



ILERA AFRICA 9th Regional Congress

26 - 29 September 2021



The New Unionism

Use of high technologies in union activity and collective bargaining.

‘Reality check, the South African Perspective’

Presented By:
Mr Frikkie De Bruin_PSCBC

INTRODUCTION

- A cloud of uncertainty hangs over the future of Trade Unions despite the ILO launch of 'Future of Work Centenary Initiative'. There is fear that the direction of change in the world of work is away from, the achievement of social justice” (Visser, 2109).
- Digital innovations has found their way into our workplaces, homes, pockets and mind-sets, actively shaping the adaptation of new technologies (Bensusán, 2019; Schoeman, 2018;).
- Trade unions have embraced new technologies to their advantage.

INTRODUCTION

- Choosing and adopting specific carefully selected and tested applications and software, which suit union purposes, becomes an issue of strategic importance (Schoeman, 2018).
- Getting more young people into the unions is key to any strategy of union renewal. The gap in unionization between young workers entering the labour market and older workers close to retirement is larger than ever (Mote, 2019).
- Digital technologies play the role of a facilitator, but not a goal in itself increasing democracy at work (Moore, 2019).

INTRODUCTION

- New digital technologies can contribute in a measurable form, to the overriding goal to support organizations and members of union movements (Räthzel, and Uzzell, 2019).
- 27 years of democracy have seen the Trade Unions in South Africa moving with times in order to improve labour relations.
- The 21st century has seen the growth of Trade Unions in the public and private sector. These unions are at different levels and stages of adopting technology as the paper will highlight.
- The role of new technologies for unions is evident in the Public and private sectors. Ever since the introduction of the concept of the digital divide (Pedersini, 2010).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Trade unions have been a bit behind the curve in adopting digital technologies, and they've got a tremendous amount to offer (Fiorito, Jarley, and Delaney 2000; Magee, 2019).
- How the whole labour environment embrace lots of different uses of digital technologies, as appropriate in each case is critical (Magee, 2019).
- This could vary from websites hosting downloadable templates, campaign resources, and social media channels to apps, and virtual conferencing, meetings and communication to members (Cockfield,2005; Magee, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Digital, involves bridging the old world with the new.
- Workers still desperately need Trade Unions to address the fundamental power imbalances.
- Unions are still relevant. However, we are in real danger of losing our relevancy if we don't adapt to the changing world of work and that has to mean digital (Magee, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- If Trade Unions are to realistically adapt to the world of electronic communications, the first step is to ensure that they have sound IT infrastructures.
- Trade Unions must be prepared to invest in ICT equipment, which will meet the needs of the organisation and the expectations of the members they serve.
- The need for Trade Unions themselves to change their structure in order to be able to deal with the new electronic age need debate and consideration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- The use of technology to promote these services increases the Union's opportunities to enhance available Membership Benefits and improve revenue streams (Bowerman, 2004).
- The E-Union provides services and benefits through online marketing initiatives.
- E-unions can also directly email their members at little cost and minimal effort.
- Unions, by their very nature, are campaigning organisations.

E-Union the South African Perspective

- The South African Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 promote economic development, social justice, labour peace, and democracy in the workplace.
- LRA regulates organizational rights of trade unions, and promoting collective bargaining at the workplace
- Trade Unions have adopted different ways in which they can manage processes, membership management, communication, collective bargaining, and dispute management.
- This has led to moving with current changes and adopting new technology to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

E-Union the South African Perspective

- The public Service is the biggest employer in South Africa with over 3 million employees.
- All Public Service Labour Unions are guided by their vision, mission, values of loyalty, transparency, respect, integrity, consistency, and service excellence.
- While it is not a plain playing field Unions have to adapt and adopt to survive and maintain the numbers of membership in the competitive field.

E-Union the South African Perspective

- Unions recruit, serve and retain members, this requires accurate information communicated, responsible and sustained communication with its primary audience.
- The majority of trade Unions in South Africa have adopted technologies based on the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- Technology has become the catalytic tool leading to effective messages that add value for the recipients.
- Effective communications activities also ensure that branding messages of Trade Unions are conveyed in a manner that supports the marketing initiatives of the organizations.

E-Union the South African Perspective

Technology enhancement in communicating with Union members

- While all Trade Unions have robust communication strategies, the level and degree at which they use technology to boost their strategies differs. The Communication strategy empowers and educate members, informing stakeholders and the Public at large.
- The Majority of Trade Unions large and small have adopted certain principles in relation to their communication strategy.
- Members are offered a variety of communication channels in recognition of the diversity of membership.

E-Union the South African Perspective

Technology enhancement in communicating with Union members

- In the 26 years of democracy South African, Trade Unions have been gradually introducing themselves to technology planning and executing online virtual meetings and other conferences.
- The Majority of Trade Unions large and small have adopted certain principles in relation to their communication strategy.
- Members are offered a variety of communication channels in recognition of the diversity of membership.

E-Union the South African Perspective

Technology enhancement in communicating with Union members

- In the 26 years of democracy South African, Trade Unions have been gradually introducing themselves to technology planning and executing online virtual meetings and other conferences.
- The majority of Trade Unions have made use of various methods for recruitment strategies/tools (fit for purpose) through virtual meetings amongst others to recruit, educate, plan and engage in collective bargaining.

E-Union the South African Perspective

Technology enhancement in Collective Bargaining and Dispute Management

- With regard to collective bargaining, the Unions have adopted use of social media platforms for engaging with members and all relevant structures as part of official means of communication.
- Council Meetings, collective bargaining and dispute management now are conducted through hybrid (face to face and virtual). The outcomes of the initiatives have been quality meetings.
- The use of technology was strengthened by the outbreak of Covid 19 Pandemic leading to the “New normal”.

E-Union the South African Perspective

Technology enhancement in Collective Bargaining and Dispute Management

- Unions embraced fourth industrial revolution faster than expected due to Covid 19 pandemic.
- Trade Unions continue to attend disciplinary hearing physically (face to face as technology may not be stronger for its members).

Technology enhancement in Picketing

- Labour in the Public service before and during Covid 19 had to plan picketing using current media platforms, such as social media, to organise members, communicating on all legal processes and conduct mass action.

E-Union the South African Perspective

Technology enhancement in Picketing

- The Public Service Trade Unions have by no choice been forced to up their game in adopting technology due to Covid 19 pandemic.
- Different platforms have been developed for registration, mostly online, for marketing while addressing members' issues, registration and management, education and information.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

- Opportunities exist in promoting e-unionism and this would allow Trade Unions to think out of the box and ensure they continue to represent the employees and engage with labour without delays.
- Adopting e-unionism links well with the fourth industrial revolution. However, challenges exist as more resources are needed to acquire all required technology and ensure all members are represented as expected.

CONCLUSION

- A number of factors are contributing to the usefulness of the internet as a tool for unions to communicate and organize
- While many Trade Unions in South Africa have made great strides in embracing the internet and adopting digital technologies, there are still some that are lagging behind.
- Unions hesitant to embrace the potential of technology are doing a disservice not only to themselves, but also to the workers they represent
- Going digital is all about making an executable plan based on the immediate and future needs of the union. This plan doesn't have to be grand or lofty. It just needs to be practical

REFERENCES

1. Bensusán, G. (2019). Transformation of trade unions in Latin America: Contexts, ideas and agendas. *International Journal of Labour Research* 2019 Vol. 9 Issue 1–2
2. Both, M (2015). Responsible unionism during collective bargaining and industrial action: Are we ready yet? North West University
3. Bowerman, P. (2004). *Trade Unions and the Internet*. European Social Fund. Berlin
4. Cockfield S (2005). Union renewal, union strategy and technology. *Critical perspectives on international business*, Vol. 1 No. 2/3, pp. 93-108.
5. Hlatshwayo, M. (2017). *Technological Changes and Manufacturing Unions in South Africa: Failure to Formulate a Robust Response*. University of Johannesburg, South Africa
6. Fiorito, J; Jarley, P and Delaney, JT. (2000) *The Adoption of Information Technology by U.S. National Unions*. Vol. 55, No. 3 (2000 SUMMER), pp. 451-476 (26 pages)



Thank you!!!

