Collective Agreement (SALGBC, 2015), are Issues relevant to a specific municipality but beyond the jurisdiction of the bargaining council or its divisions; issues referred to the LLF by the bargaining council; and the concluding of Minimum Service Level Agreements (operational issues within a respective local government). Agreements taken at the LLFs would then be escalated to the division's bargaining committee for ratification (SALGBC, 2015).

Collective bargaining fundamentally revolves around communication process hence it presents challenges that are commonly associated with communication (Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus & Jordaan, 2016). The collective bargaining challenges outlined are based on qualitative research data sourced from the local government sector collective bargaining stakeholders in Gauteng between 2020 and 2021. The collective bargaining challenges discussed in this chapter are not exhaustive, and further research work might discover additional challenges.

Politicisation of collective bargaining

Following substantial engagement with the three stakeholder groups involved in local government collective bargaining in Gauteng, it was revealed that internal politics within political parties somewhat contribute to the confrontational nature of collective bargaining. The extended exercise of political power in the collective bargaining processes by councillors representing the employer organisation politicises collective bargaining. They might be representing particular political parties in the council of a particular municipality, but in the SALGBC they only represent the employer organisation (Shabangu, 2021). One Gauteng Division research participant, for instance, commented on how political interference has become a challenge to the collective bargaining issues:

“Remember the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) is a member of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). COSATU is affiliated to the ANC, so when we are seated at the Local Labour Forum (LLF), and we talk to councillors, we talk to ANC councillors; so, if ANC councillors have their own divisions at branch level they bring them here, and then they divide labour. Those are the things we have identified, and we have not come up with an answer on how we are going to deal with it.”

The indirect involvement of political parties creates unease and has a detrimental impact on collective bargaining. A participant from the Tshwane Division expressed concern about the challenges of collective bargaining when certain stakeholders introduce political party dynamics into the process. The participant explained that:

“You might find that a lot of us as shop stewards are ANC members. Even when you are in meetings and you’re planning something, some of your shop stewards will tell them [the ANC] that, hey, we are planning something, and we are coming for you.”

Likewise, a research participant from the Johannesburg Division also indicated the interference that party politics has on collective bargaining within local government:

“For your understanding, all these collective bargaining problems are caused by political parties.”

Coercive collective bargaining

Coercive collective bargaining refers to a bargaining environment where one stakeholder consciously intimidates other stakeholders and adopts a ‘leader stakeholder’ posture. A “leader stakeholder” is a term used to describe a stakeholder who asserts dominance over other stakeholders in situations like collective bargaining, believing that decisions made should primarily serve their own interests rather than those

of other stakeholders. Typically, this is followed by putting pressure on other stakeholders to agree with their negotiation stance through intimidation (Shabangu, 2021). As elucidated by a participant from the Tshwane Division:

“We have been followed; we have been threatened; but we don’t care anymore. But you see, there’s one thing that you must realise as a union is that you must be sure of your strength.”

The leader stakeholder hypothesis was further emphasised by one participant from the Gauteng Division:

“The employer would actually be a problem here because if both trade unions agree that things should be done this way, the employer is the one that complicates issues, this [is] because they [the employer] have authority over the implementation of collective bargaining resolutions.”

The leader stakeholder hypothesis is operationalised using intimidation and coercion, giving rise to the idea of coercive collective bargaining. The reality of the coercive collective bargaining concept is, moreover, explained in the following SAMWU Gauteng Division press statement:

“[The] Municipal Manager with his deputy have been using their positions of authority to intimidate, threaten and cause division among our members and employees of the Midvaal Local Municipality in general. The threats started during the demonstration that they will deal with all SAMWU members after elections and, indeed, after elections they started to suspend our members following ambiguous and witch-hunt allegations, instilled fear among employees, caused division and suspended our members, including all shop stewards within Midvaal in an attempt to ban the union so they can push their devious agendas.” (SAMWU, 2016a)

In that same year, the trade union released another statement expressing comparable views on collective bargaining within the province:

“We have heard of the offensive that has been launched against the working class by municipalities [as] a direct attack on trade unions by the employer. We will be defending ourselves against the employer who has shown no regard to collective bargaining and wants to run municipalities as though they are someone’s private property.” (SAMWU, 2016b)

Such a positional approach towards engagement damages trust and the possibility of value creation among stakeholders. Solving challenges becomes a difficult exercise and trust is diminished under such circumstances (Lewicki, Elgoibar & Euwema, 2016). Confrontations that, at times, have led to killings in the labour relations environment remain a worrying factor, demonstrating a need for a co-creation approach in collective bargaining.

Trade unions and political parties’ alliances

Historically, trade unions have been working side by side with political parties such as the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). Some of these trade unions shared ideological beliefs with these political parties. The United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA), for instance, had an alliance with the IFP, while COSATU has an alliance with the ANC (Bennett, 1988; Bennett & Howe, 1986). The collaboration between trade unions and political parties proved effective during the fight against apartheid. Bhorat, Naidoo and Yu (2014) argue that COSATU played a vital role in shaping the course of economic restructuring and the path of transformation within the nation. This research has confirmed, however, that some stakeholders involved in the collective bargaining hold differing views on such collaborations nowadays.

One Gauteng Division’s research participant, for example, pointed out the alliance between trade unions and

political parties as one of the challenges facing the process of collective bargaining. The research participant explained:

“If you look at other countries abroad, you’ll find that very few labour federations have this historical alliance with political parties that govern a country. In South Africa, we blur the lines (between trade unions and political parties). When shop stewards are aggrieved with management and the structures of collective bargaining in the municipality, the unions will approach the political leadership and try to strike a deal, and then want to come with that gentleman’s agreement outside the structures of collective bargaining and want to implement it in this collective bargaining arena, and that is what causes these tensions and problems.”

The challenge posed by alliances between political parties and trade unions was also shared by a research participant from the Gauteng Division. The participant stressed:

“There is a confusion of roles. Remember, I am a member of the ANC at branch level. Then I would attend a branch meeting of the ANC where I am just an ordinary member and come to the union where I am now secretary. Then I stand in front of members and articulate issues. Now, when I am in the union position, I want to address the issue from the ANC branch meeting on the wrong platform, which is the main problem that we need to address. Yes, it is the national alliance, but the trade union needs to have their own rules otherwise these things [misunderstanding of roles] are not going to fall off.”

A Tshwane Division study participant clarified that the factional dynamics within the ANC extend to shop stewards in the union who also hold membership in the ANC. Then trust among shop stewards of one trade union in the collective bargaining process is disrupted. The participant expressed that:

“Some shop stewards will say, this one is pushing a particular agenda because he belongs to a different faction [a grouping in the ANC].”

Poor consultation

Consultation stands out as a fundamental level of stakeholder engagement. It is during consultation that an organisation presents information to stakeholders and receives feedback. Consultation is essential among stakeholders for an effective functioning of an organisation (Larson & Williams, 2009). Local government collective bargaining is characterised by poor consultation, which negatively affects efficiency and progress in stakeholders’ engagement processes.

In a consultation process, stakeholders’ feedback is valued and considered at a leadership level. Most collective bargaining challenges would be detected early if the local government’s consultation machinery were functioning well. Meaningful dialogue and inclusive consultation could solve labour relations problems before erupting into conflicts, as explained by a Tshwane Division participant:

“So, if you engage us properly, we are prepared to make a deal out of the situation – to say, ‘Maybe let’s take this route’. We [trade unions] are not difficult people; it’s just about proper consultation and engagements.”

Consultation is not a stakeholder engagement process that is done for the sake of it. Failing to value consultation can also create problems among the stakeholders involved. The main problem associated with poor consultation in collective bargaining is that the employer tends to have the upper hand. This manifests through the taking of decisions without involving other collective bargaining stakeholders (Shabangu, 2021). This happens with matters impacting all stakeholders, as stated in the following SAMWU Gauteng Division statement:

“We have noted decisions which have been taken without following due processes and consulting with organised

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labour, such as the decision to convert day shifts into night shifts. We are, however, glad that the South African Local Government Bargaining Committee declared that move invalid as there has been no agreement between trade unions and the city in the LLF.” (SAMWU, 2017:1).

Meanwhile, the terms of reference of the LLF in the City of Johannesburg (2018: 6) make it clear that the basis of sound and sustained labour relations is effective communication and cooperation among collective bargaining stakeholders. This means the opposite of that would be unsound labour relations and would therefore pose a challenge to the stakeholders and the process.

A Tshwane Division participant stressed:

“They [the employer] fail, on a regular basis, to communicate with employees. They would just apply certain resolutions without consulting with employees, and I think if they do that [consulting], it would bring much more stability in the organisation.”

Consultation is not only helpful for sourcing feedback from stakeholders, but it also contributes to building a working relationship. The following SAMWU Johannesburg Division statement stresses consultation’s relevance in this regard:

“If the Mayor is serious about having a cordial relationship with the trade unions, he should begin by consulting with trade unions before making decisions that would impact employees.” (SAMWU, 2017:1).

Now that challenges associated with the collective bargaining process have been identified, the following section proposes some solutions to the challenges.

Solutions to the Collective Bargaining Challenges Identified

In an organisational environment where there is a multiplicity of voices, such as local government collective bargaining, strategic communication practice accentuates stakeholder collaboration, co-creation and dialogue as ideal approaches for minimising engagement challenges (Shabangu, 2021). Therefore, stakeholder recognition and co-creation, resolving collective bargaining issues collaboratively, meaningful dialogue, and building and strengthening trust among stakeholders are some strategic communication principles that can be integrated in an organisation facing engagement challenges similar to those previously discussed.

Stakeholder recognition and co-creation

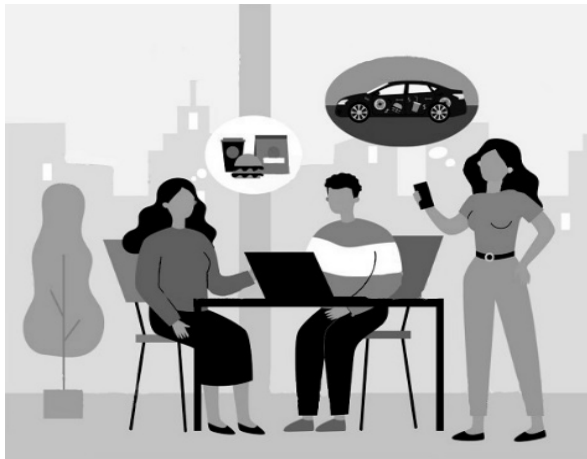


Figure 1: Stakeholders ought to recognise each other and encourage co-creation. Source: Author

To achieve co-creation, stakeholders need to value, involve and recognise each other, hence the importance of stakeholder recognition. Such recognition is one of the levels of stakeholder engagement and is central to facilitating stakeholder co-operation leading to the minimisation of

engagement challenges. Stakeholder recognition in local government collective bargaining should not be confused with identification of stakeholders (Shabangu, 2021). Stakeholders in the local government collective bargaining environment are clearly identified in the Main Collective Agreement (2015–2020). The agreement does not include political parties as stakeholders; it only mentions trade unions and the employer organisation. Recognition of these stakeholders is key to ensuring co-creation in solving challenges.

The main principle of stakeholder recognition involves recognizing and embracing the perspective that all stakeholders should be included in collective bargaining processes and decision-making. Moreover, they ought to treat each other with respect and value each one's contribution. Such an approach obviates any unwelcome interference by those not recognised by the agreement in the collective bargaining (Shabangu, 2021).

The stakeholder recognition principle is anchored in the 'stakeholder involvement' factor. By engaging stakeholders in decision-making and governance processes, it becomes simpler to achieve organizational accountability and responsibility (Greenwood, 2007; Fisher & Hopp, 2020). Acknowledging stakeholders is crucial because when employees feel acknowledged and connected to an organisation, they tend to align their decisions with the organisation's strategic objectives and exhibit behaviours beneficial to the organization, such as cooperation and demonstrating good organizational citizenship (Shabangu, 2021).

There are many ways in which organisations can put into action the principle of stakeholder recognition. Firstly, this can be achieved by providing additional avenues for listening. By actively listening, an organization can gain deeper insights into stakeholders' thoughts and feelings.

Secondly, an organisation can organise platforms such as seminars where stakeholders engage each other openly on issues impacting collective bargaining. Most importantly,

these seminars must be convened in a neutral setting where all parties feel unrestricted and not compelled to adhere to the directives of any leader stakeholder. Skilled labour relations consultants can be hired to help facilitate such occasions. Such seminars must result in summarized reports featuring actionable steps and clear timelines, as these will be beneficial to stakeholders, enabling them to monitor the seminar's progress and feel personally involved as contributors to the report's development (Shabangu, 2021).

Resolving collective bargaining issues collaboratively

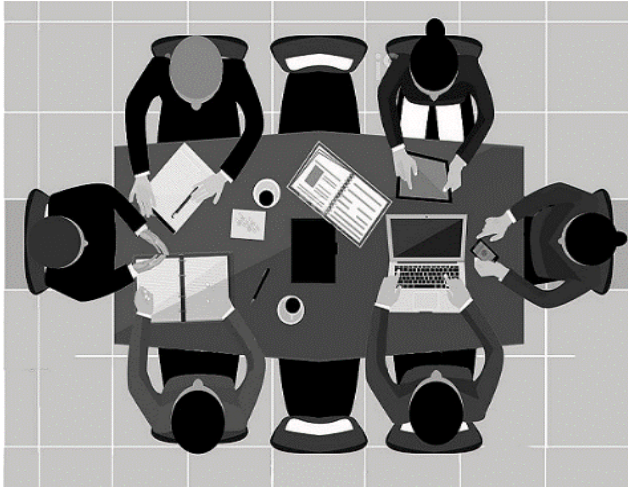


Figure 2: Collaboration is grounded on continuous stakeholder interaction and tolerance. Source: Author

Stakeholder collaboration can help resolve problems such as coercive collective bargaining in many different ways. Firstly, through stakeholder collaboration an environment where an organisation can achieve a task that could not be easily accomplished in any other way is created. Collaboration helps to create a favourable environment for constructively building a future-focused stakeholder relationship. Secondly, the local government's ability to solve collective bargaining problems that an individual stakeholder cannot solve,

could be strengthened through stakeholder collaboration (Shabangu, 2021).

The main aim of a collaborative approach is to facilitate a group creative brainstorming exercise with wider stakeholder inputs, through the creation of a collaboration space. This is a space where local government collective bargaining stakeholders can express their opinions and have these taken into account. A suggested approach to this is that a local government can publicise a contested bargaining issue in an internal communication platform such as intranet, newsletter or WhatsApp groups and invite stakeholders to respond. Depending on the time available for the bargaining issue being discussed, a labour relations expert can be invited to facilitate and share perspectives on the subject. Subsequently, a collaborative response to the issue at hand would then be developed. It is, however, important to say that collaborative approaches cannot be exhaustive, and none is better than the other (Shabangu, 2021).

Meaningful dialogue



Figure 3: Meaningful dialogue creates a sense of belonging and adds value to all stakeholders. Source: Author

Meaningful dialogue refers to an engagement that creates a sense of belonging and adds value to all stakeholders in a conversation. Dialogue becomes meaningful when all stakeholders appreciate the engagement's purpose. This is done by showing respect to each other and valuing each one's contribution in an engagement session (Shabangu, 2021).

Meaningful dialogue is essential in an era where a post-modernistic stakeholder emerges in organisations. The emerging stakeholder – the new stakeholder – wishes to be part of the decision-making process in an organisation. The local government collective bargaining challenges outlined above show that the emerging new stakeholder can indeed be identified in the sector. Turning to the challenge of poor consultation in local government collective bargaining, it is again apparent that the new stakeholder is eager to be recognised and empowered through involvement in the organisation's processes (Shabangu, 2021).

The emergence of the new stakeholder is precipitated, among other things, by the proliferation of technology. Technology moves information easily from one point to the other. This empowers the new stakeholder, who now has unlimited access to information. Therefore, using platforms such as social media, the new stakeholder can question leadership on issues that previously were deemed 'for management' only.

Meaningful dialogue is therefore proposed as an alternative resolution to the local government collective bargaining process. Through meaningful dialogue, different perspectives from stakeholders are considered and integrated into organisational planning. This is done to emphasise that stakeholders should not be viewed as resources or units of production but as equals in the organisation (Shabangu, 2021).

Build and strengthen trust among stakeholders



Figure 4: Trust is one significant factor in organisational relationships. Source: Author

In collective bargaining, trust refers to reciprocal expectations of respect, honesty, support and transparency in the relationship between the trade unions and the organisation. Research in the local government collective bargaining environment has established that failure to respect and abide by agreed performance measures causes a breakdown of trust among collective bargaining stakeholders. In addition to that, the blaming of trade unions and political parties' alliances as one of the reasons for disruptive collective bargaining could be reason enough to demonstrate how necessary it is for collective bargaining stakeholders to work on trust-building among themselves (Shabangu, 2021). In a confrontational collective bargaining scenario where there are high levels of trust among stakeholders, they tend to display cooperative behaviour, while relationships characterised by low trust produce the opposite (Elgoibar, Munduate & Euwema, 2016).

Building trust attributes is neither a simple nor a short-term exercise. There is no one approach that can respond to all trust related problems. However, constant interactions between stakeholders is one of the strategies identified as a

trust-builder in a collective bargaining environment. This strategy, which is explained by the fact that stakeholders get to know about each other's interests, needs and commonalities, can be achieved by allocating time and resources in informal and personal interaction between the senior management team and trade unions representatives (Lewicki et al, 2016). Moreover, these scholars add that constant communication between stakeholders and open communication channels, even during periods of conflict, are effective in building trust.

Conclusion

Most significantly is that the interdisciplinarity of strategic communication is not only restricted to organisational communication, public relations and marketing communication but can be extended to other fields such as labour relations in the local government sector. Local Labour Forums and Bargaining Committees are two critical structures of the local government collective bargaining in the Tshwane, Johannesburg and Gauteng divisions of the Local Government Bargaining Council in the Province. The discussion further shows that the local government sector collective bargaining resembles the 'all channel' and 'chain communication' network.

The collective bargaining challenges identified and discussed have demonstrated engagement challenges in labour relations in the local government sector. In a collective bargaining space, where one stakeholder believes their voice is not heard, and where the blaming of the other is common, promoting trust-building has been discussed as an ideal solution. The chapter has shown that trust promotes collaborative engagement, which allows protagonists to collectively develop solutions.

The importance of meaningful dialogue as a solution to collective bargaining, characterised by the proliferation of technology and the emergence of the phenomenon known as the new stakeholder. Stakeholder recognition and co-creation are some of the strategic communication objectives that have

been discussed as ideal solutions to public sector collective bargaining challenges.

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