

# Analysing the state of trade union membership in South Africa

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## Declaration

I, Menachem Mendel Orelowitz, declare that this research article is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination to this or any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Orelowitz', with a stylized, cursive script.

Menachem Mendel Orelowitz

Signed at Cheltondale

On the 31<sup>st</sup> day of March 2022

## **Dedication**

This report is dedicated to the all the members that are part of a trade union in South Africa.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge the following individuals who played a crucial part in my completion of this research:

- Tonderai Sibanda, my supervisor, who spent countless hours advising, guiding and encouraging me
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the research is to understand the reason for the decline in trade union density in South Africa. Trade unions worldwide have seen a huge decline in their membership density. South Africa is no different. There has been a lot of research regarding the effectiveness of trade union towards the economy and the country. The importance in understanding the reasons for this decline allow for measures to be put in place by the trade unions in order to reverse this. Trade unions have been around for decades and have given their members a huge number of benefits in the work place.

The research was conducted through interviews with members of trade unions as well as leadership members within these trade unions. These participants were chosen at random but had to be a current or past member. This research was qualitative in nature which allowed for more in-depth research. Trade union membership make up currently for 25% of the work force.

The majority of members have had some disappointing experience from the trade union due to a lack of service delivery. Even though members acknowledged that they lacked proper service delivery from trade unions, members still would not want to represent themselves against their employer. Members need trade unions for security. The increased knowledge and results against the employer, the trade unions bring, is still creating some benefits for their members.

Members are the core and backbone of trade unions. They need to be treated as paying customers, that require the best service from trade union continuously throughout their membership. Trade unions need members in order to gain strength through numbers. The ability for trade union to acknowledge this and focus on not just giving the minimum to their members will allow for a turnaround in the decline of trade union density.

## **Keywords**

Trade Union, Member, Service delivery, Affiliation, Decline, Organisation  
Density

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Currently there is a decline in trade union membership density globally and in South Africa (Cloete, 2021). Since the establishment of trade unions in the early 1880s, trade unions relied on trust and relationships with their members (Cloete et al., 2021). Many trade unions are putting huge effort into new strategies that will ensure long term sustainability of their organisations. Cloete (2021) points out, that potential new members are choosing not to join trade unions and deal with their bosses directly. Some members do not believe that trade unions have their members best interest anymore.

The struggle for equality in the work place and the world, has been ongoing, leaving no country untouched to such a seemingly unsolvable dilemma. Trade unions are making closing this equality gap, the core of their existence. Regardless in which country trade unions operate in, trade unions are there to better the lives of their members, while at the same time trying to better the economy (Celine McNicholas L. R., 2020)

For many years trade unions attempted to close the financial gaps, with just wage negotiations (Bryson, 2007). A lot has changed since then and trade unions attempt to close gaps in various other aspects as well. Senes, FM (2011) illustrates other compensations such as: sick leave, employment protection, safety guidelines, unemployment cover and occupational health to mention just a few (5 Reasons to join a trade union, 2019)

Trade unions play a crucial role in two main facets which are political and social. (Boskovic, 2022) The ability of trade unions to have knowledge and power in each of these different segments, is fundamental to its members and its existence (Trade unions in transition: What will be their role in the future of work?, 2021). Nel (2005) explains that each country's labour and legislative framework, is built around its

associated history. This framework takes into account various socio-political, economic and technological forces that define and run the country

(Nel, 2016). In South Africa the growth and the trust that the trade unions have could be attributed to the huge role the trade unions played in driving out apartheid.

Many countries in the western world are seeing a decline in its trade union density (Vlssor, 2019). Many of the western countries trade unions, have had to make very strategic changes in order to attempt to turn around this declining trend. Heery (2005) writes specifically with regards to trade unions in the United Kingdom, that there is a renewal effort with regards to membership number. He continues to state, that understanding the future goals of trade unions is needed, in order to strategize in the present time. (Freedland, 2019) With such drastic changes in other countries' trade unions, one can conclude that it is just a matter of time before this happens to the South African trade union member density, which is at the forefront of equality drive for the country.

The aim of this research is to attempt to understand the core existence for trade unions, specifically in South Africa and analysing the state of trade union membership in South Africa.

## **1.2 Research Conceptualisation**

### **1.2.1 Research Problem**

Trade unions throughout the world, specifically in the western countries are seeing a major decline in the density of its union membership (Addison, 2020). He continuously says that many trade unions throughout the world have needed to make fundamental strategic changes, in order to ensure their existence in the future. This fundamental issue that trade unions face, further requires human resources departments throughout all unionized organisations to change strategies in order for this to be aligned with their new expectations (Ulrich D. B., 2007). These departments are dealing more directly with employees than they have had to in the past. Human resources departments are at the forefront of strategic ideas and

alignment for their organisations(Johnson, 2021). While South Africa's trade unions have been an integral part in the creating of a new democratic South Africa as well, trade unions have made huge progress in closing the gap in inequality. It is just a matter of time before we see a bigger decline in trade union density in South Africa (Cloete et al, 2021). The history that involves trade unions is dwindling with their members.

Trade unions during the apartheid era gained the trust of many South Africans. With that trust, huge numbers joined the trade unions in the fight against the apartheid government (Friedman, 2019). The dynamics within South African trade unions and political afflictions, have resulted in a number of splintered trade unions. One of the reasons trade unions are splitting, is due to members losing trust with their trade unions (Cloete et al, 2021). One of the more specific reasons for that trust being lost, is the fact that trade unions are representing their own interests as opposed to that of their members (Seager, 2021).

### **1.2.2 Research Purpose**

This research analyses the state of trade union membership in South Africa. Trade unions in South Africa are becoming more worried as employees are choosing not to join a trade union. Research shows, that the trade union density in South Africa is sitting at 23%, meaning nearly 77% of workers are not affiliated with a trade union in today's times, seemingly this is by choice (Colete et al, 2021). Membership levels are on a constant decline. Trade union density is at an all-time low. Trade unions in South Africa have seen very little being done in order to expand their membership and gain further knowledge as to why this is happening (Cloete et al, 2021). This research will focus on the members of trade unions and trade unions that operate in South Africa.

### **1.2.3 Research Questions**

The following questions were developed to help analyse the state of trade union membership in South Africa.

#### **1.2.3.1 Research Question 1**

What are the causes of the decline in trade unions' membership density in South Africa?

#### **1.2.3.2 Research Question 2**

What are the key issues that influence trade unions and their members' relationship?

#### **1.2.3.3 Research Question 3**

What are the trade union membership retention strategies?

#### **1.2.3.4 Research Question 4**

What factors influence member decisions when joining a trade union?

### **1.3 Delimitations and assumptions of the study**

This research only involves current and non-current members as well as leaders in trade unions that currently operate in South Africa. It allows for members that have had an association with these trade unions to participate in the study. The sample of participants are from members/leaders in different industries, as well as open to all cultures and races. This allows for involvement from all members of any trade unions in South Africa. The interviews allow for participants to add any comments throughout the interview.

It is assumed all the participants would answer all questions truthfully, honestly and to the best of their abilities. In order to ensure those respondents, feel comfortable, full anonymity was kept at all times. All participants who participated in this research were part of a trade union or had been a member of a trade union previously. The

interviews were conducted in English. All selected participants are residing in South Africa.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

In the many years since the establishment of trade unions, there has been huge amount of research done on whether or not trade unions effect the economy in a positive or negative way. (Medoff, 2021). With a lot more research that looks directly at the core purpose of trade unions, or in fact which side of the table they actually sit on and effect, politically and or socially. With the increased decline in the membership's density of trade unions globally, specifically in the western countries (Heery, 2005). There is minimal research that has been done, with analysing the state of trade union membership specifically in South Africa.

South Africa has seen unemployment levels rise over the last few years. Stats SA (2021) shows that this unemployment levels has risen since 2008. In 2008 that figure was 22.41% and now sits at 32.6% in 2021 (Statssa, 2021). It is said that the number is even higher, as many South Africans do not even fall into the category of unemployed, as they are not even in the market for jobs. With such a huge percentage of the population unemployed, trade unions numbers are dwindling due to that fact alone.

With the world-wide trade union density decreasing, trade unions having taken a shift to be more strategic in order to continue operating in the years to come. South Africa is in a slightly different situation, the trade unions have been involved and played a huge role in the fight in the ending of the apartheid era. Trade unions in South Africa pre-1994, acted almost as political parties, putting huge pressure on the government and organising protest marches for their members and the general public. When one of the federations, Cosatu was asked why they were involved in politics, Cosatu's Meintjies stated that not only government needs to be involved in forming the new democratic South Africa (Parks, 1987). As such, trade unions are fundamentally part of our democratic country and the future of a democratic South Africa.

Analysing the state of trade union membership in South Africa today and whether is the history of South African trade unions hold members, to continue being represented by these trade unions is fundamental.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

The aim of this study is to analyse the state of trade union membership in South Africa. Understanding this, will assist trade unions to better strategize in order not to follow suit like the many other trade unions globally. The need to stop the curve of declining membership density is crucial. South Africa has a long history with trade unions involvement in creating the democracy that we see today. The unintended consequences on not researching the state of the trade union, potentially could land South African trade unions in a situation where they cannot stop the continuing decline of their membership density.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Trade unions have been involved in the South African economy for many years. These trade unions are continuously striving to make the lives of their members better and fairer in the workplace. The core value of these trade unions, is equality for all. However, trade unions worldwide, are seeing a huge decline in their membership density. This creates issues as trade unions rely on membership numbers for power and income. The need for new strategies is needed in order to continue their existence well into the future. Many trade unions worldwide have a historical connection that has got them where they are today. Historical connections with the workers fight for emancipation is not enough to guarantee the future of trade unions. Trade unions potentially are in danger of becoming irrelevant, if their membership continues to decline.

### **2.2 Research Problem Analysis**

#### **2.2.1 Symptoms of the problem**

Trade unions worldwide have seen a decline in trade union membership density. South Africa has joined in the decline in trade union members density. (Claus et al.,2012). There has been a shift in whom trade unions are making their priority, strategically and day to day. This shift in direction and priority from the trade union leadership is having dire consequences on their membership density. Trade unions are continuously pointing to the idea that members set direction for the entire organisation. In reality this is just a slogan they make when wanting to gain more trust and increase membership.

#### **2.2.2 Causes of the problem**

With the rest of the world seeing a decline in trade union membership, the reason is different to that in South Africa. In Great Britan, trade unions are seeing the decline

due to employees not recognising these unions in 'pay bargaining' (Blanchflower A. B., 2008). South Africa is different, the decline here is due to the fact that trade unions are putting service to their members on the back foot (Claus, et al ,2021). Trade unions' members are seeing a reduced value for the money they pay to the trade union every month.

### **2.2.3 Consequences of the problem**

With any organisation that provides a service, regardless of the industry – the trust between the main organisation and its customers, in this case the members, is critical for its survival and strength (Drapeau, 2003). When this trust chain has been broken, repairs to that relationship can takes ages and, in some cases, are unrepairable. The building and continuous maintaining of this trust relationship, is fundamental for the progressive future between both the trade unions and its members.

### **2.3 Knowledge gap analysis**

The need to analyse the state of trade union membership in South Africa can give insight into the decline in trade union membership. This is crucial in finding a potential solution. Many researches have researched many different fields with regards to trade unions. More research needs to be done in order to give trade unions information in order for them to correct these issues, be sustainable and increase their membership (Rivers, 2014)

### **2.4 Trade Unions**

The South African Department of Labour defines a trade union as an organisation which gives protection to its members through negotiations and labour knowledge. This includes wage talks and improvement of working conditions, but most importantly act as liaison through negotiations with employers and their members. (Goverment, 2021). Oxford university gives a further explanation and definition on

this. A trade union is an external organisation that is funded by the members. This external party is appointed by these members. Their main objective is wage negotiations, job security working conditions and direct liaison with companies. This would include labour laws, governance and economic stability. One of the main strengths that these trade unions have to achieve these tasks, is through collective bargaining and if need be, through protestive action such as a strike and marches. (Oxford References, 2021)

## **2.5 History of Trade Unions – Pre- and Post-Apartheid**

During the period preceding the formation of the South Africa trade unions as we know today, there was a huge growth in the number of operating trade unions. In all working sectors, new and different trade unions sprouted up.

In December 1881, South Africa saw the start and establishment of its first ever trade union known as, Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ). The ASCJ was established for workers connected to the British colony. This trade union also made its membership strictly for those that were affiliated. Blacks and non-English speaking whites were not allowed to join this union. This trend that excluded the blacks and non-English-speaking races, continued for many years thereafter. Prior to the end of the apartheid era, many blacks and non-English speaking whites were legally not allowed to be a part of any trade unions. In 1906 workers in the Cigarette industry went on strike in the Western Cape Area. This was organised by the General Workers' Union and the Social Democratic Federation. This was the official establishment of the first ever socialist-oriented co-operative society in South Africa.

In the 1930 a small change to the Industrial Conciliation Act allowed for the inclusion of Africans and Non-English-speaking whites. This ultimately was to protect the jobs of the whites as the previous act unknowingly did at the time. Companies became incentivized in hiring of blacks over whites due to the reduced wages that employers could get away with paying these black workers. This also ensured that whites could never work for and under blacks. This act was only for semi and un skilled labour

workers. This further made the economy suffer, as the gap in skilled and unskilled workers was growing. This shortage was starting to hamper economic growth for the country.

Even with the huge growth in the economy, in the 1960s. it was illegal for any black employee to join any trade unions (Murray Leibbrandt, 2007). This, coupled with the continued low paying wages and harsh working conditions, strikes starting happening more frequently. These strikes were being organised by the non-recognised black unions with the main aim, to be recognised and to create fair working conditions for all blacks to be implemented. In the early 1970s government passed the Settlement of Disputes Act, this act created a joint-liaison committee of employers and African workers. This liaison committee was an attempt to try and accommodate demands of these non-unionized black workers. This act proved not to be as effective as initially hoped and planned. The main reason for this, was due to the fact that there were still two different legal system for the Afrikaans and Black workers. (Webster E. , 1987)

With international pressure mounting and a slowing down of the economy, the South African government started feeling the pressure, locally and internationally. The need for government to create new labour laws and policies that not only favoured the whites, was coming under immense pressure. The need for equality in the work space was urgently needed. To top it all off, the 1976 Sowetan uprising brought more negative international exposure to South Africa apartheid government than ever before (Leibbrandt et al.,2007).

In the 1979 the Wiehann and Riekert report was commissioned. This report was the response by the South African government due to the increased unrest with regards to the unfair labour laws and discrimination of the blacks. The conclusion of the commission, recommended that black unions be legalized through the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act of 1979. This act included African and non-whites workers. Only two years later was the ban also lifted on non-racial trade unions (Godfrey et al, 2010). The result of the commission gave the non-white work force, more power with wage and general work force negotiations. Pressure from both the mining and manufacturing sectors for a stable workforce, finally led to the eradication of influx control act in 1986 (Van der Berg & Bhorat, 1999). The abolition of influx

control act of 1986 repealed the legislation, stating that blacks could not be in an urban area for more than 72 hours without official permission. Also, the statutory power to forcibly remove black communities and individuals had also been repealed.

The abolition of influx control act of 1986, single handedly started about change in bringing about equal rights for all. Importantly this started to better the work place conditions for black workers. This was the start of trade unions for all in South Africa.

Trade unions had already been formed Pre 1994, but never had the power needed to make the impact for their members and the country. The trade unions pre-1994, used to organise marches and strikes in the fight against the oppressive government and labour laws. These trade unions acted in a political perspective more than a social perspective. These organised strikes and marches were used to help change, as far back as 1906.

At the end of the Apartheid era in 1994, trade unions in general had made huge gains in closing the discriminatory gap that existed in the labour market, which played a huge part in the many years prior to 1994. Many authors also refer this to be a double transition in which trade unions played a crucial role. These two transitions were building up the economy which had been in international isolation for many years, as well as pushing for equal labour rights for all (Webster E. , 1987) . This, continued a two-legged role that the trade unions still are playing today. Trade unions in today's times are playing a role in wage and other negotiations on the worker's front. They also play another role in broader politics, to ensure that the state supports these workers continued rights. These gains that have been made, also enticed white workers to join trade unions as the fight for better wages and laws continued for all members affiliated and unaffiliated to those trade unions.

As much as there has been major gains for a democratic labour force, trust that has been built since the end of the apartheid is apparently dwindling (Cloete, 2021). Research has shown that in the years 2011 and 2012 trust between members and trade unions has decreased by 40%. (Visser, 2019) .

## **2.6 Political and Social Need for Trade Unions**

Throughout the world particularly in South Africa, members join a trade union from a political and social perspective. There is a need to join a force that can unite them

when needed, to protest governments actions and decisions, all the while still fighting for better rights from the employer. This does not mean trade unions are a political party, but more specially a social movement that stands against discrimination of its members. These trade unions played a pivotal role in ending apartheid. The huge influx in the membership numbers of black trade unions in the 1980s to the early 1990s is a result of many individuals seeing the trade unions as a political front to join the debate about the direction of the country (Finnemore, 2018). Trade unions play both a political and social role of the economy. One cannot function without the other. If the trade unions are not fighting for its members on a political front, then the only pull they have for their members, is with wage negotiations and disputes. This aspect of a social movement by the trade unions, can be seen in taking an even further toll. In 2005 Cosatu played a key role in combating HIV/AIDS. Cosatu passed a resolution to campaign for a greater access to these lifesaving drugs, as well as raise awareness of this virus. Trade unions need to be a voice for their members on these two separate fronts.

The need for trade unions to balance the political and social side is fundamental. This can be referred to as 'social unionism'. These trade unions can become more concerned to support government, as opposed to its members. This can ultimately lead to members needs and concerns being put secondary. (Uys, 2016) Trade unions can also be more un-balanced on the other side of this. This approach abandons any concerns for the broader social or political issues, and focuses on the immediate demands and interests of its members.

Whilst trade unions need to play an important role in politics, both for their members and the country, these trade unions still need to operate just like any other business. They have clients whom they receive money from and whom they need to provide a complete service to. This act of providing a paying service, allows them to act fully in the interest of their members. As such, trade unions today are thriving with success for their members. Whilst trade unions in the pre apartheid days were mostly for blue collared workers, a lot has changed since then. In today's day and age members of a trade union come from a mixed educational level, from masters, scientists, in the

medical field, to plumbers and the uneducated. This diversity in education levels and industries further ensures that the trade unions act properly and professionally in all matter of business.

## **2.7 The need for unions in today's workplace**

Workers need fair and better treatment more than ever. More and more employers are shedding the responsibility that they have, directly onto their employees. Employers are trying harder and harder to wash their hands clean of these responsibilities, these include, medical insurance, contribution to pension, reasonable working hours and job safety and protections. Employers are also making employees job security far less, than ever before. They are continuously retrenching, pushing for part time work and shorted contracting times, as well as importing products, as opposed to producing these products locally.

Throughout the world, the joining and unity of people with the similar problems and views regardless of the different sectors, in order to solve problems has been extremely effective. It is this unity that leads to bettering the lives of oneself and others while making the necessary positive changes. Trade unions give employees the chance to effectively fight back, in order to improve their working conditions and ultimately better their lives. Employees spend a huge amount of time at work and in the work space. The need to create an environment in which they feel safe and happy, promotes great work environment and better performance. Overall, more than one in ten South Africans are part of a trade union. This number does not represent the true numbers that trade unions hold. Many workers in this country fall into the category of "informal work" and the unemployed category which are not unionised. The numbers that the trade unions hold is huge, these numbers in unity, can bring positive results for employees. The key to the trade union's success lies with collective bargaining - these numbers are the key to success<sup>2</sup>.

Trade unions in the past have better wage results with blue collared workers than skilled workers. Trade unions none the less have closed a major gap in general wage inequality. (Schumacher, 1998). Hirsch and Schumacher (1998) conclude that trade unions mostly benefit the low- to middle-income workers more than the white-collar workers. This still happens in today's times.

Appendix 4 shows the better results between the blue collar and white-collar wage negotiations. In 1997 blue collar had an increase of 23.3% while white collar on had an increase of just over 2.2%. The bigger increase can also be seen with the school graduates with 20.8% increase and 5.1% increase for college students. (Mishel M. W., 2003).

## **2.8 Trade union Density in Western Countries**

While trade unions have become a big player in the social and political markets of most countries, there are some that argue that these trade unions may be coming to an end, or more specifically to an end as we have known (The Economist, 2006). The nature of unionization is its ability to increase membership and retain old members. Claus Schnabel (2013), attempts to answer questions pertaining to trade union's ability to grow, when density is on the decline. This coupled with non-realistic expectations of trade unions and the strategy needed to continue long into the future.

Visser J (2011) conducted a study in which data was provided by ICTWSS Database (Table 1), on trade union density in over 25 x 1<sup>st</sup> world countries. This data shows that Density fell in 24 out of the 25 countries (96%), since 2001. When data was analysed between 1960 and 2010, this shows that the trade unions quantity dropped in 13 out of the 18 countries (72%) countries, with an increase in 5 countries. Over the longest possible observation period, 1960 to 2010, density has fallen in 13 out of the 18 countries, but increased in five countries (28%) (**Schnabel, 2013**). With no evidence that these declines have been impacted by an Anglo Saxton pattern, these

patterns need to be analysed even further to completely understand why the decline in each country's percentage declines differ.

## **2.9 Disadvantages of joining a Trade Unions**

Trade unions create much better results for blue collared than white collared workers (Mishel M. W., 2003). The benefits that unions have created such as pension, better wages and working conditions, have become the norm of companies today. With trade unions pushing for continuous higher wages, companies need to find money in order to pay these increases. Sometimes that means reducing the workforce or working hours of workers. In South Africa in particular, trade unions and non-union workers earn the same, unlike the rest of the world where trade unions and non-union workers earn differently. In industries that do not often go into wage negotiations, monthly payments to the trade unions can almost feel worthless. Many members also do not feel like they have a say in negotiation or even when strikes are being organised by the trade union.

## **2.10 Trade Union and the impact on the labour market**

There is continued conversation around the idea of what actual power the trade unions hold in the countries they operate in, but more importantly in South Africa. It is seen that the drive from the trade unions for higher wages creates more power for these trade unions, as members see the results that they want. On the other side, the drive for higher wages ultimately affects creation and sustainability in the industry and ultimately can affect the country's economic growth. Each country gives trade unions different legal rights and power. In understanding more specifically South African trade unions system and its impact to the labour market. Botero (2004) makes use of data collected from over 85 countries. This data points to the fact that the trade unions power worldwide, is less than the South Africa unions power (Botero, 2004). More importantly he points out that this is due to the overly unionized workforce and trade union movement. This transforms into powerful collective

bargaining tool for the trade unions. South Africa's workforce is overly unionized to give labour unions disproportionate power in the arena of employment relations.

## **2.11 Variables of Interest**

In this research, there are four variables of interest that have been identified. They are membership density, members relationship, retentions and decisions. These variables have been controlled in order for data to be obtained. These variables will show the effect against the response variables.

## **2.12 Management theories**

### **2.12.1 – Collective efficacy theory**

While this theory is normally affiliated with the motivation and performance in sports, researchers have also linked this theory to group settings, as most sports are played or associated with groups. (George, 1995). The ability for groups to work effectively and efficiently often produces the best results. This is linked to trade unions and its bargaining power through collective bargaining.

Trade unions have to be able to be unified in order to achieve the required and set out results. Members and trade unions need to have pride in the work they do and provide, while members need to have pride with the trade union that they are associated with. This pride leads both member and trade union to achieve best results.

Collective efficacy theory also points to another sports association, sportsman at different levels will be paired up together, this ensures that the weaker sportsman is pushed to the limits in order to keep up with the stronger sportsman. Trade unions have the ability to produce results for the weaker. The need to continuously push for each

other's partner, regardless of ability is fundamental in accomplishing tasks effectively.

### **2.12.2 - Transparency Theory**

Transparency as a concept has been around for decades. Many governments and private organisations around the world have gained trust back from the people by providing this simple ability to the public and their members/customers (Fenster, 2015). The ability to share openly to any members, creates a foundation that democracy strives for, accountability and responsibility. Transparency leads to trust which increases overall organisational performance. Trade unions are no different as members need to be able to trust in their chosen trade union. Trust is not given but earned. Trade unions need to continuously earn the trust of their members. Continuous transparent information, can ensure that members understand what is happening behind closed doors.

### **2.12.3 - Commitment – Trust Theory**

Consumers even after making a choice to buy a product or buy into a service, are still constantly reevaluating that choice, this is known as continuous knowledge. The ability to communicate this can create benefits for both sides. There are many reasons and factors both internal and external that contribute to an organisation's success or failure. Above all else, is commitment and trust between parties. (Hunt, 1994).

The trust and commitment bring into the partnership, fundamentals that preserve and invest in the relationship. The key mediating variable model (KMV) put trust and commitment as a moving aspect that joins 5 important constructs (relationship termination costs, relationship benefits, shared values, communication, and opportunistic behaviour) against 5 possible outcomes (acquiescence, propensity to leave, co-operation, functional conflict, and decision-making uncertainty). This

relationship has the same fundamentals as a marriage, the need to trust and full commitment from each side creates that maximum output, which are the rewards.

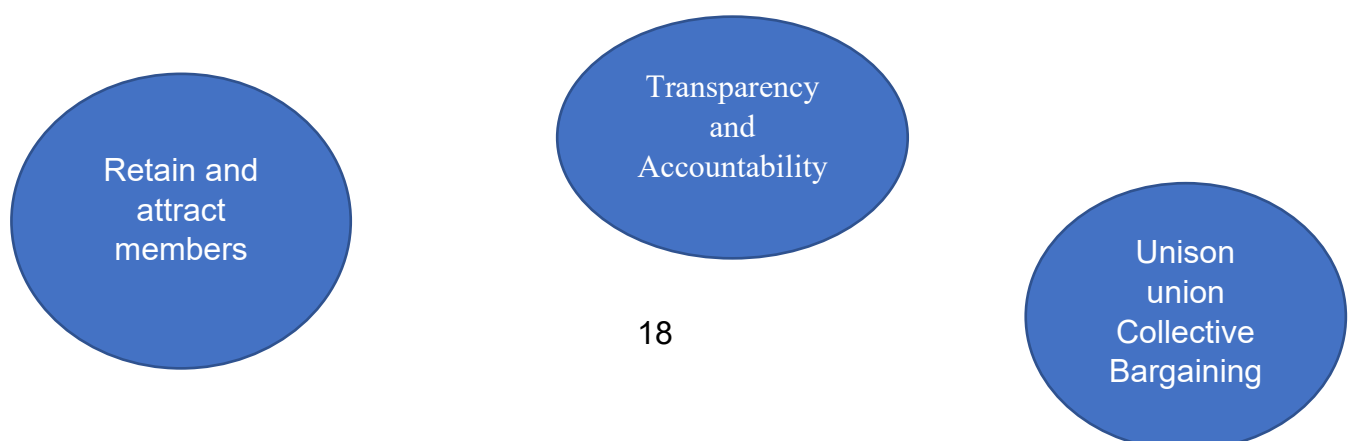
This also ensures that both parties are going to lock in for the long term. Members need to also be able to see the value that these trade unions bring, the minute that they have to start searching for these reasons, membership decline will follow.

#### **2.12.4 - Psychological Theory**

Psychological theory - Members of trade unions need to be treated as paying consumers, they are the trade unions source of income. With that as the core of trade unions thinking, every action that these trade unions make, has consequences that affect them directly. These can be for the good or bad ultimately. Each of these members have an ultimate choice to be a part of this trade union. Trade unions need to put a lot more into the understanding of their members, this type of information can help them adapt in order to meet the needs of these members.

When members get exposed to information, good or bad, action usually follows (Hansen, 1976). Trade unions need to continuously better themselves - for their members. With the trust of trade unions under the spot light, these trade unions need to relook at how they see these members. Trade unions need to ensure that they are aligned with their members need and wants. Its ability to reevaluate the needs of these members will be crucial to its long-term survival

#### **2.13 Conceptual Framework**



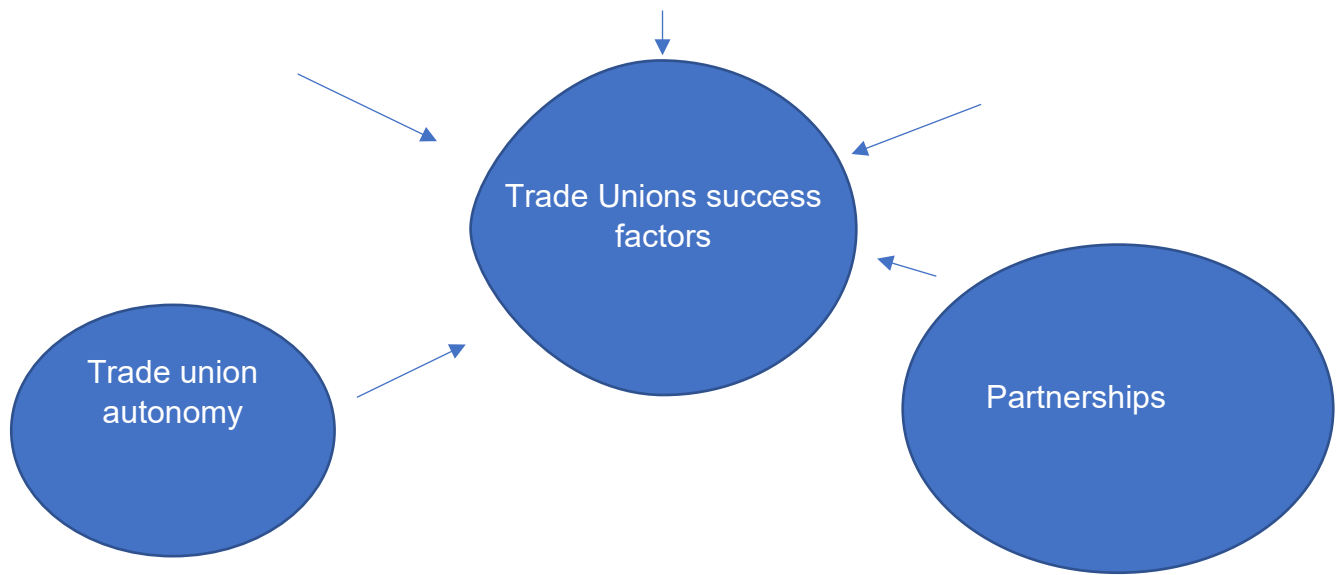


**Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework**

Source: Adopted from Trade Union principles and guidelines (Trade Union Principles and Guidelines on Development Effectiveness, 2011)

The above principles that have been used to depict the variable components that effect unions and their members (Trade union principles and guidelines, 2011). Each variable is continuously moving parts that always needs to be managed by the trade unions. Although each variable is important, in this study we propose that two of these variables stand above the rest and these are the its members and the partnership with them, of which, trust is fundamental.

## **2.14 Propositions**

### **2.14.1 Proposition 1**

There are various factors that are influencing the decline in many trade union membership density in South Africa. Trade unions are seeing that lack of trust between members and the trade unions is contributing to this decline. This is amongst unclear benefits, cost versus reward in naming a few (Visser et al,2019). These members have a perception that these trade unions are more loyal to the bosses in the industry than they are to the actual members of the trade unions. Trade unions have seen a decline since 1990 of 47% and from then 28% in 2017

(South Africa Government, 2021). Claude (2017) has pointed out that the decline in the membership density in South Africa is different from that of the one faced in Britain. South African trade union density is declining due to the fact that members have been put on the 'back foot'. They do not have a feeling as though they are paying customers, which they are (Claus et al., 2017)

Proposition 1- There are a number of possible reasons for the decline in trade union memberships in South Africa.

#### **2.14.2 Proposition 2**

The relationship between members and trade unions is just like any other customer relationship. The need to continuously work at the relationship is fundamental for customers to feel that this chosen partnership is right and beneficial to them and their families. There has also been a shift in the employee and employer relationship, which has shifted the work force to deal directly with their employees. This crucial relationship shift, that has started to exist shows just how important such relationships are. Trade unions and members should share the same, if not better relationship in order to better the trade unions numbers. (Vlssor, 2019)

Proposition 2 – There are a number of issues that influence the relationship between trade unions and their members.

#### **2.14.3 Proposition 3**

Trade unions all around the world have seen a need to have strategies that will ensure that they exist in the near future (Cloete, et al,2021). Retention strategies are amongst those strategies that are extremely important for the survival of those trade unions. The membership pool is becoming smaller and smaller, with 'customer fishing' becoming the only way new customers are acquired. Retention strategy should not only be focused on when membership density is on the decline, this strategy needs to be part and parcel of the trade unions strategy holistically.

Proposition 3 – Trade unions seem to have very little focus on retaining current members.

#### **2.14.4 Proposition 4**

Members have many options with trade unions now days, with many contributing factors to join those trade unions. Members need to feel that they have made the correct choice when choosing a partner who will represent their best interests. South Africa in particular has huge power due to the vast amount of trade unions that operate in the country.

Proposition 4 - New members join trade unions for very specific thought-out reasons.

#### **2.15 Conclusion**

Understanding the history of trade unions in South Africa is fundamental in understanding how unions become powerful and with big memberships. For a decade now, trade union membership density is declining in South Africa. Employees and members are choosing to rather take on the employer head-on without the support and power of these trade unions. Trade unions need to understand that a different strategy needs to be adopted in order for future existence to be a reality. The mindset of how trade unions provide a service, needs to be at the core of everything they do. A customer centric approach, with a better understanding of customer needs and wants needs to be at the forefront.

## **Chapter 3 - Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This study used a qualitative research approach. The data was collected via a telephonic interview with participants. The population of the study, is all South Africans that are currently members or in leadership position within a South African registered trade union. Purposive sampling was used to identify the trade union members and trade union leadership to interview. Thematic analysis was used to study the information collected and identify the themes which came of the study. The descriptions of participants are included in this chapter.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

There are three main research approaches used, namely: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. In this research, qualitative method approach is used, as this form of research allows for a more in-depth understanding through discussions that can be had openly, all the while still having some structure (Roshan, 2009). This data is generally very exploratory by nature. This method can give finding that could not be obtained by numbers and statistics. (Hoepfl, 1997)

### **3.3 Research Strategy**

The research strategy that was used in this research is qualitative interviews. Unstructured Interviews were used with a list of questions in an interview schedule. This is very in-depth by nature. The aim was to discuss openly without limitations the topic at hand. This gave participants the opportunity to provide their own information, but still allow for the interviews to be kept standardized.

### **3.4 Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research methodology. The need to use this method was due to the fact that the information that needs to be gathered, needed to have more in-depth understanding than that of which quantitative provides. Tiley (2017) further points to quantitative research not answering 'why' to many questions, while qualitative answers the 'why' to these questions. Qualitative research helps map a relationship between information collected and insights observed. In this research, interviews were used which allowed for this deeper understanding of the topic (Tiley, 2017). Research can be broken down into 5 design categories: descriptive research design, correlational research design, experimental research design, diagnostic research design and explanatory research design. This research used descriptive research design.

### **3.5 Population**

The population of this research is any South African that is currently a member of a South African registered trade union. More specifically any person who qualifies to be a member of a trade union in South Africa and is currently a member or in leadership in the trade union.

### **3.6 Sampling method and size**

Fourteen participants were interviewed for this research. Purposive sampling or more commonly known as judgmental sampling was used to select them. The participants were carefully selected before being invited to participate in the study to enable collection of relevant and useful information for the research. Purposive sampling allow for the researcher to make a judgment call whether or not the participant would be a suitable in order to conduct the research. (Maul, 2018)

### **3.7 Data Collection instrument**

One of the most common collection tools in qualitative research is one on one interviews. This research type that was selected, needed a collection instrument that allowed for information to be gathered with more depths in order to provide insights useful for the study. Unstructured questions were used. This allowed the interviewee to add in any comments or thoughts during the interview process. Unstructured interviews, allowed for more in-depth answers for the research. Appendix 2 shows research instrument that was used for this research.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The information gathered was analysed using thematic analysis. This type of analysis helps to achieve a better understanding from participants as the data is gathered based on lived experiences (Sundler, 2019). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) this form of analysis has been called the foundation of qualitative analysis (Lorelli S. Nowell, 2017). Thematic analysis allow for a wide range of research questions, but can also be very insightful due to the ability for important details and information to be added in at any time from the participants. Thematic analysis is easily learnt and understood, which is why this analysis was used.

The research questions were formulated using information gathered in the literature review. The researcher came up with four research questions that needed to be answered. Based on these four research questions, twelve interview questions were formulated. In order to properly gather information to answer these four-research questions, three interview questions were asked for each research question

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

In this research ethical considerations were taken into account. All participants that participated in the research did so out of their own free will. Also, these participants

at any time were able to withdraw fully, this was completely voluntary participation. All participants provided a written consent for them to participate in the research. Information that was gathered will be kept completely anonymous; no name will be taken and made available. Information that was gathered will be kept on a computer in a folder which has password protection. At no time in the research were participants be put in situations that were not safe. Dignity of participants was kept at all times. The research went through the Wits ethics approval process before the research was conducted.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

Quantitative research uses reliability and validity to improvise the quality of research. In qualitative research trustworthiness improves the quality of the research. It's imperative that this research is deemed reliable and trustworthy by researchers, the public and all practitioners who read it. The reliability and validity inform readers that this research's findings and results are of a trustworthy nature. Thick quotations were used to ensure transparency and trustworthiness of the research. The thick quotations illustrated the analysis process and how the findings were obtained from the information provided by the participants

In order to improve the trustworthiness of the research credibility, and conformability were conformed to. Credibility was achieved using triangulation of sources using different participants interviewed at different times and by using two groups being trade union ordinary members and trade union leadership. Conformability was achieved as the researcher remained neutral in getting to the findings of this research, Findings were based on analysis from participant and data available. The researcher followed a written down process to interview the participants and to analyse the information they provided. Using thematic analysis processes recommended by other researchers improved the conformability. Thematic analysis by nature, is a process that is developed over time and constantly moves back and forward between the six phased method. (Lorelli S. Nowell, et al, 2017)

### 3.11 Methodical limitations

As with any research, this research has limitations. While all the information was collected and analysed with great precaution, there may be flaws with the nature of the methodological implementation. While the potential samples size is aligned with research, this size may not be large enough to do generalisations.

### 3.12 Description of Participants

#### Research Participants/Trade Union Leadership

| Participant Number | Member/Employee | Age | Race     | Job Role                 | Membership Years |
|--------------------|-----------------|-----|----------|--------------------------|------------------|
| 01                 | Member          | 45  | Coloured | Stock Controller         | 15               |
| 02                 | Member          | 41  | African  | General Worker           | 17               |
| 03                 | Employee        | 55  | African  | General Secretary        | 26               |
| 04                 | Member          | 40  | Coloured | Distributor              | 12               |
| 05                 | Member          | 50  | African  | Store Clerk              | 20               |
| 06                 | Member          | 47  | African  | General Worker           | 2                |
| 07                 | Member          | 31  | African  | Nurse                    | 6                |
| 08                 | Member          | 38  | African  | Cleaner                  | 14               |
| 09                 | Member          | 33  | African  | Nurse                    | 8                |
| 10                 | Member          | 56  | African  | Picker/packer            | 9                |
| 11                 | member          | 48  | African  | Boiler                   | 15               |
| 12                 | Member          | 35  | African  | Nurse                    | 9                |
| 13                 | Employee        | 33  | African  | Head of Operations       | 10               |
| 14                 | Employee        | 42  | African  | Shop Steward/Chairperson | 11               |

**Table 1 : Research participants**

Of these 14 participants, 11 were trade union members and 3 were employees of different unions. The union included Satawu, Numsa, Cosatu, Denosa, Num, Samu, Nehawu, Psa, Npswu, South African food and Allied/Food and General Workers Union, Hospersa and oil and gas trade union. Of the participants 5 were between the ages of 30-40, 6 were between 40-50 and 3 were between the ages of 50-60. Participants varied in job role from cleaner to head of operations. The above list summaries the participants that were involved, but has not disclosed the participants

names in line with the confidentiality maintained by the researcher. The summary also shows the order of which participants were interviewed as well as recording numbers of these participants. All participants in this study were members of trade unions or worked for trade unions in lead or managerial positions.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

The Identification of the correct research design was fundamental. Without proper analysis and understanding of what design would best be suited for this research, one can end up making the research unsuccessful. The design chosen, links properly with qualitative research, sample number and the research instrument.

All 14 participants were interviewed telephonically while being recoded. This allowed for a more in-depth analysis as well as ability for participants to add in any information at any time. These participants were trade union members or members in leadership positions of the trade unions. These participants, participated out of their own free will. All known safety measures were taken into account during these interviews.

## **Chapter 4 - Presentation of Results**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results obtained in this study. The information was collected via telephone calls with the participants, whilst being recorded. These participants were chosen using purposive sampling and were all members of a trade union or in a leadership position within a trade union. Each research question, has three interview questions which relate to it. The use of unstructured interview questions, allowed for participants to add in any information throughout the interviews.

### **4.2 There are specific causes that are affecting the decline in trade union density**

#### **4.2.1 Why are membership numbers in unions declining?**

This interview question is to identify a pattern and reasons as to what is driving membership numbers of trade unions down. A number of themes emerged out of this interview question. Members have pointed to a number of reasons for this. These are, lack of service delivery and more trade unions mushrooming. Further to this ineffectiveness of unions, unions are losing direction and members perceiving that they are not getting value for money. The lack of service delivery that members indicated, meant that unions have been falling short.

However, the union leadership feels that the decline is not due to lack of service delivery, but based on external issues that are out of their control. They are saying the reasons are, that too many trade unions are mushrooming in the industry, economic instability, political involvement and lack of induction by employers toward their members. The members and the trade union leadership agree that more trade

unions mushrooming, is affecting membership. The economic instability could be related to members wanting more value for money.

*Participant 8 said “I think that people are realising that trade unions are not as effective as they used to be. People have more of a voice now on their own. Trade unions are not doing what they are supposed to be doing and what they promised to do on a general level.”*

*Participant 14 said “I do not think this is a ‘one reason’ answer, there are a few reasons that play a part in this decline. There are many unions mushrooming in the industry, which makes less for each union. There has been a huge decline in the lack of induction done by trade unions. This is due to the employers not properly inducting new employees. There have been many dismissal cases in the country due to the organisation struggling”.*

*Participant 4 said “The trade unions do not do anything – they just take their member’s money every month. They deal only with the employers and never deal directly with their members. I am being honest here. I kept thinking that each year this will get better, but it does not.”*

The research results show dissatisfaction among members towards the trade unions. Various reasons have been found to be this cause. Lack of value for money and proper job security, these aspects seem to come out as some of the major reasons. The trade unions feel the decline is due to other influences which are mainly economic and political. This should not be the case; trade unions need to take responsibility for not delivering on their promises. On the political front the mushrooming of other trade unions is having a major effect on the membership density. The members also agree this is a major problem. Other research shows that membership worldwide has seen a huge decline in membership density (Claus,

2012). Different countries are seeing this for different reasons (Balasubramanian, 2015). This decline trend does not seem to be stopping, regardless of the country.

#### **4.2.2 What do you think the benefits of joining the trade union are?**

This question is to identify what benefits there are with being a part of a trade union. A number of benefits have been pointed out by members. Participants identify job security, labour expertise, collective bargaining, as well as general employee security as some of these benefits. Some of the participants pointed out that the payment is not worth the reward they receive. One of the participants said that members are not getting any benefits at all. In terms of the trade union members, the benefits need to be clearly seen and make a positive impact on their lives.

The leadership feels that these benefits cannot always be seen by the members. There are many hours and work that happens in the back end and on various different fronts which are often not measured by physical results and benefits for the members. Trade unions have a diverse membership range, with many needs and wants for each individual. A benefit to one member might not be seen as a benefit to the other. It is this behind the scene work that paves the way for benefits to all members.

*Participant 12 said "Trade union act as collective bargaining council for their members. They are champions in the interest of workers. Further to this, trade unions are there to ensure employees get promoted when the right time comes. Trade unions make sure they get better salaries through wage negotiations as well as job security. There are also trade unions that are more politically focused and still these benefits come from collective bargaining. Some of these topics that they are involved with are social issues, such as climates change, gender-based violence and LGBT issues."*

*Participant 2 said “The benefit of joining a trade union in the past was to help with the protection against abusive employers and managers. These are the employers who do not follow the rules and regulations of the law when employees are being expelled. Further to this, another benefit is wage negotiations and work-related issues.”*

*Participant 7 said “The main thing is for job security. Trade unions are there to stand up for you against employers. ‘They are the people that can speak the language’. They have the correct knowledge and understanding on how to represent you. The biggest benefit is job security.”*

Members are seeing benefits from the trade union but have a different viewpoint from one another on what benefits are best for them. Various benefits have been pointed out by members, but it seems there is a general conscience, that trade unions provide their member security in various forms. This is security from employers and in fact, security also in the political sense. The trade unions also feel that this is the core being of a what a trade union does. With many members having different needs, meeting all these needs is very hard. Security in the work place is their strong point. Throughout the world trade unions can be seen to offer such a benefit as well in South Africa (The conversation, 2016). Other countries are seeing this job security for unionized members even more so during the pandemic (Celine McNicholas H. S., 2021). Celine (2021) indicates that the major reason for trade unions existence, is security in the work place

#### **4.2.3 Since joining a union, has the level of trust decreased or increased?**

This interview question is to better understand whether the level of trust increases or decreases with time. Members learn more about the operations, benefits and ins and out of these trade unions which effects that level of trust. Trust for members is a huge component in such an industry Unfortunately this trust is decreasing amongst members towards the trade unions. A number of themes have emerged from this

interview question. These are, trustworthiness, lack of care, as well as members courage. While members do initially have trust in their chosen trade union, members have pointed out that that trust mostly get lost over time. Members pointed out that when money is involved there needs to be complete trust in the other party.

The union leadership feels somewhat different to that of its members. They have pointed out that trust is very complex, and decreasing and increasing of trust is a normal but a continuous work in progress. A huge part of keeping members trust relies on the external environment, which is mostly out of their control. These external reasons are poor economy leading to lack of jobs and growth, laws that override trade unions in the work place and aspects like pandemics such as Covid 19. This inability for trade unions to have more control of their settings and surrounds, create a mistrust from their members towards them.

*Participant 9 said “The level of trust at the time had decreased 100%. This is one of the main reasons that I left. I felt that in a case when something did happen, I could not count on my trade union at all. Yes, my trust in the union definitely decreased.”*

*Participant 6 Said “honestly, I do not know anything as it stands, as I have said before I am still new to this union. Currently I would say that the level is increasing, as the trade union that I am with currently is fighting for us for permanent roles, as we do not have a permanent role.”*

*Participant 13 said “I think that trust levels are often dictated by external issues. These issues are mostly out of the unions control, rather that internal issues that are in their control. Looking at this covid pandemic, lots of jobs have been lost. This makes the unions look bad, but this is out of the unions control. Further to this, management in companies were able to override agreement put in place between the unions and the employer. I cannot pin point what would affect this, that is not external. These trust levels are*

*continuously going up and down. This is such a complex issue to get right. Unions have to be continuously flexible in order to deal with this issue.*

Trust levels decreasing between trade unions and its members. Various reason has been found to be the cause of this. Lack of communication with members and failing continuously to meet the needs of their members contributes to the decline in trust. The trade unions feel that the decreasing of members trust in the union is due to external issues such as political and economic issues. These they say, are out of their control. On the economic front, this is due to the increasing of unemployment levels. Other research shows that the need for trust in this partnership is fundamental for members and the trade unions (Claus, 2012).

#### **4.3 There are issues that influence the relationship between trade unions and their members**

##### **4.3.1 Do you think relationships effect memberships?**

The effect that relationship has on membership numbers, is understood from this interview question. From the members point of view, relationship plays a vital and key role in their eyes. A number of reasons stood out as to why relationship effects membership. These are, customers importance, trade unions would not be anything without members, relationship is key for knowledge sharing between members and their trade unions, and finally members need to feel like they are being looked after.

The trade union leadership, also feels that relationship effects membership numbers as well as membership happiness. If a member is happy and has a relationship, it will be much harder for them to leave. The themes are similar to that of their members.

*Participant 12 said “Yes, you must have a relationship. This relation ensures that trade union know what the members want and how to deal with them. Very important.”*

*Participant 7 said “100%, the reason I joined a certain trade union was due to this. They approached me, talked to me, invited me to braai, started that relationship crucial relationship. This was the start of the relationship that made me want to be a part of them.”*

*Participant 14 said “This is a big deal; it has a huge effect. This will be to the point, that you can find a member has resigned if the member has not been looked after. Non-negotiable. The members are the union”*

Relationship is key to membership numbers. Connection created between members and trade unions, increased trust levels as well as knowledge transferred between the two parties. Research shows that the need for a relationship in this partnership is fundamental for member and the trade union to have, this partnership is just like any other work relationships (Martic, 2020). The trade unions too feel that this creation of relationship is important. Although they share this same sentiment as members, the creation of this relationship with members has fallen short. The members agree this is a major issue in their eyes.

#### **4.3.2 Are there keys issues that affect the relationship between members, and the unions?**

In understanding any keys issue that would affect the relationship between members and trade unions, positively or negatively, this interview question was asked. From the view point of the members, relationship in general plays a vital role in this partnership. Relationship is affected in their view, by a number of reasons. These include, accommodation of their needs, service delivery, proper representation, effective wage negotiation and as well as effective transparent communication.

The trade union leadership agrees that certain issues can impact the relationship. When this relationship is affected negatively this can in turn, effect membership numbers. If a member sees that his issues are always dealt with, the relationship will become stronger and better. From the view point of the trade union leadership, the themes gathered from this interview question are, proper representation and continuous and best interest for their members. Members should be at the core of everything they do.

*Participant 13 said “The key issues would be, is for trade unions to play to all the needs of their member. Members are all on different levels of income and expectations. Not meeting these needs effects, the relationship between members and trade unions”*

*Participant 6 said “I think basically its communication. There seems to be no communication between members and trade unions. If a member wants to get information, they need to reach out to the trade union in order to find that information out. They never communicate anything besides for general emails.”*

*Participant 3 said “I think it’s more got to do with the employers not allowing for trade unions to make a difference in the work place for their members. Employers are giving more increases and better treatment to non-unionized members. Employers are always talking amongst themselves.”*

*Participant 12 said “The lack of unions reaching out to their members. They need to find out what is happening on the ground. Trade union need to build new relationships with new members, a lot of potential new members do not even know where to start with the trade unions. They need to reach out.”*

The key issues identified are members representation, service delivery and priority of their member's needs. This effects the relationship between members and trade unions which ultimately affects membership numbers. Relationship has been found, to be the connection that members need with the trade union. Trade unions too feel that this creation of relationship is vital. Although they share this same sentiment as members, it seems the creation of this relationship with members has fallen short. Other research shows that the need for a relationship in a work partnership is fundamental for all parties involved, trade union should be no different (Martic, 2020)

#### **4.3.3 Do you think trade unions get direction from their member?**

The need to be fully up to date with actual information is vital as a trade union. This interview question identifies whether or not trade union have that knowledge and information to create a better service for their members. Members have pointed out to a number of reasons as to why the this is important in their eyes. These are, trade unions need to have on the ground updated knowledge and information from members directly in order to be as effective as possible. Too many trade unions are seamlessly falling short when it comes to constantly working with their members.

Trade union leadership have pointed out that this constant work is continuously happening and always a work in progress. The reasons behind this are, trade unions ensure that shop stewards are in the work place, working constantly with their members. The trade union leadership agree that working constantly with members is important aspect that builds relationships with their members.

*Participant 1 Said: "Not to the degree that trade unions should be working with their members. This is a continuous work in progress, aspects are always changing on the ground. Trade unions need to know that information and adapt accordingly for their members."*

*Participant 7 said “No, I do not think so, they should be working more on this. The only time they do work with their members, is when they are recruiting new members. When they see that they loosing members, this is the only time they come to our institutions.”*

*Participant 13 said “Yes, they are. In trade unions they have a person called a shop Stuart, which work in the work place. They are prefects for the trade union. They are the link between the trade union, members and employers. They are there to work with members constantly. They are our links.”*

*Participant 14 said “They are our bosses, as a trade union they are worker controlled. They need their members in order to get a mandate on what to follow. We can never wake up and just change the constitution. We need to consult with them in order to get better direction that we need to follow.”*

Working and getting direction from members is crucial. Members and unions seem to have very different views on the execution of what this constant work and direction means. While trade unions think that the shop stewards are executing this role, members have pointed out that this not happening on the ground in reality. The ability to have better on the ground knowledge can give the trade unions better direction in order to achieve the desired outcome for their members. Although they share this same ideology execution of this is failing both the members and the trade unions.

#### **4.4 The need for trade unions to have retention strategies is vital for growth and survival.**

##### **4.4.1 Does trust play an important role between members and unions?**

Trust in many industries plays an important and crucial role when conducting business. This question is to identify if trust plays an important role in the partnership that exists between a member and trade unions. The themes that have emerged are, money involvement, partnership, safety and ultimate confidence. The reason for this is members livelihood and job security are in the hands of the trade unions. If members do not have trust and confidence in the trade union, membership will fall.

Trade union leadership did not point out anything different. The need for trust in this partnership with members is unequivocal. Leadership points out that there is no room for doubt in their abilities and worthiness. The need for trust to be gained and kept continuously is a must.

*Participant 3: "Yes it sure does, but currently as it stands there is a lack of trust between unions and members. It's really lacking."*

*Participant 5: "Yes, it does, the members elect and choose their union. Which shows that they trust this trade union."*

*Participant 4: "Yes, it does, it always plays an important role when money is involved."*

*Participant 11: "Yes, it is supposed to be that a member trusts their union, but currently there are plenty of people that do not trust their union."*

These interviews show that there is no room for distrust between members and their trade union. Members and trade unions have the same opinions on the importance when it comes to trust. Very few members have trust in their current trade unions. Trust needs to be continuously gained; trade unions are not executing this continuously. Research shows that the need for trust between members and trade unions is crucial and non-negotiable (Gordon, 2015).

#### **4.4.2 Has the decline of union density been felt by the union members?**

Understanding the effect that the decline of membership has on members and trade unions is important. The reduced members can potentially have a negative effect on service delivery. Trade unions income is from membership fees. The reduced income received can have an impact on other services that trade unions offer. Members have pointed out that they are feeling the decline more from a number's aspect, rather than decreased service delivery aspect. The main themes which came out are, reduced collective bargaining, recognition due to numbers and lastly trade union power. Trade unions need numbers in order to gain more power, less numbers reduce that power, leading to reduced results for their members.

The trade union leadership had similar ideas as the members. Trade union's income is from membership fees. This being reduced, becomes alarming to the trade unions. The need for trade unions to best perform for their members is from power, which come from numbers. Collective bargaining is a huge component that trade unions use in negotiations with employers.

*Participant 13 said "This is definitely being felt by the trade unions. I would not say that its being felt by the actual members. Trade unions have expenses to pay. Members raise those funds in order to pay for those expenses. Less money, means less ability to pay for good resources."*

*Participant 2 said "Yes, members do feel the decline, there needs to be a certain number of members for a trade union to be recognised and qualify in the work place. Also, this affects contribution, trade unions are not able to do certain jobs due to lack of funds."*

*Participant 10 said “Yes, it has been felt. Members are feeling like they do not have the power they used to. This is why members are not gaining individually by being a member of the union.”*

The decline of membership density in trade unions is being felt by members and the trade unions. This is being affected in some way or another. This is due to reduced collective bargaining, trade union power, as well as reduced internal ability of the trade unions. Trade unions rely heavily on big memberships in order to have strength, power and be acknowledged. Research shows that the need for a large membership for collective bargaining and power, creates a strong trade union, which produces better results for the members (McNicholas, 2020).

#### **4.4.3 Do you know of any retention strategies in place by your trade unions?**

This interview question is conducted in order to get a better understanding on whether trade unions are doing everything possible to keep members from leaving. Many businesses now have retention departments. Members have outrightly pointed out, that they have not heard of any strategy nor have dealt with any trade union departments dealing with retentions. Themes that have emerged are lack of importance and carelessness. Trade unions have not shown any sense of urgency in the past, to support such strategies and ideas.

The leadership in the trade unions have acknowledged this inability according to the data captured. Some have pointed out the importance of this with some trade unions. These members need to be influenced to stay in the trade union and not leave.

*Participant 14 said “Yes, there is, the trade union is on a serious program to do this. The shop Stuarsts are being trained to do this. Members need a strong leader in the work place. This comes down to knowledge on the shop Stuart level.”*

*Participant 9 said “No, I do not think so, when I left the union, all I had to do was send an email. No one called or asked question, it took about three months for the debit orders to stop. Maybe this was just with my trade union, I cannot talk for others. This is a big deal; it has a huge effect. This will be to the point that you can find a member has resigned if the member has not been looked after. Non-negotiable. The members are the union.”*

*Participant 2 said “No not for members, I think they have it for staff, if members want to leave, they just leave.”*

*Participant 11 said “Not that I know of, if a members want to leave, they just leave.”*

There is a lack of retention strategy in the trade unions. These trade unions do not even have a department that handles such issues. Whilst members can see that trade unions have started showing interest and making this important, the execution seems to have been very slow. The reason for this is, shop stewards that are meant to take on this process might not have the correct knowledge and skills to deal with something of this nature. Although these trade unions see the importance, members are not seeing any result from this. This research shows that the need for a retention department is extremely important and vital to any organisation's growth and survival. Gleantap(2021) found a similar results when he studies trade unions in (Gleantap, 2021)

#### **4.5 There are factors that are influencing members decisions when joining a trade union.”**

##### **4.5.1 What part does history play when choosing a trade union?**

History in many sectors can play in important role. This interview question assists to find out whether the trade unions history attracts members when choosing between

one or more trade unions. The themes that emerged out of this interview question are sense of identity and the struggle. Members pointed out that this played an important role in choosing a trade union in the past, but that this linked history is losing its impact as time goes on. The reasons for this are, in the past members had made their decisions based on this history that the trade unions were a part of. Nowadays members want to see results and benefits from being a member and not just based solely on history.

The leadership also feel that the history that is associated with the trade unions is not affecting members choices. In the past this played a huge part with members. These reasons are members require benefits and value more so now. They also want to look at the present and not at the past any more. The members and the trade union leadership agree history is not playing a role like it used to.

*Participant 9 said “Yes, it does, when I started working for a particular company, most of the new members were joining this union, as they had played a huge role during those times. At the same time this paved my judgement in choosing, but now seems that it’s not playing any role.”*

*Participant 2 said “Now it is a different ball game. It is a different era that we live in now. It’s different now days, it’s about the role that unions need to play in today time and my interest.”*

*Participant 10 said “Not really, I do not think that it does. Right now, potential members just want to benefit for themselves.”*

*Participant 5 said “Not really, the times are different. Before members used to trust the unions, they were fighters, now not so much because of the political affiliation.”*

Both the members as well as trade union leadership, show that history does not currently play a role in choosing a trade union. Members want to see benefits and results for themselves and not look back at the past.

#### **4.5.2 Are unions putting members needs first, above all else?**

This interview question is to understand whether the trade unions are still making the needs of their members their main priority. This in the main priority in the eyes of their members. Themes that emerged are falling short, service delivery and mostly, despondent members. Members have pointed out that the priority behind members coming first is missing. This is having a negative effect on membership. The participants pointed out the fact that trade unions are often adopting increases that the employers have chosen and not what they, the members have wanted.

The trade union leadership expressed that this is not the case, members are being put first, but external out of their control issues do not allow for them to get what they want always. Their mandate from members is being followed, but this is not always successful.

*Participant 7 said “Honestly speaking, I doubt it. I cannot speak for other unions and members. But I really do not think so. When I still was a member and our union was in negotiation with my employer, just seems that they adopted the wage increase of what the employer wanted.”*

*Participant 13 said “Unions do put members first. Trade unions have a lot to deal with. They have to try and meet the personal needs of members which are many. When these demands are not met, this can seem that they are not putting their needs first. Trade unions have to deal with external and internal issues which do not allow for this to show.”*

*Participant 10: "This is what is supposed to happen, as I have mentioned before, there is a factor that links the unions to government. It is because of this setting of the unions that makes this not happen, as they are somewhat political, this is where it goes wrong"*

Members believe that their needs are not a top priority. This is further being backed by the lack of retention strategy. Members are not getting the service that they feel they should be getting from trade unions. When members are in wage negotiations and disputes, they often do not get their desired outcome. It seems to members that their needs are not priorities with the trade unions. Even though this is the major factor that members express, the trade unions say that they are putting members needs first. Although these trade unions see the importance, members are not seeing enough positive result from this.

#### **4.5.3 Would you prefer to represent yourself against your employer?**

This question is to understand whether or not members would prefer to represent themselves or make use of a trade union for representation. The themes that emerged from this interview question are expertise, knowledge and proper representation. While two members have pointed out that they would rather represent themselves, this seems to be based on past bad experiences. This is not to say that the outcome would have been different if they themselves, had represented themselves. The need to have expertise and knowledge in those specific fields will give members the best possibility of a positive beneficial outcome.

Trade union leadership say that without a doubt, union representation is the key in obtaining the most beneficial outcome for their members. The reason for this is, trade unions have knowledge and expertise in the labour and negotiations field which are required. Regardless of educational level that members have, the need to have that knowledge is vital for a better outcome.

*Participant 9: “Yes, I would, one of the reasons I left was because I did not see any value with them helping me, felt I could do a better job myself in this sector. This could have been the sector that I was in. Members want to have a union that knows what they are talking about.”*

*Participant 13 said “Members should always use a union in order to represent them. Regardless as to what level of education these members have, they are not experts in wage negotiation, labour laws etc.”*

*Participant 11 said “I would rather represent myself, especially now that I am in a managerial level in the organisation.”*

*Participant 14 said “Bad idea to represent themselves. This is across all levels of workers. Even if you have an engineer for example, they are not labour experts. Union is always busy with these things. They have become experts in this regard. Members are worse off without that knowledge.”*

Two out of the participants said they would rather represent themselves. While the rest still would want representation from the trade union. Various reasons have been found, such as, members lack the knowledge and expertise in order to deal with labour related issues. The trade unions feel no member should represent themselves due to this lack of knowledge and expertise they possess. Trade unions deal with these issues daily and in huge numbers and they understand labour laws extremely well. Research shows that representation by trade unions, results in better outcomes than self-representation and more so in wage negotiations (Alex, 2007). Alex (2007) points to results of increased wages that are significantly higher with members that are part of a trade unions in various countries.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

The results from the interviews conducted with the 14 participants were presented. The thematic analysis in nature and made use of unstructured interviews, allowing from participants to add in any details they wanted, at any time. This type of analysis allows for a wide range of research and can be more insightful and detail orientated. The participants were unions member as well as leadership employees of trade unions. This allowed a better analysis, as both parties were involved in the data capturing.

The research results show that members are dissatisfied with the service delivery they receive from trade unions. Due to members having different views on what benefits are. A variety of benefits that members want to see have been pointed out, namely: security, wage negotiation and better working conditions. Members are losing trust in their trade union, as needs and priority of members has been put on the back foot. Member see the importance of numbers, as this gives strength in collective bargaining.

## **Chapter 5 - Chapter 5- Discussion of findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the facts obtained from this research. This discussion provides information as to the state of trade unions in South Africa. The key findings which came out from this, are members need to be treated like any other paying customer. Trade unions have been formulated in order to protect and better the lives of their members. This service needs to be intertwined in their relationships with members, retentions and direction they receive from the members.

### **5.2 What are the causes of the decline, in trade union membership density, in South Africa?**

This research question was created in order to understand if there are any key and specific driving forces that are causing the decline in trade union membership density in South Africa. The themes that emerged are cost benefits, service delivery and general member security.

Members are seeing less value for the money they pay trade unions every month. In my view, it is important for a member to get a proper service from the trade unions as these members sacrifice a lot in order to pay their membership fees. In order to be member of a trade union, members need to pay monthly. In my view, trade union members are customers of their trade unions and they need to be treated as such.

Members require proper job security and they need to feel that they are represented by the correct party at all times. Their jobs provide for their livelihood. Any problems with their jobs affect them and their families. It can be seen from the findings from both members and from the trade union leadership, that members need a proper and effective service from the trade unions. Karl Cloete (2021) has a similar view. The problems that members have with the trade unions can relate directly to the result of the decline in membership density.

The leaders of the trade unions, attribute the decline to other influences which are mainly economic and political. The trade union leadership believe the influences are outside their control. The trade union leadership attribute the decline in membership density to 'mushrooming' trade unions. The current legislation allows any grouping to form their own trade unions. The 'mushrooming' of new trade unions is doing more harm than good. Karl Cloete (2021) asserts that trade union are all fishing from the same pond. Trade unions are not finding new members but just taking members from other unions.

In my view, this seems irresponsible and negligent, not delivering the fundamental core services a trade union should be delivering. These core services are job security, representation, labour knowledge and negotiations. These trade unions need to take accountability and responsibly for their actions. The findings show that the trade union leaders also agree that this is a major problem, which affects membership significantly. Membership worldwide has seen a huge decline in membership density (Claus, 2012). Different countries are seeing this for different reasons (Balasubramanian, 2015). In United States this decline of trade union membership is due to members seeing trade union as part of their problem and not part of their solution (Heidecker, 2013). In the United Kingdom the decline in membership is due to employers not recognising these trade unions for pay bargaining (Blanchflower A. B., 2008)

Trust levels of members towards trade unions are decreasing in South Africa. This in my opinion is devastating in such a relationship. Research shows that the need for trust in this partnership is fundamental for members and the trade unions (Claus, 2012). Members need to have proper and effective communication with the trade union. This communication between the two parties is completely lacking, according to the participants. The needs and wants of the members are being affected and not being met due to this lack of communication. The needs of trade union members are being put on the back foot. Trade unions feel that the decreasing of members trust in the union is due to external issues, which are out of the union's control. Economically, South Africa's unemployment rate is sitting at 34.9% (Stats SA, 2021).

This high unemployment rate is due to the struggling economy which is not in their control, but they look bad when member lose their jobs.

Based on the findings, it is evident that the decline of union membership is due to members not seeing that the trade unions are benefiting members in the way that they are supposed to. Members have different views on what value trade unions should be providing, but they concur that trade unions are falling short on value creation for members.

In my view, trade unions are there to provide protection and create better working lives for its members. The fact that they need to be involved on a political front as well, should not alter the service that their members receive. Saviour Rizzo (2016) says: trade unions are in business to service their members in various forms. These members need to be the main concern at all times (Rizzo, 2016). This creation of value for its members needs to be its only priority. Trade unions need members in order to create power through collective bargaining, the more members that they have to represent, the more powerful they are. This is one of the ways the trade unions create value for members, but they need the numbers. With the many downsides that trade unions have, they should never be in a situation that their lack of service delivery to their members, is what is driving the membership density down for their organisation.

Trade unions in my opinion are there to service their members. Understanding why that member is leaving will give crucial information that can benefit the entire organisation. The need to be involved on that front will not only solve members problems, but will also increase the service delivery to members. In my view, trade unions need to make sure members remain with their organisation, even when it comes to extra costs such as this. Value for their members needs to be apparent in every department. This creation of value for its members needs to be its only priority. This is just another way trade unions create value for their members. Trade unions should never lose more members when information from other members can be used to increase service delivery and service experience.

### **5.3 What are the key issues that influence trade unions and their members relationship?**

The results of this question identify specific issues that are influencing the way members view their relationship with the trade unions. Trade unions need to understand the implication that issues, such as relationship, connection and trust is having on this partnership. These issues in my opinion, have a significant effect on trade unions membership.

Members have entrusted theirs and their family's livelihood in the trade union. This relationship, if negatively implicated - can potentially lead to members looking elsewhere and leaving that trade union.

Relationship between members and trade unions is key to membership numbers. There needs to be a connection that is created between members and trade unions. The members need to know that they are being looked after, regardless of the times and the circumstances. This connection between these two parties, makes members feel safe, as well as shows them they are getting value for their money.

A good relationship between members and the trade union will increase trust levels. Once there is trust it will make it easier for knowledge transfer from the trade union to members. Knowledge is an important asset for members to be able navigate issues which arise within their employment. Transferring of shared knowledge between members and trade unions is seen as a long-term asset (Noor Alia Hanim Mohamad Hassan, 2017). The importance of this relationship that is created between members and trade unions, is also understood through the trade union leadership. Although they share this same sentiment as members, it seems the creation of this relationship with members has fallen short. Members agree this is a major issue in their eyes. The need for a solid relationship in such a partnership is fundamental for the member and the trade union, just like any other work relationships (Martic, 2020)

Relationships if effected negatively, in my view will lead to members leaving. Based on my finding's representation, service delivery and priority of members affects this relationship. Relationship has been found, to be the connection that members need. The need for a relationship in a work partnership is fundamental for all parties involved, employee trade union relationships are as important as employer employee relationships (Martic, 2020). The trade union leadership too, feel that this creation of relationship is vital. Although they share this same sentiment as members, this research shows that the creation of this relationship with members has fallen short.

The need to work with members is crucial. Members and trade unions have a very different view on the execution of this. Trade unions think that the shop stewards is executing this role. Members have pointed out that this is not happening in reality. In my view the ability to have better 'on-the-ground' knowledge can give the unions better direction in order to achieve the desired outcome for everyone. Although they share this same ideology, execution of this is failing both the members and the unions.

Based on the findings – Trade union members need a relationship with their chosen trade union. In customer service, relationships create a positive connection between the two parties. Rakesh Soni (2021) point to the ideas that governs a relationship. A relationship address customer issues as well as constant interaction with that customer. (Soni, 2021).

In my view, trade unions should be a service delivered to their 'customers' to create a better working environment as well as to better their member's lives. In order for this to properly and effectively get done, the unions need to have a solid relationship with their members. Members are the ones that have the most to lose. In my opinion a positive relationship between trade unions and their members is undoubtably non-negotiable and of vital importance.

#### **5.4 What are the trade union membership retention strategies?**

Organisations that are companies or non-profit organisations are providing a lot of attention to retention strategies with good results. (Mecha, 2015). Members of non-profit organisations are now being treated as customers. Customer retention is cheaper and more effective than acquiring new customers. Understanding the retention strategy that guides the trade unions, will give insight into their importance. The themes that emerged are trust, customer retentions and reduced power.

The findings show that trust is a non-negotiable trait that the members have to have from their trade union. The importance of such a trait is felt by both members and the trade unions. Trust in trade unify relationships, is crucial (Gordon, 2015). The findings shows that few trade union members have full trust in their current trade unions. In my view, organisations that lack the ability to prove to their customers that they are trustworthy will not have growth and success. Trade unions need to make sure their members trust and feel they can count on their trade union to do what they are supposed to do, in order to bring the required outcome.

The decline of membership density in trade unions is being felt by members and even more so by the trade unions. Members and trade unions feel this effect in different ways. The findings from this research show that these members feel the decline when certain numbers are needed, in order to be recognised in the work place and mostly when bargaining power is reduced. Trade union are feeling the decline with reduced revenue as well as reduced ability to hire correct human capital for the job at hand. Trade unions rely heavily on large memberships in order to have strength and be acknowledged. Numbers are needed to ensure proper collective bargaining and power. This creates a strong trade union with better results to the members (McNicholas, 2020).

There is a lack of retention strategy in the trade unions of South Africa. Trade unions do not have a specific department that handles such issues. A retention department

is extremely important and vital to an organisation's growth and survival (Gleantap, 2021). The research findings show, that trade unions have started showing interest in developing retention strategies and putting in place structures to execute these retention strategies. The execution of these retention strategies seems to have been missed so far in the trade unions. The reason for this lack of execution includes shop stewards that are meant to focus on this process, but it seems they do not have the correct knowledge and skills to deal with this. Although the trade unions see the importance of retention strategies; members are not seeing the effort which the trade unions are making. In my opinion, the lack of importance shown to retention strategies in trade unions, shows their lack of innovation and responsiveness to be able to survive into the future.

It is discovered from the findings, that trade union do not have a retention strategy or department currently in place. Trade union leadership have pointed out, that such retention strategies are being highlighted as crucial. Plans have now started to be made in order to solve this problem.

Many organisations in today's times put a huge amount of money and importance in to such departments and strategies. In my view, unions should be placing way more importance on this. They are easily accepting that members will leave. Trade unions are only functioning because of their membership, without these members they do not have an organisation. These unions need to show as much importance to these strategies, as they show importance to political affairs.

## **5.5 What factors influence member decisions when joining a trade union?**

Understanding the factors that affect members decisions when joining of a trade union is imperative for growth and sustainability. Themes such as history, collective union power, proper service delivery and customer retention were identified in this study.

The findings indicate that the history that is associated with trade unions does not play a part when members make a decision of which trade union to join. In the past this played a crucial role when members made that decision. This finding is agreed upon both by members as well as trade union leadership. In my view, members just want to see benefits and results for themselves and other members. The importance of the past is not paving the way of the future. Although trade unions still associate themselves with that of the past, gains from that are not coming through like it used to.

In my opinion, good and effective service delivery must always be made a priority. Members are the backbone of trade unions. The data from the participants show that they expect to be a top priority in the minds of the trade union leaders. This means that no employer or political affairs should take over that priority in the eyes of the trade unions. In understanding how organisation prioritise their customer/membership base, an importance measure is looking at the strategy that these organisations follow. Most trade unions in South Africa do not have any specific retention strategy and this depicts the lack of priority trade union are showing to their members. Members are not getting the service that they feel they should be getting from the trade unions. The findings in this research show that members feel that when trade unions are in wage negotiations and disputes with employers, trade unions tend to lean to the side of the employer. The needs of the employer of being able to survive into the future are given more impetus, compared to the immediate needs of the trade union members. The trade union leadership see the importance of putting the needs of the members first. Even though, the findings allude to this lack of priority of members, none of the trade unions leadership feels they are not putting the needs of the members first.

Even though members are not happy with the service delivery they get from trade unions, the findings shows that most members still would not want to represent themselves. In my view the reason for this is, members lack the knowledge and expertise in order to deal with such complex employment issues. There is so much information one needs in order for self-representation to become fruitful. In my view

members should not represent themselves, but be represented by the trade unions. Collective bargaining still is very effective in the work place. Regardless of the level of education, labour laws are complex and trade unions are expected to be experts in labour law. Representation by trade unions, factually produces better results and outcomes than self-representation and more so in wage negotiations (Alex, 2007). Alex (2007) show results of increases in wages when trade unions lead in wage negotiations.

The finding shows that there are many factors that influence members when joining trade unions. Effective service delivery comes up at the top. This history that has built the trade union to what they are today, is playing less and less of a role when members make joining decisions. In my view trade union need to focus on a key aspect that will influence member's decisions. This will impact on new and existing members. Trade union needs to not hope that the history that has brought them to where they are today, will continue to bring new members. The reason for that is, members of today, need to see results and definite benefits of being part of a trade union. Members are paying for and expecting a good service.

In my view trade unions need to provide a service that makes members not want to leave, or feel that they are not getting value for money. The factors that influence members decisions should be based on the proper service delivery that trade unions provide

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Membership density of trade unions in South Africa is on the decline. It is evident that this is due to members not seeing proper service delivery. This service delivery comes in various forms and differs with each member. Trade unions are losing focus on what their priorities should be. This unfortunately has affected service delivery. Furthermore, trade unions have not shown importance when it comes to working with their members. This is imperative in order for them to gain important knowledge,

in order to better serve their members. This knowledge as pointed out by Emily Hunter (2018) drives customer satisfaction, increased training and knowledge, resolving customer issues faster, motivation of employees and increased overall organisation performance. This interaction between these parties also creates a relationship, which members do not see. Members need to be driven to join and remain with the given trade union. Understanding that service delivery and relationship and not history or political affiliations, will be a driving force that will increase membership for the organisation.

## **Chapter 6 - Summary, conclusion, limitations and recommendations**

### **6.1 Research process and content summary**

#### **6.1.1 Conceptualisation**

Trade unions throughout the world including South Africa are seeing a decline in union member density. (Claus et al.,2012; Cloete et al.,2021). Trade unions worldwide, have needed to make strategic and crucial changes within their organisation in order to turn this decline around (Western, 2000). South Africa's trade unions need to understand why there is a decline within their specific trade union memberships and find ways to address those issues.

This research, delves into the state of trade union membership in South Africa. Trade unions in South Africa are becoming more and more worried as employees are choosing not to join a trade union. Research shows, that the union density is sitting at around 23%, meaning nearly 77% of workers are not affiliated with a trade union, seemingly this is by choice (Colete et al.,2021). The membership levels are on a constant uncontrollable decline. Trade union density is at an all-time low. Trade unions have seen very little being done in order to expand their memberships and gain further knowledge as to why this is happening (Cloete et al.,2021).

Appropriate research questions were formulated to be able to understand reasons of this decline in trade union membership in South Africa. Factors affecting relationships between trade unions and members, trade union retention strategies and factors that influence decisions of joining trade unions, were analysed in this research.

### **6.1.2 Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework, depicts the trade unions key success factors. These success factors are continuously evolving. These includes partnerships, to retain and attract members, transparency and accountability, trade union autonomy and of course, collective bargaining. This relationship is continuously changing and evolving. This evolution needs to be understood by the trade unions. Each of the components are variables which are continuously changing and needs to be managed by the trade union. Although each variable is important, two of these variables stand out above the rest in this research. They are the retention of members and partnerships and building trust which emerges as an important glue.

### **6.1.3 Methodology**

This research uses qualitative method approach. This type of research allows for a more in-depth understanding that come from open discussions with the participants. The data for the research was collected through interviews with 14 participants that are members or employees in leadership positions - of trade unions that operate in South Africa. These interviews were unstructured interviews. This allowed for more in-depth discussions which improved our understanding. The aim was to be able to openly discuss issues without limiting the topic at hand. This research made use of a descriptive research design. There was screening that ensured that the correct participants were interviewed for the research. Purposive sampling was used in the study. The data gathered was analysed by thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allowed for a wide range of research questions.

### **6.1.4 Empirical research results**

Participants took part in a qualitative study that captured data from a telephonic interview. This study was conducted in order to do an analysis of the state of trade union membership in South Africa. Members have become dissatisfied with the service delivery they are receiving from trade unions, which has resulted in a decline

in membership density in South Africa. Major themes that are presented from this dissatisfaction are lack of value for money, reduced service delivery and proper job security. Members in the past need to be only protected against their employers. Now members needs are changing to a more holistic service required by trade unions. This component is a crucial aspect that needs to be met, when having a membership with the trade unions. This above all else, is what the trade unions have become masters at. Experiences that these members are having, due to this lack of service delivery, are causing members not to have trust in these trade unions.

Participants pointed out that they lack relationship with their trade unions. Which has become an important element in the eyes on their members. These members have also pointed out that there are issues that effect and support this crucial relationship. Relationships is key to membership numbers and membership happiness. The ability to work closely with members, supports and enhances this relationship and increases shared knowledge. On-the-ground knowledge from the members and communication to the members, gives proper resources and guidance in order to achieve successful results.

Trade unions need members in order to become more powerful and have more influence. Numbers make all the difference in such an industry. Trade unions do not have any capability in keeping members from leaving, but they do need to learn how to turn members away from leaving. This ability will support bigger numbers. Even though members have pointed to their dissatisfaction in the trade unions, members still need them in order to be properly represented. They understand fully that trade unions are there best chance at a successful outcome when having disputes with their employers.

#### **6.1.5 Discussion of research findings**

Based on the findings, it is evident that the decline of membership numbers within the trade unions is directly linked to the lack of service delivery members receive.

From the literature in chapter 2, members required value for money from the start of trade unions in South Africa, that remains unchanged. There are many different views from members on what service delivery is most important to them, but all agree that service delivery is vital. In my view, trade unions need to protect, create and sustain benefits for their members. They do not need to prioritise political affiliation over member's rights and needs. In the member's eyes, they still believe that a trade union should have their members interest as the primary focus and concern (Rizzo, 2016). This needs to guide trade unions in all of its activities. This creation of value for its members needs to be its main priority. The findings shows that just like any service delivery where customers are involved in, these customers should be the core focus of the organisation. They need to be continuously worked with, building a relationship that brings about trust. Always transferring knowledge between the parties. Strong communication is vital.

Trade unions need to acknowledge that members give the organisation more power and strength. Literature showed just how valuable this power was, even in the days of the apartheid. This power and strength will provide better results to their members. The trade union leadership need to take responsibility for their actions. In the past this seemed to be less important based on the other work trade unions did for members and the country. In my view they need to stop using external issues to make excuses for their lack of service delivery to their members. This needs to be looked at as a partnership. A partnership that needs to have a relationship, trustworthiness and creation of benefits.

In my view, trade unions need to provide a service that makes members happy with the service they get. The factors that influence members decisions, should be based on the proper service delivery that trade unions provide. Members are the core and backbone of trade unions. They need to be treated as paying customers, that require the best service from trade unions continuously throughout their membership.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

### **6.2.1 Contribution to the knowledge gap**

My contribution to the knowledge gap is that I identified the need to analyse the state of trade union membership in South Africa. This research involved both members as well as trade union leadership. In the research of this topic, I formulated a research topic, the research questions as well as interview questions, in order to get these questions answered.

Analysing the view of both members and union leadership, brought a balanced view to issues discussed in this research report. This view came up during an interview with the participants. The aim was to understand the reasoning of the decline in membership density from both sides.

Vivek (2012) identifies the need to further understand customer engagement through relationships. This can help build better more focused strategies for the trade unions. The need for future research that is pointed out, needs to help the trade unions to identify these strategies in order to benefit their members. My research shows that it is important to have strong relationships in the context of trade unions in South Africa.

### **6.2.2 Comparison of findings to other similar studies**

Mills (2018) focuses on the idea that customers need to be made the priority in all dealings as they always should be the organisation's priority. This ideology creates long term sustainability, as well as organisational focus. Customer's expectations are continuously changing. The ability for organisation to meet those newly changing expectations, is the key to a successful organisation. Trade unions that operate in today's times face the same expectation; members needs are continuously changing. In order to perform better than that of your competitors, internal and

external relationships are the backbone. These relationships support the organisations strategy and growth. The crucial need, to engage and connect with customers is needed more now than ever (Mills, 2018).

In a service-based organisation accountability promotes high standards as well as produces better results (Hill, 2017) This culture also builds a trusting and committed workforce, which are constantly committed to the organisational goals. Members need to know that the trade union that they have chosen, is not going to be making excuses, due to external' out of their control' reasons for reduced outcome or service deliveries. These members need to see results for themselves.

### **6.3 Limitations**

Limitation exists with all qualitative research including this research. The findings are based on trade unions in South Africa only. These finding might not be relevant anywhere else to trade unions globally. This study cannot be generalised to a bigger population. All the data that was captured was open to the researcher's interpretation and understanding. Even though all participants spoke English, English was not their first language.

### **6.4 Recommendations**

Trade unions need to change the way they treat and deal with members. Members of trade unions today are not very satisfied with the service they receive. Changing the way trade union communicate and treat members can influence their membership numbers. This will ensure that unhappy members become happy and stay that way. This shift to a membership centric approach will help with stopping the decline in membership numbers. Members want to be treated like the paying customers they are

Members are vital for the survival and sustainability of any trade union in South Africa. These members are contributing monthly in order to get protection, security, guidance and knowledge form the trade union. Understanding these needs allows for

a better and more impactful service to be provided to them. The acquiring of this knowledge needs to be continuous and gained through all of their members. Trade unions need to have up-to-date information at hand, in order for such a service to be provided to its members.

Trade unions in South Africa today have lost all insight as to how their members are feeling toward the organisation. Members are generally not happy being a part of a trade union. The only way to turn such a perception, is to understand why members are not happy, why they do not see value and why they do not want to remain a member of a trade union. Trade unions can use the findings in this research to formulate strategies to respond and improve the concerns of their members

## **6.5 Future research**

There has been a lot of research with regards to the implication trade union have on the economy, as well as the country as a whole. There is not enough research as to how trade unions operate in the eyes of their members and what this implication has on membership density. Trade unions are also not doing enough internal research directly with their members, in order to better their products and services for their members.

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## **Appendix 1 – List of major trade union in South Africa**

South African Football Players Union (SAFPU)  
Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU)  
South African Medical Association (SAMA)  
South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU)  
Public and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (PAWUSA)  
Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA)  
Chemical, Energy, Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (CEPPWAWU)  
South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU)  
South African State and Allied Workers Union (SASAWU)  
National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)  
Food and Allied Workers Union (FAWU)  
Thor Transport Action Retail & General Workers Union (THOR)  
Professional Educators Union (P. E. U.)  
National Public Service Workers Union (NPSWU)  
Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU)  
Banking, Insurance, Finance and Assurance Workers Union (BIFAWU)  
South Africa Private Security Workers' Union (SAPSWU)  
National Transport Movement (NTM)  
Labour Equity General Workers Union of South Africa (LEWUSA)  
Inqubelaphambili Trade Union (ITU) Mine, Engineering and Distributors Workers Union of South Africa (MEDWUSA)  
National Security Commercial and General Workers Union (NASECGWU)  
Building Wood and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (BWAUSA)  
South African Communications Union (SACU)  
Joint Affirmative Management Forum (JAMAFO)  
Health and Other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERSA)  
Independent Commercial Hospitality and Allied Workers Union (ICHAWU)

Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie (SAOU)

United National Public Servants Association of South Africa and Allied Workers Union (UNIPSAWU)

South African Abet Educators Union (SAAEU)

National Security and Unqualified Workers Union (NASUWU)

Communication Workers Union (CWU)

Motor Industry Staff Association (MISA)

Tertiary Education National Union of South Africa (TENUSA)

South African Parastatal and Tertiary Institutions Union (SAPTU)

Congregated and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CAWUSA)

## Appendix 2 – Data collection instruments

### Interview Schedule- Trade Union Members

| Question Number | Interview Question                                                                |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1               | Why are membership numbers in unions declining?                                   |
| 2               | Do you think relationships affect memberships                                     |
| 3               | Are there keys issues affecting the relationship between members, and the unions? |
| 4               | What do you think the benefits of joining a trade union are?                      |
| 5               | Do you think trade unions get direction from their members?                       |
| 6               | Does trust play an important role between members and unions?                     |
| 7               | What part does history play when choosing a trade union?                          |
| 8               | Has the decline of union density been felt by the union members?                  |
| 9               | Do you know of any retention strategies in place by your union?                   |
| 10              | Since joining a union, has the level of trust decreased or increased?             |
| 11              | Are unions putting members needs first, above all else?                           |
| 12              | Would you prefer to represent yourself against your employer?                     |

Interview Schedule- Trade Union Employee (Leadership)

| Question Number | Interview Question                                                                                                  |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1               | Why are membership numbers in unions declining?                                                                     |
| 2               | What effect does relationships effect memberships?                                                                  |
| 3               | Are there keys issues affecting the relationship between members and the unions?                                    |
| 4               | What benefits do Trade Unions give their members?                                                                   |
| 5               | Do you think trade unions get direction from their member?                                                          |
| 6               | Does trust play an important role between members and unions?                                                       |
| 7               | Do trade unions believe that history plays a role with members?                                                     |
| 8               | Has the decline of union density been felt by the Trade union?                                                      |
| 9               | Do you know of any retention strategies in place by this union?                                                     |
| 10              | Since working for a Trade union, has the level of trust decreased or increased between members and the trade union? |
| 11              | Are unions putting members needs first, above all else?                                                             |
| 12              | Would you recommend that members represent themself against their employer?                                         |

### Appendix 3 - Research consistency matrix

| Research Questions                                                                                                          | Interview Questions                                                                                                                                                                                           | Themes                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Research question 1:</b><br><br>What are the causes of the decline in trade unions' membership density, in South Africa? | Why are membership numbers in unions declining?<br><br>What do you think the benefits of joining a trade union are?<br><br>Since joining a union, has the level of trust decreased or increased?              | Lack of service delivery<br><br>Payment vs reward<br><br>Trustworthiness  |
| <b>Research question 2:</b><br><br>What are the key issues that influence trade unions and their members relationship?      | Do you think relationships affect memberships?<br><br>Are there keys issues affecting the relationship between members, and the unions?<br><br>Do you think trade unions are working constantly with members? | Customer Importance<br><br>Service Delivery<br><br>Knowledge of customers |
| <b>Research question 3:</b>                                                                                                 | Does trust play an important role between members and unions?                                                                                                                                                 | Partnership                                                               |

|                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What are the trade unions membership retention strategies?                                                    | <p>Has the decline of union density been felt by the union members?</p> <p>Do you know of any retention strategies in place by your unions?</p>                                                     | <p>Reduced collective strength</p> <p>Carelessness</p>                    |
| <p><b>Research question 4:</b></p> <p>What factors influence member decisions when joining a trade union?</p> | <p>What part does history play when choosing a trade union?</p> <p>Are unions putting members needs first, above all else?</p> <p>Would you prefer to represent yourself against your employer?</p> | <p>The struggle</p> <p>Service delivery failure</p> <p>Representation</p> |

## Appendix 4 - Union density in 25 advanced countries

**Table 1.** Union density in 25 advanced countries.

|                                | Union density (net membership/employment, %) |       |       |       |       |                   | Change (% points) |           |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                                | 1960                                         | 1970  | 1980  | 1990  | 2000  | 2010              | 1960–2010         | 1980–2010 |
| AU                             | 50.2                                         | 44.2  | 48.5  | 39.6  | 24.5  | 19.0 <sup>a</sup> | -31.2             | -29.5     |
| AT                             | 67.9                                         | 62.8  | 56.7  | 46.9  | 36.6  | 28.1              | -39.8             | -28.6     |
| BE                             | 41.5                                         | 42.1  | 54.1  | 53.9  | 49.5  | 52.0 <sup>a</sup> | 10.5              | -2.1      |
| CA                             | 29.2                                         | 31.0  | 34.0  | 34.0  | 30.8  | 30.3 <sup>a</sup> | 1.1               | -3.7      |
| CH                             | 36.1                                         | 28.9  | 27.7  | 22.7  | 20.6  | 17.8 <sup>a</sup> | -18.3             | -9.9      |
| CL                             |                                              |       |       | 18.2  | 13.5  | 14.3 <sup>a</sup> |                   |           |
| DE                             | 34.7                                         | 32.0  | 34.9  | 31.2  | 24.6  | 18.6              | -16.1             | -16.3     |
| DK                             | 56.9                                         | 60.3  | 78.6  | 75.3  | 74.2  | 68.8 <sup>a</sup> | 11.9              | -9.8      |
| ES                             |                                              |       | 18.7  | 12.5  | 16.7  | 15.9 <sup>a</sup> |                   | -2.8      |
| FI                             | 31.9                                         | 51.3  | 69.4  | 72.5  | 75.0  | 70.0              | 38.1              | 0.6       |
| FR                             | 19.6                                         | 21.7  | 18.3  | 9.9   | 8.0   | 7.6 <sup>b</sup>  | -12.0             | -10.7     |
| GR                             |                                              |       | 39.0  | 34.1  | 26.5  | 24.0 <sup>b</sup> |                   | -15.0     |
| IE                             | 50.4                                         | 59.1  | 63.5  | 56.7  | 40.4  | 36.6 <sup>a</sup> | -13.8             | -26.9     |
| IT                             | 24.7                                         | 37.0  | 49.6  | 38.8  | 34.8  | 35.1              | 10.5              | -14.4     |
| JP                             | 32.9                                         | 35.1  | 31.1  | 26.1  | 21.5  | 18.5              | -14.4             | -12.7     |
| LU                             |                                              | 46.8  | 50.8  | 46.4  | 42.5  | 37.3 <sup>b</sup> |                   | -13.5     |
| NL                             | 40.0                                         | 36.5  | 34.8  | 24.3  | 22.9  | 19.0 <sup>a</sup> | -21.0             | -15.8     |
| NO                             | 60.0                                         | 56.8  | 58.3  | 58.5  | 54.4  | 54.4 <sup>a</sup> | -5.6              | -3.9      |
| NZ                             |                                              | 56.5  | 69.1  | 48.8  | 22.4  | 21.4 <sup>a</sup> |                   | -47.7     |
| PT                             | 100.0                                        | 100.0 | 54.8  | 28.0  | 21.6  | 19.3              | -80.7             | -35.5     |
| SE                             | 72.1                                         | 67.7  | 78.0  | 81.5  | 80.1  | 68.9              | -3.2              | -9.1      |
| SG                             |                                              | 25.4  | 22.8  | 14.4  | 16.1  | 17.6 <sup>a</sup> |                   | -5.2      |
| UK                             | 40.4                                         | 44.8  | 50.7  | 39.3  | 30.5  | 27.5 <sup>a</sup> | -12.9             | -23.2     |
| US                             | 30.9                                         | 27.4  | 22.3  | 15.5  | 12.8  | 11.4              | -19.5             | -11.0     |
| cv <sup>c</sup> , 18 countries | 0.426                                        | 0.396 | 0.367 | 0.481 | 0.569 | 0.596             |                   |           |
| cv <sup>c</sup> , 24 countries |                                              |       | 0.419 | 0.513 | 0.596 | 0.612             |                   |           |

<sup>a</sup>2009; <sup>b</sup> 2008; <sup>c</sup> coefficient of variation.

Source: ICTWSS Database, version 3.0 (Visser, 2011); own calculations.

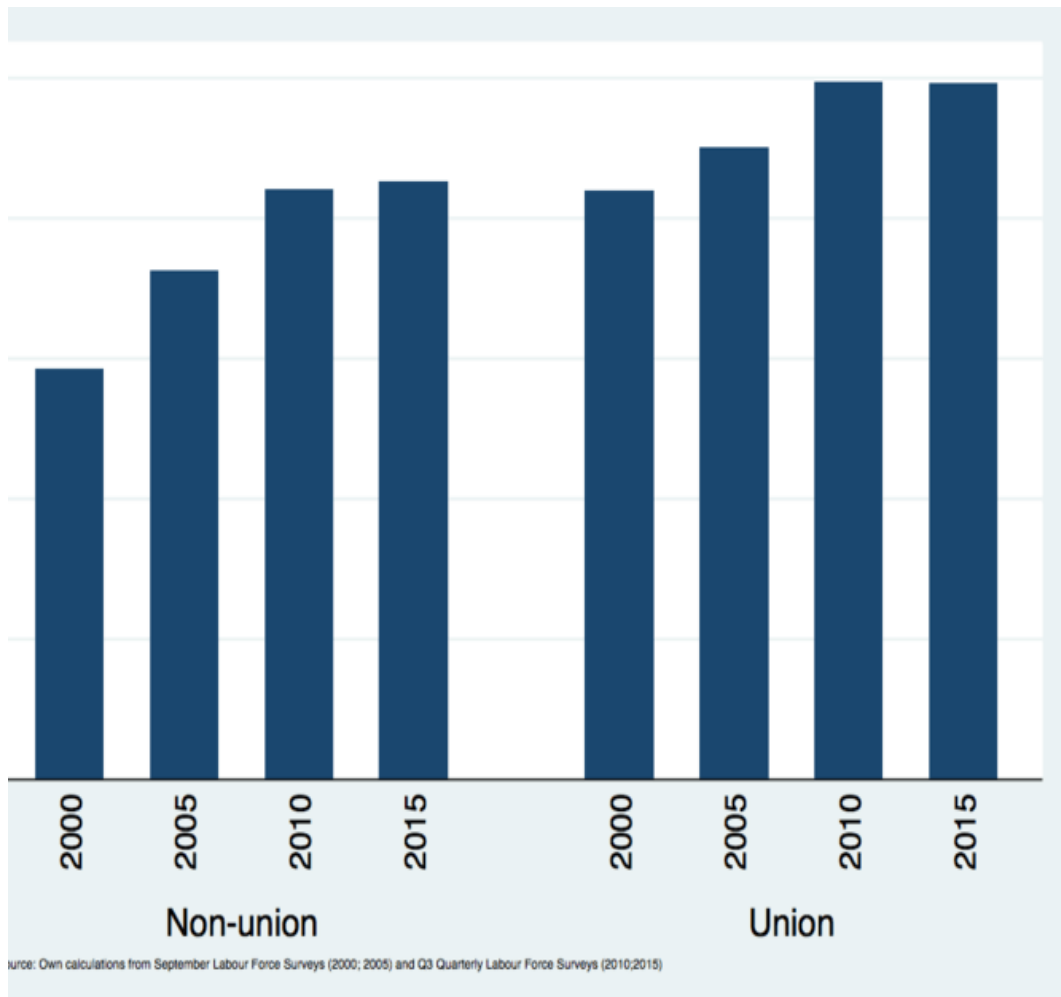
Source: (Visser, 2019)

## Appendix 5 - Union wage premiums for subgroups

| TABLE 2<br>Union wage premium for subgroups |                     |               |                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Demographic group                           | Union wage premiums | Percent union | Source                                     |
| <b>Occupation</b>                           |                     |               |                                            |
| White collar (1997)                         | 2.2%                | 11.6%         | Mishel et al. (2003, Table 2.3a)           |
| Blue collar (1997)                          | 23.3                | 20.8          | Mishel et al. (2003, Table 2.3a)           |
| <b>Education</b>                            |                     |               |                                            |
| College (1997)                              | 5.1%                | 10.4%         | Mishel et al. (2003, Table 2.3a)           |
| High school (1997)                          | 20.8                | 23.6          |                                            |
| All (1992, 1993, 1996)                      | 24.5                | NA            | Gundersen (2003, Table 5.1 and Appendix C) |
| High school or less                         | 35.5                | NA            |                                            |
| <b>Wage distribution (1989)</b>             |                     |               | Card (1991)                                |
| Lowest fifth                                | 27.9%               | 23.5%         |                                            |
| Second fifth                                | 16.2                | 30.3          |                                            |
| Middle fifth                                | 18.0                | 33.1          |                                            |
| Fourth fifth                                | 0.9                 | 24.7          |                                            |
| Top fifth                                   | 10.5                | 17.7          |                                            |

Source: (Visser, 2019)

## Appendix 6 - Union boost job security in South Africa



<https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/122817/how-unions-have-boosted-pay-and-job-security-in-democratic-south-africa/>

Source: (The conversation, 2016)