



Exploring the collective bargaining efficacy in a selected public sector department within the North West Province

MJ Tshipo

 **orcid.org/0009-0005-4475-8221**



Mini-dissertation accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Business Administration* at the North-West University

Supervisor: Dr BR Olaleye

Graduation: June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study explored the efficacy of collective bargaining in a selected public-sector department in the North West Province of South Africa. Despite constitutional and legislative frameworks such as the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and the Public Service Act, collective bargaining in the province remains characterised by prolonged wage negotiations, strikes, and inconsistent implementation of agreements. Using the Pluralist Industrial Relations Theory as a guiding framework, the research investigated how structural, relational, and contextual factors influence the success or failure of bargaining outcomes. The study adopted a qualitative case study design within an interpretivist paradigm, drawing on semi-structured interviews with officials from the Office of the Premier, union representatives, and departmental stakeholders. The study initially had 20 participants earmarked; however, it reached data saturation after 10 interviews. Thematic analysis was applied to identify key patterns and dynamics shaping bargaining processes. Findings showed that capacity gaps, poor preparation, inconsistent mandates, high turnover among negotiators, and low levels of trust between labour and management weaken collective bargaining. These factors disrupt continuity and undermine effective decision-making. However, when communication improves, relationships stabilise, and agreements are clearly structured and implemented, collective bargaining strengthens employee morale and supports more efficient institutional performance. The study concludes that collective bargaining can strengthen labour relations and public sector performance if supported by improved training, consistent representation, fiscal realism, and transparent coordination mechanisms. Practical recommendations include strengthening OTP's mandate-coordination capacity, enhancing monitoring of agreement implementation, and fostering collaborative trust between the labour union and management. These insights contribute to industrial relations scholarship and provide actionable guidance for policy reform and provincial labour governance.

Keywords: Collective Bargaining, Effectiveness, Labour Relations, North West Province, Public Sector, Qualitative Study.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the mini-dissertation submitted herewith to the North-West University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree is my own original work. It has been text-edited in accordance with professional communication standards and has not been previously submitted to any other institution for evaluation purposes.

M J Tshipo

33481679

01 November 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the following key role players.

To God Almighty, who gave me strength, wisdom and courage to continue my study journey; and to my supervisor, Dr Banji R. Olaleye, for assistance, continued support and guidance.

To my wife, Mrs Magogodi Tshipo, my sons, Resego and Othusitse Tshipo, my parents, my late father, Godfrey Tshipo, and my mother, Johanna Tshipo, for teaching me about the value of education and the benefits I stand to gain in the future.

To my siblings, friends, maternal and paternal relatives, who encouraged me to study hard. Then, my colleagues who supported me through my study journey.

To all who participated in my studies, may God continue to shower you with blessings, and also thanks to the North West Provincial Government for allowing me to conduct my research in their workplaces.

DEDICATION

I dedicated this mini dissertation to my fellow students, my supervisor, my editor, and, above all, to academics whose writings enable me to delve deeper and better understand my research topic. I dedicate this research to my wife, sons, and all the Tshipo families and associated surnames. I appreciate their support. Above all, God Almighty, who held me through this journey. I will strive to apply my knowledge to improve my work environment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	II
DECLARATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
DEDICATION.....	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	VII
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
LIST OF FIGURES	IX
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	3
1.3 Research Aim and Objectives	5
1.3.1 Primary objectives	5
1.3.2 Secondary objectives	5
1.4 Contributions and Significance of the Study	5
1.4.1 Theoretical contribution	5
1.4.2 Practical contribution	6
1.4.3 Industry contribution	6
1.5 Delimitation of the Study	6
1.5.1 Field of study	6
1.5.2 Sector / Industry of study.....	7
1.6 Definition of Key Terms	7
1.6.1 Collective bargaining	7

1.6.2	Public sector	8
1.6.3	Province.....	8
1.7	Chapter Summary	8
CHAPTER 2	LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1	Introduction.....	10
2.2	Conceptual Review.....	10
2.2.1.	Collective bargaining	10
2.2.2	Evolution of collective bargaining.....	11
2.2.2.1.	Collective bargaining in the public sector: A Critical Synthesis.....	12
2.2.2.2	The South African context: legacies, tensions, and institutional complexities	14
2.2.2.2.1	Legal and institutional framework for collective bargaining in South Africa	15
2.2.2.3	The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa – Section 23	16
2.2.2.4	The Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995	16
2.2.2.5	The Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC)	17
2.2.2.6	Provincial chambers	18
2.2.2.7	Integration of legal and institutional frameworks	18
2.2.2.8	Comparative analysis: patterns, divergences, and implications	19
2.2.3	Determinants of collective bargaining outcomes.....	19
2.2.3.1	Union leadership and organisational strategy	20
2.2.3.2	Political interference and partisan alignment	20
2.2.3.3	Union capacity and organisational effectiveness	21
2.2.3.4	Resource constraints and fiscal limitations	22
2.2.3.5	Legal and procedural complexity.....	23
2.2.3.6	Sociopolitical environment and public perception	23

2.2.4	Challenges facing collective bargaining in the public sector	24
2.2.4.1	Prolonged negotiations and institutional gridlock	24
2.2.4.2	Industrial actions and the crisis of essential services.....	25
2.2.4.3	Wage disputes and the politics of affordability	25
2.2.4.4	Service delivery disruptions and public backlash	26
2.2.5	Strategies to improve the outcomes of collective bargaining	26
2.2.5.1	Rethinking institutional design and governance	27
2.2.5.2	Capacity building and professionalisation of unions	27
2.2.5.3	Depoliticising bargaining processes	28
2.2.6	Policy recommendations for a resilient bargaining system	28
2.3.	Theoretical Review	29
2.3.1.	Theoretical foundations of collective bargaining	29
2.3.2	Neo-Institutional Theory	29
2.3.3.	Theory of Collective Bargaining	31
2.3.4.	Pluralist Theory.....	33
2.3.4.1	Collective bargaining in the public sector: A Pluralist View.....	34
2.3.4.2.	Theoretical implications and future directions	36
2.4.	Empirical Review	37
2.4.1.	Collective bargaining in the public sector: global and local perspectives	37
2.4.1.1	Developed countries.....	37
2.4.1.2	Developing countries	38
2.4.1.3	Underdeveloped (low-income) countries.....	40
2.4.2	The South African context: Legacies, tensions, and institutional complexities	41
2.4.2.1	Short critical synthesis and implications for the North-West Province	42

2.5	Determinants of Collective Bargaining Outcomes: Beyond Isolated Factors.....	42
2.5.1	Union leadership and organisational strategy	43
2.5.2	Political interference and partisan alignment	44
2.5.3	Union capacity and organisational effectiveness	45
2.5.4	Resource constraints and fiscal limitations	46
2.5.5	Legal and procedural complexity.....	46
2.5.6	Sociopolitical environment and public perception	47
2.6	Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Collective Bargaining	48
2.6.1	Rethinking institutional design and governance	48
2.6.2	Capacity building and professionalisation of unions	49
2.6.3	Depoliticising bargaining processes	50
2.6.4	Leveraging digital tools and data analytics	50
2.6.5	Strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms	51
2.7	Summary of Contribution to Literature	52
2.8	Chapter Summary	54
CHAPTER 3	METHODOLOGY	55
3.1	Introduction.....	55
3.2	Research Paradigm.....	55
3.3	Research Approach.....	56
3.4	Research Design	57
3.5	Population and Sampling Strategy	57
3.5.1	Population.....	58
3.5.2	Sampling technique	58
3.5.3	Sample size	59

3.6	Data Collection	60
3.7	Data Analysis.....	61
3.8	Trustworthiness	62
3.8.1	Credibility	62
3.8.2	Transferability	63
3.8.3	Dependability	63
3.8.4	Confirmability	63
3.9	Ethical Considerations	64
3.9.1	Permission and informed consent	64
3.9.2	Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity	64
3.9.3	Right to withdrawal	65
3.9.4	Justice and fairness.....	65
3.10	Chapter Summary	65
CHAPTER 4	DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION	67
4.1	Introduction.....	67
4.2	Demographic Profile	67
4.3	Overview of the Themes	69
4.4	Theme 1: Functionality of the Collective Bargaining Process	71
4.4.1	Theme 1 Findings.....	71
4.5	Theme 2: Determinants of Success and Failure in Collective Bargaining.	73
4.5.1	Theme 2 Findings.....	74
4.5.1.1	Mandate clarity as a decisive determinant	74
4.5.1.2	Capacity and skills gaps, especially on the labour side	75
4.5.1.3	Communication and transparency challenges	75

4.5.1.5	Fragmented leadership, role confusion, and unstable representation	76
4.5.2	Literature comparison.....	77
4.6	Theme 3: The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Public Service Delivery	78
4.6.1	Sub-themes	78
4.6.1.1	Administrative delays and decision-making paralysis affect the timeliness of service delivery	78
4.6.1.2	Capacity gaps reduce the quality of bargaining outcomes	79
4.6.1.3	Trust and relational deficits	79
4.6.1.4	Representation discontinuity	80
4.6.2	Literature comparison.....	81
4.7	Theme 4: ... Strategies for Strengthening the Effectiveness of Collective Bargaining	81
4.7.1	Theme findings	82
4.7.1.1	Strengthening skills development and capacity of bargaining delegates.....	82
4.7.1.2	Enhancing information sharing and communication	83
4.7.1.3	Restoring trust and rebuilding labour–management relationships.....	83
4.7.1.4	Addressing administrative weaknesses and improving implementation of resolutions	84
4.7.1.5	Promoting cooperative working relationships between unions and employers.....	85
4.7.2	Conclusion.....	85
4.8	Chapter Summary	86
CHAPTER 5	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	87
5.1	Introduction.....	87
5.2	Summary of Findings.....	87
5.3	Key Findings.....	90

5.3.1	The collective bargaining structure is sound, but operational functioning is weak .91
5.3.2	Capacity gaps among representatives' compromise negotiation quality 91
5.3.3	Communication breakdowns and poor information sharing weaken the system 92
5.3.4	Trust between labour and employer is fragile and often compromised 92
5.3.5	Implementation of agreements is inconsistent and often blocked 93
5.3.6	Structural misalignment between national and provincial mandates creates tension. 93
5.3.7	Strengthening cooperation and mutual understanding is essential 94
5.4	Implications for Practice 94
5.4.1	Functionality of collective bargaining.....95
5.4.2	Determinants of success and failure in collective bargaining 95
5.4.3	Impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery.....96
5.5	Assessment of the Research Aim and Objectives 96
5.5.1	Research aim 97
5.5.2	Objective 1: To evaluate the current collective bargaining process in the public sector of North-West Province. 97
5.5.3	Objective 2: To identify factors that contribute to the success or failure of collective bargaining 97
5.5.4	Objective 3: To assess the impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery. 97
5.5.5	Objective 4: To propose strategies for improving the effectiveness of collective bargaining in government. 98
5.6	Recommendations of the Study 98
5.6.1	Training and capacity development.....98
5.6.2	Strengthening mandates and continuity 99
5.6.3	Improving implementation and accountability 99

5.6.4	Building trust and communication channels	100
5.6.5	Addressing fiscal constraints strategically.....	100
5.6.6	Protecting bargaining from political interference	100
5.6.7	Enhancing linkages between bargaining outcomes and service delivery	101
5.7	Limitations and Suggestions of the Study	101
5.8	Considerations for Future Research	102
5.8.1	Comparative provincial studies	102
5.8.2	Quantitative follow-up research.....	103
5.8.3	Longitudinal studies on bargaining outcomes	103
5.8.4	Interdisciplinary approaches.....	103
5.8.5	Exploration of union renewal	103
5.9	Chapter Summary	104
REFERENCES		102
APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL		114
APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH		116
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE		120
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM		123
APPENDIX E: TURNITIN REPORT		129
APPENDIX F: PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING		131

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGSA	Auditor-General of South Africa
BCEA	Basic Conditions of Employment Act
CB	Collective Bargaining
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
HR	Human Resources
IR	Industrial Relations
LRA	Labour Relations Act (Act No. 66 of 1995)
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
OTP	Office of the Premier
PAIA	Promotion of Access to Information Act
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act (Act No. 1 of 1999)
PSA	Public Servants Association
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSCBC	Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council
SA	South Africa
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SSSBC	Safety and Security Sectoral Bargaining Council
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UNISON	Union of Public Sector Employees
USA	United States of America

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Breakdown of participant sample and the units they represented.....	57
Table 4.1	Job Roles of Participants.....	64
Table 4.2	Participant years of experience in collective bargaining.....	65

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1	Code-document table.....	66
------------	--------------------------	----

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Collective bargaining is a natural aspect of any organisation that employs people. In the public sphere, it is a key tool for negotiating employment terms, salaries, and workers' rights (Brunner & Ju, 2019). The North-West Province provides a fascinating case study to explore the complex and sometimes puzzling world of public-sector labour relations. The ethos behind collective bargaining lies in its potential to be more than just a symbolic gesture toward workplace democracy. It aims to improve working conditions and establish fair compensation structures (Campolieti, 2025).

Collective bargaining is important because it helps balance income distribution, removes barriers that some employees face due to their gender, race, or ability to work, promotes inclusivity, and stabilises workplace relationships (Zwysen & Drahokoupil, 2024:336). Given the provincial governance model, this study designates the Office of the Premier (OTP) as the selected public sector department because collective bargaining at the provincial level is centrally coordinated through the OTP and its bargaining chamber structures. Accordingly, “efficacy” in this study refers to the extent to which the Office of the Premier coordinated bargaining processes produce timely, affordable, transparent and implementable agreements that are executed as intended while stabilising labour relations across provincial departments.

The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 governs collective bargaining in South Africa. Section 31 of the amended legislation stipulates that collective agreements reached in a bargaining council are binding on each party. The Constitution of South Africa also influences collective bargaining rights. Section 23(5) of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) guarantees the right for every trade union, employer’s organisation, and employer to participate in bargaining. Consequently, due to the constitutional and legislative provisions, South Africa boasts one of the world's most progressive labour relations frameworks, ensuring structured and orderly collective bargaining. Within this framework, the province is reported as one, with the Premier as the executive authority to whom line departments account for labour relations matters coordinated through the Office of the Premier.

Post-apartheid South Africa’s public sector has experienced a significant shift toward unionisation, underscoring the importance of labour relations in state-employer settings (Van Norren, 2022:2791). Collective bargaining in the public sector has long been regarded as a

crucial tool for resolving labour disputes, balancing the interests of employers and employees, and ensuring fair labour practices as outlined in Section 23(1) of the Constitution of South Africa (1996), which states that everyone has the right to fair labour practices. Furthermore, Section 23(5) of the Constitution asserts that every trade union, employer organisation, and employer have the right to engage in collective bargaining. At the provincial level, bargaining is centralised through the OTP's coordinating role, noting that education and health may have sector-specific dispensations while still interfacing with provincial chambers.

Strikes across various sectors have plagued the public sector in South Africa. The 2023 Strike Barometer, released by the Casual Workers' Advice Office (CWAOW), reveals that 60% of the strikes (51 incidents) were wage-related, with 41 strikes occurring in the public sector. In the 2024 report, CWAOW noted that strikes in the public sector and privatised public services accounted for 39 of the strikes in 2024. Most of all, strikes continue to be over wage-related issues, such as underpayment or non-payment, payment at the wrong grade, failure to pay overtime, and against employers who deduct provident fund or medical aid payments and refuse to pay this over to the funds (Aruleba & Jere, 2022).

The basis for providing statistics on strikes is the understanding that strikes underscore the success or failure of collective bargaining, highlighting moments when dialogue between management and labour breaks down. They are primarily a deployable weapon when power imbalances threaten the equilibrium of a largely diplomatic process and are instituted when negotiations break down (Pasquali et al., 2021). Areas such as the public education sector have historically suffered the most from industrial action; consequently, various measures aimed at reducing the incidence of strikes in the education sector have been proposed, such as making the sector an essential service, rendering strikes unlawful (Aruleba & Jere, 2022).

The Public Sector Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) is fundamental to collective bargaining in South Africa's public sector. It facilitates negotiation between the government, in its employer role, and the various trade unions representing public sector workers (Shabangu, 2024; Rotimi et al., 2021). Established under the Labour Relations Act of 1995, it has a broad mandate, yet it is also constrained by the narrowness of its primary platform, the public sector collective bargaining space (Maleka, 2024). The PSCBC provides a platform for public servants to express their employment-related grievances and for public sector work conditions to be articulated in ways that go beyond salary (Skosana, 2022). By advocating for and achieving compliance with labour laws, the PSCBC is one of the few platforms in South Africa where

labour and management meet on a semblance of equal footing. At the provincial level, the Coordinating Chamber for the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council for the North West Province (CCPNWP) operates alongside sectoral chambers (e.g., GPSSBC, PELRC, PHSDSBC), with the Office of the Premier coordinating mandates, negotiations and implementation interfaces with line departments.

The Provincial coordinating chambers of the PSCBC are established in terms of PSCBC resolution 9 of 2003, with their jurisdiction being limited to issues of a transverse nature in the provincial administration, and thus those issues that only affect the provincial administration concerned and need specific attention in that provincial administration and falls within the competency of the executive authority of that provincial administration (Skosana, 2022). The province of the North-West, with its peculiar socio-economic realities, serves as a lens through which one can examine more carefully how well labour relations work in the public sector, with all the mechanisms that support them, such as collective bargaining. Within this provincial architecture, the present study narrows to a single department-level case, the Office of the Premier, to examine collective bargaining efficacy in practice.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite South Africa's comprehensive constitutional and legislative framework supporting collective bargaining—most notably Section 23 of the Constitution and the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995—public sector collective bargaining outcomes remain persistently contested and unstable. Scholars have widely acknowledged that South Africa possesses one of the most progressive labour relations regimes globally (Benjamin, 2013; Webster, 2022). However, empirical evidence increasingly suggests a widening gap between the *formal existence* of collective bargaining institutions and their *practical effectiveness* in delivering stable labour relations and sustainable service delivery outcomes (Skosana, 2022; Shabangu, 2024).

The literature documents that public sector collective bargaining in South Africa is frequently characterised by prolonged negotiations, recurrent wage disputes, and episodic industrial action, often accompanied by breakdowns in trust between labour and the state as employer (Webster, 2022; Khumalo & Olaleye, 2025). These dynamics are particularly pronounced in essential service sectors such as health and education, where industrial action directly disrupts public service delivery and undermines institutional legitimacy (Aruleba & Jere, 2022; Williams, 2018). Recent unprotected strikes by NEHAWU in the North West Province, marked by service

disruptions and reports of intimidation, further underscore the fragility of current bargaining arrangements (North-West Provincial Government, 2023).

While existing studies have extensively examined public sector strikes, union militancy, and the legal framework governing collective bargaining at a national level (Benjamin, 2013; Van der Walt, 2018; Skosana, 2022), far less attention has been paid to the *operational efficacy* of collective bargaining at the provincial coordination level. In particular, the literature remains largely silent on how centrally coordinated provincial bargaining structures—such as those administered through Offices of the Premier—translate national agreements into implementable, affordable, and enforceable outcomes within provincial administrations. This represents a significant empirical and analytical gap.

The North West Province offers a critical case in this regard. Collective bargaining in the province is centrally coordinated through the Office of the Premier (OTP), which consolidates departmental mandates, aligns affordability considerations with Provincial Treasury, and oversees implementation through provincial and sectoral bargaining chambers. Yet, despite this centralised coordination model, the province continues to experience persistent labour disputes, delayed implementation of agreements, inconsistent mandates, and recurrent industrial action. These outcomes raise fundamental questions about whether the problem lies not in the absence of bargaining structures, but in the *efficacy of OTP-coordinated bargaining processes themselves*.

Existing literature tends to treat collective bargaining failures as outcomes of union behaviour, fiscal constraints, or political interference in isolation (Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024; Shabangu, 2024). What remains underexplored is how institutional capacity, mandate coherence, continuity of representation, trust, and implementation mechanisms at the provincial coordination level interact to shape bargaining outcomes in practice. Moreover, few qualitative, case-based studies have examined how public sector actors themselves—government officials and union representatives—experience and interpret the effectiveness of collective bargaining within a specific provincial administration.

Accordingly, the central problem this study addresses is the lack of empirically grounded understanding of why collective bargaining continues to produce unstable and contested outcomes in the North West Province despite a robust legal framework and a centralised provincial coordination model. The study responds directly to this gap by examining collective bargaining efficacy as a multidimensional construct encompassing process functionality,

mandate clarity, implementation fidelity, and labour–management relationships within the Office of the Premier. By doing so, it seeks to move beyond strike frequency as a proxy for failure and instead interrogate the institutional and relational dynamics that shape bargaining effectiveness at the provincial level.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

1.3.1 Primary objectives

The study's primary aim is to explore the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North-West Province's public sector.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

- To evaluate the current collective bargaining process in the public sector of North-West Province.
- To identify factors that contribute to the success or failure of collective bargaining.
- To assess the impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery.
- To propose strategies for improving the effectiveness of collective bargaining in government.

1.4 Contributions and Significance of the Study

Variations in collective bargaining rights across states, particularly in right-to-work states, pose challenges to achieving equitable and efficient environments. By examining these dynamics, this research seeks to guide policymakers and labour leaders in navigating the evolving landscape of public-sector labour relations. It aims to offer significant contributions to both the academic community and practitioners in the field.

1.4.1 Theoretical contribution

This research contributes to the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) and industrial relations by deepening the theoretical understanding of collective bargaining in the public sector. It seeks to examine how these processes influence labour relations, workplace peace, and organisational efficiency, particularly within a provincial government context. By centring analysis on a single coordinating department (OTP) and operationalising “efficacy” (process, agreement, implementation, relational), the study refines pluralist and neo-institutional perspectives at the provincial level. By thoroughly investigating existing bargaining systems

and their operations, this study offers detailed theoretical insights that few others in the field can provide.

1.4.2 Practical contribution

This study will benefit public sector managers, union representatives, and policymakers in the North-West Province and beyond by examining the strengths and weaknesses of current collective bargaining structures and practices, and by providing direct, actionable recommendations to enhance them.

1.4.3 Industry contribution

The study is particularly concerned with the sectoral impact of collective bargaining. It is not enough to say that public sector workers are simply the beneficiaries of collective bargaining; it is also essential to acknowledge that this process transforms public institutions themselves into something closer to the ideal of the liberal democratic public sphere ("a culture of negotiation, fairness, and mutual accountability") within which they are supposed to resolve their disputes. The research also highlights institutional and cultural barriers that may impede collective bargaining in the public sector.

By focusing on OTP as the provincial hub, it is poised to offer the kind of insights that can only be gleaned from a close examination of the interaction between public sector unions and government authorities: insights into how organisational cultures, leadership styles, and methods of communication can affect public sector bargaining and the kinds of agreements or stalemates that result. For the North-West Province, and potentially for other regions across South Africa, the study is likely to provide a strong foundation for long-term improvements in labour relations and public administration.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

1.5.1 Field of study

The study delves into Industrial and Organisational Psychology, critically examining labour relations in the public sector. It thoroughly examines human resource management from a collective-bargaining perspective. (Public Management & Administration and Public Sector HRM: Collective Bargaining, Public Governance, and HR Service Delivery)

1.5.2 Sector / Industry of study

The study focuses exclusively on the public sector, with the selected department being the Office of the Premier of the North West Province, which centrally coordinates provincial collective bargaining for government departments within the Province. Unlike private-sector bargaining, which often centres on profit-driven outcomes, this research examines how collective bargaining operates within a policy-driven environment characterised by legislative frameworks, resource constraints, and public service delivery mandates. Given the centralised provincial model, the primary unit of analysis is the OTP's coordination of collective bargaining (through CCPNWP and sectoral chambers). The primary respondents will include OTP labour relations/HR officials, recognised union representatives active in provincial chambers, and oversight actors such as Provincial Treasury/DPSA/OTP senior managers involved in mandates, costing and implementation.

1.5.3 Geographical demarcation

The North-West Province of South Africa serves as the focus of this case study, selected for its distinct labour dynamics, challenges with service delivery, and a history marked by public sector strikes and conflicts. Data collection is centred on the Office of the Premier (North West) as the provincial coordinating hub, with supplementary perspectives from stakeholders interfacing with the OTP (e.g., Provincial Treasury and recognised unions). The study aims to generate department-level insights that reflect how the province “reports as one” through the Premier's executive authority, thereby gaining clear and direct insight into the practice and perception of collective bargaining within the public sector. This provincial focus is intentional, not only to make the findings relevant but also to ensure they are helpful and directly actionable for policymakers and labour stakeholders in the North-West. Ultimately, the study may have implications beyond the immediate context, providing lessons for other provinces facing similar issues.

1.6.2 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining refers to the formal negotiation process between employers and employee representatives, typically trade unions, regarding terms and conditions of employment (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020:20). This includes wages, working hours, benefits,

and dispute resolution procedures. In the public sector, collective bargaining often involves multiple stakeholders, including government departments and public service unions, and is governed by statutory frameworks such as the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995. It is a key mechanism for maintaining industrial peace and improving relations between employers and employees (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). In this study, “collective bargaining *efficacy*” denotes the extent to which OTP-coordinated bargaining produces timely, affordable, transparent and implementable agreements with demonstrable implementation fidelity and improved relational outcomes (e.g., trust, reduced dispute recurrence).

1.6.3 Public sector

The public sector comprises government-owned and government-controlled institutions that provide public services (Kusumasari et al., 2019; Khumalo & Olaleye, 2025). This includes national, provincial, and local government departments as well as public entities and agencies. In the context of this study, the public sector refers explicitly to provincial government departments and public institutions operating within the North-West Province of South Africa. These institutions are responsible for implementing policies and delivering health, education, and public services. Analytically, the study focuses on the provincial administration, coordinated through the Office of the Premier, for collective bargaining.

1.6.4 Province

A province is a territorial unit within a country, governed by its own provincial legislature and executive authority, under the broader national governance framework (Khambule, 2021). South Africa is divided into nine provinces, each with constitutional authority over certain functions and services (Khambule, 2021). The focus of this study is the North-West Province, one of the nine provinces, which has its own unique socio-economic and labour relations context. This setting provides the geographical and administrative framework for examining the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the public sector. In reporting and accountability terms, the province “reports as one,” with the Premier as the executive authority to whom line departments account, hence the selection of the OTP as the case department.

1.7 Chapter Summary

The explorative study delves into collective bargaining within the public sphere, particularly in the North-West Province of South Africa. Here, public sector employees negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions with the government. This is of utmost importance; however, in recent times, the North-West Province has experienced a series of wage disputes that have

cast a shadow over this process. Because collective bargaining in the province is centrally coordinated through the Office of the Premier, this study examines the efficacy of that approach, whether it meets workers' basic needs while simultaneously safeguarding jobs and enabling the continued smooth operation of public services.

The problem statement identifies a pressing concern: public sector workers' dissatisfaction with the outcomes of collective bargaining. This is particularly true for those in the North-West Province, where workers have repeatedly resorted to striking. The study intends to investigate this issue by closely examining the experiences of OTP officials, Provincial Treasury, recognised union leaders, and selected line-department representatives (e.g., Health) involved in the OTP-coordinated collective bargaining process. This focus reflects the province's reporting architecture, where the Premier serves as the central authority.

This research aims to uncover the factors that lead to successful or unsuccessful wage negotiations in OTP-coordinated bargaining. It will explore methods to enhance labour relations and improve bargaining effectiveness. The study will also examine the current bargaining methods, assess their impact on public service, and suggest practical improvements. The research will utilise the most reliable and accurate data from various sources, including interviews as part of the case study, collective agreements, and chamber records.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the literature on collective bargaining in the public arena, specifically in the North-West Province. It covers theoretical frameworks, concepts, historical evolution, and empirical findings of collective bargaining in public establishments. Collective bargaining is portrayed as a means for resolving disputes, negotiating salaries, and reviewing working conditions in the public service. Further, it identifies the gaps in the literature and the need for further examination in the South African context.

This chapter begins by mapping the theory of collective bargaining, then discusses legislative frameworks, stakeholders, and negotiation processes in the selected public sector. The challenges and good practices identified in previous studies are then highlighted to ground the analysis and interpretation of the findings in the following chapters.

2.2 Conceptual Review

The concepts underpinning collective bargaining are essential to labour relations and have a significant impact on interactions between employers and employees, especially so in the public sector. Collective bargaining is more than a basic condition of labour relations; it is a process and practice in which employees, generally represented by trade unions, bargain with employers over wages, working conditions, benefits, job security, and other employment terms. This section examines various issues concerning the definition, development, and theory of collective bargaining, with a view to creating a framework for understanding its effectiveness in the public sector, with reference to the North-West Province.

2.2.1. Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining is the process of negotiations between employers and employee representatives to reach mutual agreements governing working conditions (Garnero, 2021). The International Labour Organisation (2019) defines collective bargaining as "a voluntary negotiation between employers or employers' organisations and workers' organisations with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by collective agreements." According to the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 of South Africa, this is an appropriate definition, and every worker has the right to engage in collective bargaining, which further defines the parameters for that action.

Collective bargaining focuses on much more than just payment for work done; rather, it is an essential tool for promoting industrial democracy, fair employer treatment of employees, and sustaining a stable working environment (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). Most terms of employment in the public sector are set through policy and administrative instruments. At the same time, collective bargaining provides oversight through structured consultation and consensus between government and labour unions, thereby engendering transparency and accountability in employment relations (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). For this research, efficacy is defined as the extent to which OTP-coordinated bargaining produces timely, cost-effective, clear, and implementable agreements that evidence fidelity of implementation and positively impact relational outcomes.

2.2.2 Evolution of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining history is intricately associated with the evolution of industrial societies and labour formations (Charles, 2024). It dates back to the early 19th century, when the advent of industrial capitalism in Europe and North America saw workers organising into associations to build strength vis-à-vis employers (Garnero, 2021). It speaks to an evolution essentially determined by South Africa's idiosyncratic socio-political history, including colonialism, apartheid, and the transition to democracy (Webster, 2022).

It was during this period that collective bargaining took place, which would have been racially discriminatory and limited as regards black workers (Webster, 2022). The laws of the time excluded most coloured workers from formal negotiations and union representation (Brandl, 2023). The 1970s ushered in a new wave of militant trade unionism, which gave rise to independent black unions and set the stage for addressing broader worker rights (Maake-Malatji, 2023). The 1990s ushered in a new democratic dispensation, complemented by a comprehensive overhaul of labour legislation, including collective bargaining (Maake-Malatji, 2023).

The Labour Relations Act of 1995 was the most remarkable event in institutionalising collective bargaining in South Africa. Statutory bargaining councils were established, as were dispute-resolution mechanisms and the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) (Limb, 2024). Workplaces made huge strides with the introduction of structured, legally protected negotiation processes through which public sector unions and employers engage, thus helping to professionalise labour relations and reduce industrial conflict (Limb, 2024).

Collective bargaining evolved within the national framework with public-sector unions such as the Public Servants Association (PSA), the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), and the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) playing critical roles. However, even with some strides, the efficacy of collective bargaining continues to face challenges related to political interference, administrative inefficiency, and capacity constraints in both unions and government departments (Rulashe, 2024). Of utmost importance, since provincial bargaining is coordinated through the office of the Premier and its chambers, assessments of "effectiveness" in this study will thus be based on OTP's coordinating, mandating, and oversight of implementation.

2.2.2.1. Collective bargaining in the public sector: A Critical Synthesis

The literature broadly agrees that collective bargaining is a central mechanism for regulating employment relations in the public sector, particularly in democracies with strong labour protections (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020; Garner, 2021). However, scholars diverge sharply on whether collective bargaining in the public sector functions primarily as a stabilising governance instrument or as a source of institutional rigidity and recurrent conflict.

On one hand, pluralist-oriented scholars argue that collective bargaining institutionalises conflict in a controlled manner, enabling labour and the state to reconcile competing interests through dialogue rather than disruption (Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Brunner & Ju, 2019). From this perspective, bargaining councils and statutory frameworks are expected to enhance cooperation, predictability, and workplace democracy. On the other hand, critical political economy scholars contend that public-sector collective bargaining often becomes dysfunctional under conditions of fiscal austerity, political interference, and weak administrative capacity, leading to protracted negotiations and adversarial outcomes (Van der Walt, 2018; Skosana, 2022).

Collective bargaining in the public sector brings together considerations of state authority, worker rights, and service-delivery demands (Rulashe, 2024). This section undertakes a critical and discursive analysis of collective bargaining cross-nationally and within South Africa, interrogating how forms, effectiveness, and limits of bargaining are shaped by institutional, legal, political, and economic factors. Cross-comparatives show that, whereas collective bargaining might be generally available as an instrument of industrial communication, much of the way it is exercised in the public sector is indeed at variance across different configurations

of governance, fiscal conditions, and politico-historical lines (Rulashe, 2024; Bhuller et al., 2022; Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024).

Globally, public-sector collective bargaining spans a wide range of institutional configurations and operational logics (Bhuller et al., 2022; Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024). In developed industrial democracies like Sweden, Germany, and Canada, collective bargaining is embedded in a broader social partnership framework that exemplifies corporatist traditions, in which unions and the state co-manage labour relations through structured dialogue and mutual concessions (Baccaro & Howell, 2017). Such systems benefit from a stable legal framework, institutionalised mechanisms for resolving disputes, and a normative commitment to a collective voice (Bhuller et al., 2022; Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024).

The Swedish model, for example, stands out for its decentralised negotiation structure, in which each agency negotiates with a union under the general guidelines of a national-level framework (Thörnqvist & Thörnqvist, 2018). This way, adjustments to local circumstances can be made while maintaining national coherence in employment standards. Likewise, the German dual system of industrial relations seeks to reconcile sectoral collective bargaining with codetermination at the enterprise level, thereby enhancing union leverage and workplace democracy (Schmidt & Mueller, 2018).

However, such institutional capacity is an exception rather than a rule. Due to federalism, collective bargaining is fragmented and uneven across the United States, leading to significant disparities in its exercise from one state to another (De Becker, 2021). Some states, like New York and California, offer strong and comprehensive rights, while others, like Texas and North Carolina, totally ban bargaining. This sharp distinction in legality points to deeper ideological rifts and to the politicisation of public-sector labour rights (Kearney & Mareschal, 2025).

Developing countries present a further complication, as in Brazil, Kenya, and India, patronage politics, administrative ineptitude, and fiscal volatility often create complex settings for collective bargaining (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). Studies show that this bargaining tends to oscillate between extreme centralisation and rigidity and fragmentation and ineffectiveness (Brunner & Ju, 2019). In many nations across Africa and Latin America, the bargaining process is often rendered impotent due to vagueness in the law, challenges in enforcing it, and a gross imbalance of power between the state and trade unions (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). Thus, it almost always instigates industrial action rather than leading to settled negotiations through bargaining (Brunner & Ju, 2019).

What is notably absent from much of this literature is sustained attention to how collective bargaining actually functions at the meso-level of provincial coordination, particularly in decentralised but centrally mandated systems such as South Africa's. Most studies focus either on national bargaining institutions (e.g., PSCBC) or on strike outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding how provincial coordination structures translate negotiated agreements into implementable outcomes. This study responds to that gap by examining collective bargaining efficacy at the level of the Office of the Premier.

2.2.2.2 The South African context: legacies, tensions, and institutional complexities

The country's post-apartheid transformation agenda shapes South Africa's public-sector collective bargaining. The constitutional and legislative reforms that accompanied the democratic transition aimed to entrench labour rights and promote participatory governance. Section 23 of the Constitution provides for fair labour practices, the formation of trade unions, and collective bargaining, and operationalises these through the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995. In the North West, this architecture operates through the Premier's office, which coordinates the provincial chamber (CCPNWP) and relevant sectoral chambers on bargaining parameters and oversight of implementation (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021).

The Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) is established under the LRA and serves as the main forum for negotiating cross-cutting issues, including salaries and employee benefits (Farazmand, 2023). Specific sector chambers and provincial chambers deal with decentralised matters. In theory, such an arrangement offers coherent, yet flexible, bargaining at two levels. Nevertheless, challenges exist. A characteristic feature, however, has been the extent of unionisation and the political embeddedness of public sector unions. Unions such as NEHAWU, SADTU, and POPCRU are intertwined with the ANC through COSATU in a matrix of political and industrial influence. Such interrelationships have bestowed bargaining strength upon unions, resulting in accusations of "politicisation" of negotiations, "clientelism," and erosion of accountability (Skosana, 2022:55).

Protracted negotiations, deadlocks, and strikes have often characterised collective bargaining outcomes in the South African public sector. Noteworthy are the public-sector strikes of 2007, 2010, and the 2020 wage dispute over the state's inability to pay the last tranche of a multi-year wage agreement (Skosana, 2022). Indeed, these cases bring to the fore the fragility of trust and contestation over fiscal discipline within the collective bargaining process.

With rising public debt and stagnant economic growth, along with a swollen public wage bill, the fiscal terrain in South Africa has become constricted (Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024). Affordability issues have been repeatedly raised by the National Treasury, prompting calls for wage moderation and even retrenchments in the public sector (Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024). On the contrary, unions argue that the fiscal demise of the state is due to theft, mismanagement, and incoherent policy, not to labour costs. Such divergence portrays underlying ideological and policy differences that permeate bargaining fora (Van der Walt, 2018).

Institutional constraints do indeed limit the effectiveness of collective bargaining. Provincial bargaining chambers are often under-resourced, leading to an irregular implementation of agreements (Shabangu, 2024). Legal challenges often arise over the interpretation or enforceability of collective agreements, which then become court matters, thereby judicialising industrial relations and eroding the primary consideration of reaching settlements through negotiations (Benjamin, 2013).

2.2.2.2.1 Legal and institutional framework for collective bargaining in South Africa

South Africa is indeed one country that boasts a healthy legal and institutional framework for collective bargaining. Such a framework aims to promote fair representation and accountability in the industrial relations environment. The overall understanding of collective bargaining is that it should foster industrial peace and democratic participation in the workplace. Founded by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 and given life by the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995, this legal framework allows for structured engagement between employers and employees, especially in the public sector.

Collective bargaining is not left to chance but is based on clearly established institutions: the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) and provincial bargaining chambers, which would further enhance its decentralisation, transparency, and responsiveness to the needs of public servants. This section will discuss the legal and institutional framework in further detail, showcasing the synergies between legal provisions and practical implementation mechanisms. For example, the mechanisms in the North West Province are coordinated through the OTP, which has consolidated mandates, aligned affordability considerations with Provincial Treasury, and interfaces with sectoral chambers.

2.2.2.3 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa – Section 23

Fair labour practices are the constitutional rights afforded to workers, explicitly guaranteeing the right to form and join trade unions, participate in activities, and engage in collective bargaining. Such a constitutionally guaranteed right defines the post-apartheid government's commitment to an inclusive society. In this inclusive, democratic society, workers speak out, are recognised, and are respected. Of great importance about collective bargaining is section 23(2), which provides:

"Every worker has the right to form and join a trade union, to participate in the activities and programmes of a trade union, and to strike."

Collective bargaining finds its home in section 23(5), which guarantees trade unions and employers the right to recognise these rights constitutionally. In so doing, South Africa declares trade unions partnerships in the area of labour relations and insulates collective bargaining from state or arbitrary interference. Public-sector and private-sector employers are thus bound by law to respect and uphold them. Constituting a basis for developing labour law, most importantly, the Labour Relations Act. At the provincial level, such guarantees are realised through OTP-coordinated bargaining forums in the North West, where provincial mandates and implementation are aligned within the constitutional framework.

2.2.2.4 The Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995

A system for implementing constitutional rights to fair labour practices and collective bargaining is established by the Labour Relations Act (LRA). Enacted in 1995, the LRA is a watershed moment in South Africa's labour relations history. It replaces an old and repressive regime of racially exclusionary and restrictive labour with a more inclusive, democratic, and regulated one. It promotes the establishment of bargaining councils, statutory councils, and workplace forums to enhance both centralised and decentralised collective bargaining (Shabangu, 2024). The most important aims of the LRA are to develop economic growth, social justice, and peace in industry through the regulation of collective bargaining. The Main provisions of the LRA dealing with collective bargaining are:

- Section 23: Governs collective agreements, rendering them binding on the parties to the agreement and occasionally extending their reach to non-parties within a defined scope.

- Chapter III: Establishes a framework within which collective bargaining is undertaken in the form of enjoining self-regulation among unions and employers through registered bargaining councils.
- Chapter VII: Contains procedures for the resolution of disputes through the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) and labour courts.
- Section 35: Creates the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC), which is the most important body for collective bargaining in public service.

The LRA gives registered trade unions and employer organisations the right to participate in collective bargaining, thereby enabling economic democracy. It also provides fair procedures for strikes and lockouts, ensuring that both sides comply with the law before engaging in such activities.

2.2.2.5 The Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC)

The PSCBC is a national bargaining council created under the LRA to serve as the central forum for collective bargaining in the public service (Shabangu, 2024). The establishment of this national bargaining council underscores the need for centralised mechanisms to manage labour relations across the various departments and sectors of the public service.

The PSCBC consists of representatives from organised labour, including unions such as COSATU-affiliated NEHAWU and SADTU, as well as representatives of the state as employer, namely the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and National Treasury. The Council is mandated to negotiate issues concerning public servants, including salary adjustments, housing allowances, pensions, medical aid, and other transversal issues (Shabangu, 2024). Roles associated with PSCBC include:

- To negotiate and conclude applicable collective agreements for the entire public service,
- Promoting sound labour relations within the public sector,
- Providing dispute resolution mechanisms,
- Monitoring and enforcing compliance with agreements.

Through its work, the PSCBC promotes uniformity in labour practices across the public service, and it stabilises the potentially destabilising situation of industrial conflict. For this study, outcomes of the PSCBC define provincial mandates, which then get coordinated and operationalised through the North West Office of the Premier

2.2.2.6 Provincial chambers

However, all the cross-national issues are addressed at the PSCBC level, while provincial bargaining occurs in the provincial chamber, which is a substructure of the PSCBC (Shabangu, 2024). Chambers that address issues about a specific region's public service workforce exist in each province, including the North-West Province. Issues addressed at the provincial chambers include:

- Regional implementations of national agreements.
- Conditions of work and policies within the workplace at local levels.
- Grievance resolution at provincial departments.
- Oversight of compliance with collective agreements on a provincial level.

Labour and government representatives at the provincial level comprise this chamber. It is also the main point of engagement for the provincial-level unions. An example of this is the Co-ordinating Chamber of the PSCBC for the North West Province (CCPNWP), which engages with unions of educators, nurses, administrative staff and other members of the public employees within provincial government departments (Shabangu, 2024). Provincial chambers manage communication effectively, decentralise decision-making, and respond to local labour issues. This is particularly applicable to provinces with special administrative challenges and diverse workforce needs. In this way, complementing the work of the PSCBC, the provincial chambers help make collective bargaining relevant, efficient, and accessible to all public servants (Shabangu, 2024). In the North West, the OTP consolidates departmental inputs, aligns affordability with Provincial Treasury, and steers implementation interfaces with sectoral chambers (e.g., GPSSBC, PELRC, PHSDSBC).

2.2.2.7 Integration of legal and institutional frameworks

A bargaining process is only effective if the constitutional right of the parties being affected, statutory obligations, and its own machinery are well-promoted in South Africa. The Constitution stands affirmatively for fundamental rights to protect workers and unions. These rights are actualised through the regulation of structures and processes created by the LRA under which collective bargaining can take place. At the operational level, such collective bargaining can take place through the mechanisms provided by the PSCBC and the provincial chambers, including negotiation and dispute resolution.

In this interlocking matrix, trade unions become the sole representatives for their member workers; employers are *prima facie* assumed to hold on to good faith bargaining, a presumption which the law can enforce; agreements reached may be enforced; and should any dispute arise, there exists a remedy in the form of the CCMA and the Labour Court, which will act in the event of the parties failing to act in good faith or dishonouring a collective agreement. Such a legal-institutional synergy fosters industrial peace, guards worker rights, and ultimately upholds the state's legitimacy as an employer-in-fact and an employer-in-law.

2.2.2.8 Comparative analysis: patterns, divergences, and implications

A comparative synthesis reveals both convergence and divergence in the public sector employment bargaining model across countries. Generally, countries that have institutionalised and depoliticised bureaucracies and have more visible, accessible fiscal governance should be expected to achieve more effective, lasting outcomes in bargaining (Shabangu, 2024). Systems beset by political unionism, fiscal opacity, and administrative inefficiency usually experience adversarial, unstable labour relations.

For instance, Sweden and Germany demonstrate how grounding social dialogue and shared responsibility of the state and unions yield stable and equitable results. Such models emphasise mutual benefit in collective, appropriate, long-term relationships and evidence-based negotiation (Sambrook, 2021). Furthermore, in this regard, unions can be defined as partners in governance rather than adversaries.

Alternatively, South Africa has attributes of a middle-income and developing country that complicate public bargaining, given political entanglements, fiscal uncertainty, and institutional fragility (Shabangu, 2024). However, what makes South Africa unique in this regard is a very high degree of legal formalism in its bargaining architecture, alongside quite informal dynamics of political patronage and weak enforcement. This dualism creates a terrible disjuncture between normative commitments and realities on the ground.

2.2.3 Determinants of collective bargaining outcomes

In the public sector, the outcomes of collective bargaining are determined not simply by rational bargaining or existing legal frameworks, but by a constellation of internal and external determinants that interplay. These determinants include variables such as union leadership styles, political dynamics, organisational capacity, and fiscal and institutional constraints and intricately influence the trajectory and efficacy of bargaining processes. This section presents

a critical and discursive literature review of key factors affecting success or failure in collective bargaining, particularly in the public sector of developing countries such as South Africa.

2.2.3.1 Union leadership and organisational strategy

Internal union leaders are primary determinants of collective bargaining outcomes. Effective leadership makes a union's bargaining position stronger through strategic event mobilisation, logical coherence in its agenda, and negotiation prowess. Van Buren III (2022) cited that to him, leadership is a relational and strategic phenomenon. Therefore, capacitating members and articulating valid claims would lead to better control over outcomes.

Two leadership styles are described: militant and conciliatory. The implication of each is different. The militant might win immediate concessions from the employer through sanctions of industrial action, but usually at the expense of long-term trust and institutional stability. On the contrary, cooperatives might develop long-term commitment, which may be criticised for compromising in politically charged environments (Darlington, 2009).

Historically, union leadership in the South African public sector has occupied a dichotomous role as both an industrial negotiator and a political actor. COSATU leaders, and therefore ANC members, are known to straddle both the bargaining and policymaking line. This dualism empowers the union while simultaneously constraining its actions (Shabangu, 2024; Limb, 2024). While access to politics expands policy influence by lowering "barriers to bargaining autonomy," it also exposes the union to a "risk of co-optation and, along with it, a softened bargaining autonomy" (Limb, 2024).

Authors such as Buhlungu (2010) argue that the ANC-COSATU alliance has limited unions' adversarial capacity by consolidating leadership structures that are already more invested in securing their political continuity than in being held accountable by rank-and-file members. This has bred internal factionalism, poor mandate consolidation, and opaque negotiation practices. In so doing, the North West now aligns with the OTP's coordinating role to uphold mandate discipline, ensure continuity of representation, and follow up on implementation.

2.2.3.2 Political interference and partisan alignment

Political interference is a determining factor in collective bargaining, especially in areas where public sector unions are deeply affected by politics. The nexus between politics and unionism in South Africa is neither incidental nor strategic; instead, it is institutionalised (Maake-Malatji, 2023). Public sector unions often operate within a corporatist framework, which encompasses

formal structures of dialogue alongside informal channels of influence. While these corporatist setups are intended to facilitate concertation, in practice, they often lead to undue interference from the political sphere (Maake-Malatji, 2023).

According to the literature, there are several entry points through which political interference starves effective bargaining of oxygen. First, it skews power asymmetries, favouring politically aligned unions and marginalising others, thereby weakening collective solidarity (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021; Ahumada, 2021). Second, it blurs the distinction between the state as employer and the state as policymaker, thereby confusing accountability and clarity. Third, it uses collective bargaining as a justification for electoral or populist support, leading to unsustainable concessions that damage fiscal prudence and administrative coherence (Naidoo, 2015; Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021; Ahumada, 2021).

Compared with more "depoliticised" public administrations, such as those of Sweden or Canada, politicised countries report much more unstable and unpredictable bargaining results. The same high levels of political patronage found in Zimbabwe and Nigeria could be shown to create less than smooth, unfocused bargaining outcomes. However, South Africa falls somewhere between the two poles. Legal protections exist, but often fail because of political imperatives overriding procedural rationality.

2.2.3.3 Union capacity and organisational effectiveness

The potential effectiveness of unions in collective bargaining is determined by their organisational strength, internal coherence, and technical capability (Ahumada, 2021), while capacity encompasses traits such as member engagement, research and policy expertise, negotiation skills, and institutional memory. As Connor and Mortimer (2013) put it, union power does not just come from being many, but also comes from strategic positioning and knowledge-based advocacy.

In fact, South African public-sector unions vary widely in their capacity. The larger unions, such as NEHAWU and SADTU, have a broad organisational reach, with professional negotiators and dedicated research units (Botiveau, 2017; Tiro, 2022). However, their functioning is often negatively affected by internal dysfunctions, including contestation for leadership, low grassroots member involvement, and a toxic, centralised culture of decision-making that alienates ordinary members from these processes (Tiro, 2022). Smaller unions, on the other

hand, face problems of inadequate resources, limited access to bargaining forums, and marginalisation in decision-making processes.

Unfortunately, union fragmentation impairs bargaining capacity. The proliferation of sectoral and splinter unions weakened collective bargaining leverage and made division-and-rule strategies easier for employers. Rivalries develop between unions. As Venter (2017) noted, effective collective bargaining requires both pluralism and unity. In South Africa, public-sector unions have not yet achieved that balance. The situation in the North West Province further complicates coordination through the Office of the Premier, as it must be brought under a single provincial mandate from various union voices before negotiations can proceed.

2.2.3.4 Resource constraints and fiscal limitations

Public sector bargaining is not something that occurs in a vacuum; it always bears the fiscal constraints imposed by state budgets and macroeconomic policy, and resource limitations might fairly fundamentally determine the nature and outcome of negotiations. Regarding fiscal space, the literature views this boundary as a key determinant of the state's responsiveness to union demands (ILO, 2013). In the presence of public finances that constrain affordability, the outcomes of bargaining are already preordained, leaving little room for real negotiation.

In South Africa, worsening public debt and stagnant GDP growth have created dire consequences for state finances, exacerbated by a swelling public wage bill (Tiro, 2022). The stance of the National Treasury has become increasingly conservative, aiming to prevent wage growth from going unchecked and even to trim the public service. These proposals clash with unions, which consider these measures to be driven by austerity and socially regressive.

Indeed, the fiscal-bargaining impasse is embodied in the 2020 public wage dispute. The state rescinded a multi-year agreement due to affordability constraints, sparking legal challenges and a breakdown of trust (Tiro, 2022). According to analysts like Van der Walt (2018), this is symptomatic of a far deeper structural tension: that the state's dual role as both employer and developmental agent means that bargaining processes cannot reconcile competing imperatives at divergent levels.

Resource constraints are certainly not purely economic but also institutional. Bargaining forums such as the PSCBC and provincial chambers suffer from inadequate funding, staff turnover, and poor technical support, which impair their ability to facilitate negotiations in a timely and effective manner. The weak enforcement mechanisms further render collective agreements

aspirational rather than binding by reducing their credibility. At the provincial level, the OTP's coordinating chamber has increasingly held that it is also subject to fiscal dependence on the Provincial Treasury for the conclusion or implementation of agreements within its discretion.

2.2.3.5 Legal and procedural complexity

The legal system governing public-sector collective bargaining in South Africa is sound in principle, drawing on constitutional rights, provisions of the Labour Relations Act, and sectoral regulation. However, the procedural complexity and legalism of the system can serve, at least from one perspective, as protection for bargaining rights and as an avenue for dispute resolution; or, under another point of view, they could entrench adversarial instead of mitigating it, thereby causing delays and giving rise to loopholes for strategic litigation (Tiro, 2022).

Empirical studies show that unions and the state increasingly resort to legal action to resolve disputes, often bypassing bargaining forums altogether. This judicialization of labour relations speaks to a severe erosion of trust between collective bargaining partners and a lack of faith in the efficacy of the negotiated structures. Furthermore, the jurisprudence on collective bargaining rights remains contested, with courts occasionally delivering contradictory decisions, thereby further undermining the predictability of bargaining outcomes (Benjamin, 2013).

2.2.3.6 Sociopolitical environment and public perception

Essentially, the broader socio-political environment, as well as public attitudes toward public sector unions, affect the legitimacy and outcomes of collective bargaining. Where unions are expected to protect workers' rights and partner in service delivery, they enjoy greater moral and political capital. However, when unions are seen to benefit only a handful of self-serving members, disrupt service provision, or conspire in poor service delivery, their bargaining power is undermined.

Citizens are ambivalent toward public-sector unions in South Africa. On the one hand, these unions are credited with promoting workers' rights and advancing transformation. Tiro, 2022. On the other hand, they have been accused of having an efficiency shield, resisting performance management, and engaging in disruptive strikes. The public sector strike of 2010, which severely affected hospitals and schools, took a toll on public support for unions by raising ethical questions about the boundaries of industrial action in essential services (Arnold & Ukpere, 2012).

It is such reputational interests that drive this dynamic; as a result, the government would hardly concede when it has poor public support, whereas unions find it difficult to rally for solidarity (Tiro, 2022). The media's role is decisive in framing these narratives that tend to oversimplify complex issues into binary moral judgments that exclude other structural factors. It leads to repeated industrial activity in the province. It delays the implementation of signed agreements, sometimes creating public perception barriers and political pressure on the OTP to maintain a balance between labour stability and uninterrupted service delivery.

Despite extensive scholarship on public-sector collective bargaining in South Africa, there is limited empirical research examining bargaining efficacy at the provincial coordination level, particularly within Offices of the Premier. Existing studies focus predominantly on national bargaining institutions, strike activity, or union–state relations in the abstract, leaving a gap in understanding how mandates, capacity, trust, and implementation interact in practice. This study addresses that gap by offering a qualitative, case-based analysis of collective bargaining efficacy within the North West Province, thereby contributing institutionally grounded insights to both theory and practice.

2.2.4 Challenges facing collective bargaining in the public sector

It is such reputational interests that drive this dynamic; as a result, the government would hardly concede when it has poor public support, whereas unions find it difficult to rally for solidarity (Tiro, 2022). The media's role is decisive in framing these narratives that tend to oversimplify complex issues into binary moral judgments that exclude other structural factors. It leads to repeated industrial activity in the province. It delays the implementation of signed agreements, sometimes creating public perception barriers and political pressure on the OTP to maintain a balance between labour stability and uninterrupted service delivery.

2.2.4.1 Prolonged negotiations and institutional gridlock

One of the significant problems the public sector faces is protracted negotiations that rarely lead to conclusions. Unlike the private sector, where market forces compel efficiency, public-sector bargaining is constrained by bureaucratic and politicised institutional frameworks (Held, 2022) that result in lengthy bargaining processes, delays in policy implementation and wage adjustments, and employee frustration. "Inertia within bargaining councils combined with procedural legalism and complex multi-party structures makes quick solutions evasive," said Van der Walt (2018).

The environment of multiple unions complicates agreement attainment in negotiating structures such as the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) in South Africa. Unending delays, position shuffling, and dramatic last-minute interventions by political actors have marked the negotiations. Such delays in procedures will thaw trusts within the system, weaken the credibility of agreements, and worsen tensions between unions and the state (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021; Maake-Malatji, 2023).

2.2.4.2 Industrial actions and the crisis of essential services

Industrial action remains a powerful tool for public sector unions to press demands. However, its use in essential services such as health, education, and policing presents complex ethical and policy dilemmas (Maake-Malatji, 2023). Strikes in these sectors directly affect public well-being and undermine state legitimacy. Critics argue that while industrial action is a legitimate form of pressure, its frequency and scale in the South African public sector point to deeper structural dysfunctions (Berry & Stuart, 2021). The 2010 public sector strike, which involved more than 1.3 million workers, resulted in massive disruptions to hospitals and schools (Pieterse, 2021).

According to Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021), such actions illustrate not merely labour unrest but a broader governance crisis. This crisis is often exacerbated by bargaining councils' inability to prevent escalation. The ineffectiveness of dispute resolution mechanisms such as conciliation and arbitration points to a systemic breakdown. As Maake-Malatji (2023) notes, when bargaining fails to produce credible outcomes, unions turn to strikes not as a last resort but as a routine strategy, thereby normalising disruption.

2.2.4.3 Wage disputes and the politics of affordability

Wage conflicts during periods of fiscal austerity and constrained state budgets are the central focus of collective bargaining disputes across the public sector. It is a symptom of recurring wage conflicts between the state and its public employees, with the government constantly citing affordability constraints while unions highlight inflationary pressures and inequality (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021). The 2020 wage agreement being contested serves as an exemplar of the fiscal, political, and legal entanglements at play.

According to scholars such as Naidoo (2015) and Van Niekerk (2021), public-sector wage disputes are not economic negotiations but mere political theatre in which unions and the state perform roles for their respective constituencies rather than engage in meaningful problem-solving. This performativity creates an adversarial climate that inhibits compromise and

entrenches zero-sum thinking. In addition, wage disputes often escalate to legal and media avenues, where governments and unions engage in strategic litigation and media campaigns. Such out-of-court contestations exemplify the breakdown in institutional trust and raise questions about the extent to which collective bargaining serves as a forum for social dialogue (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021).

2.2.4.4 Service delivery disruptions and public backlash

Most of the time, public-sector industrial action has an immediate and visible impact on service delivery and thus evokes negative perceptions in the public mind. A disruption to an essential service, such as healthcare or education, harms the vulnerable and undermines unions' legitimacy in the public eye (Webster, 2022; Marutlulle, 2021). Service delivery, according to Koelble and Siddle (2013), becomes an arena where the intersecting interests of labour disputes, governance failures, and citizen discontent converge.

This creates a paradox for unions: while industrial action is sometimes imperative to win gains, it can also turn public opinion against them and reduce their bargaining power (Marutlulle, 2021). In many instances, the government utilises public discontent to weaken union power by labelling them as tyrants of progress and efficiency. The relationship between service delivery and collective bargaining seems to form a vicious cycle: poor services create worker discontent and union mobilisation, which, in turn, lead to disruptions. Absent the requisite structural reforms, this cycle is likely to prolong existing public-sector dysfunction (Marutlulle, 2021). These dynamics further strain the Office of the Premier as the coordinating authority, hindering its ability to stabilise chambers, guarantee essential services, and ensure the timely implementation of agreed-upon resolutions across departments in the North West Province.

2.2.5 Strategies to improve the outcomes of collective bargaining

Given the cumbersome and multifaceted challenges faced by collective bargaining in the public sector, such as procedural delays, political interference, service delivery disruptions, and splintering of stakeholders, an examination of strategies that could breathe life into collective bargaining becomes imperative. This section presents a rigorous, scathing academic literature review of best practices, innovative interventions, and policy recommendations to enhance the legitimacy, functionality, and responsiveness of collective bargaining, particularly in two contextual niches: the international and South African public-sector arenas.

2.2.5.1 Rethinking institutional design and governance

Institutional reform and redesign to improve coherence, efficiency, and responsiveness represent fundamental strategies for strengthening collective bargaining. For a long time, scholars such as Freeman and Medoff (1984) have argued that wherever bargaining processes are deemed adequate, trust in institutions and clearly defined political governance architectures must also be present. Confusion over jurisdictional authorities, when coupled with inconsistent implementation of agreements within fragmented systems such as South Africa's decentralised provincial bargaining structures, can significantly undermine the bargaining process (Tiro, 2022).

Institutional alignment and centralisation are important for stabilising bargaining outcomes, according to the international literature. In this regard, Nordic countries have enjoyed highly coordinated bargaining frameworks anchored on shared goals between states and unions (Marutlulle, 2021). In these models, macroeconomic coordination, social pacts, and long-term wage restraint are traded for strong social protection. In South Africa, governance frameworks of the PSCBC, provincial chambers, and sector-specific councils could be aligned to be less incoherent and more centralised. This may involve constitutional amendments to define and re-establish the levels of bargaining units so that decentralisation does not become an end in itself.

2.2.5.2 Capacity building and professionalisation of unions

Union effectiveness is mainly determined by organisational capacity, leadership quality, and strategic acumen. Internally, many South African public-sector unions face governance problems, limited technical capacity, and a shortage of professional negotiators. Buhilungu (2010) notes that the politicisation of union leaders has led union officials to prioritise factionalism over an advocacy agenda for members.

Once collective bargaining can hold its head high, unions should invest in capacity-building measures; the professionalisation of advocacy teams for evidence-based activities and developmental policy engagement could play an important role in such capacity-building. Training and upskilling of union representatives in Latin America through programmes such as those of Public Services International (PSI) were found to significantly improve negotiation outcomes and foster a culture of social dialogue (ILO, 2020).

Additionally, internal union democracy would need a fresh impetus, as would accountability measures. A transparent electoral system, participatory decision-making, and financial

oversight would help restore trust among members and guarantee that union positions reflect collective rather than elite interests. In the case of the North West, the OTP may also enable joint annual training of all chamber representatives (with the DPSA and Provincial Treasury) on mandating, costing proposals, and drafting clauses, with an induction pathway for new representatives to ensure continuity.

2.2.5.3 Depoliticising bargaining processes

Another recurring concern in the South African literature has been the problematic entanglement of union leadership with the interests of the political elite. While the tripartite alliance has historically accorded unions policy influence, it has, in the same breath, also eroded their independence (Von Broembsen, 2024). This political embedding has blurred the boundaries between collective bargaining and political negotiation, compromising procedural integrity.

Depoliticizations of these bargaining processes will entail structural and cultural changes. Von Broembsen (2024), among others, suggests insulating the union work from party politics. This does not imply neutrality for unions but rather strategic autonomy, in which unions would relate to the government as a social partner rather than as its subordinate. Such innovation would mean the establishment of nonpartisan think tanks and policy institutes affiliated with unions but operating independently. These shall generate research, develop policy alternatives, and capacitate unions with technical negotiating tools, all of which would reduce their dependency on political brokerage (Shilinge, 2023).

2.2.6 Policy recommendations for a resilient bargaining system

Based on the critical literature review, several policy recommendations emerge:

- Institutional coherence

Consolidate and clarify the roles of bargaining councils, provincial chambers, and line departments to ensure consistency and avoid duplication.

- Union capacity building

Invest in training, leadership development, and knowledge management to enhance union professionalism and strategic negotiation capacity.

- Depoliticisation frameworks

Develop codes of conduct and conflict-of-interest policies to safeguard bargaining integrity from partisan interference.

- Digital modernisation

Leverage ICT tools to improve communication, transparency, and data-driven decision-making within bargaining processes.

- Inclusive representation

Institutionalise mechanisms to ensure the active participation of marginalised groups in all stages of the bargaining process.

- Robust dispute resolution

Establish a dedicated public sector arbitration tribunal and strengthen enforcement mechanisms to resolve deadlocks effectively.

- Strengthened social dialogue

Revive platforms like NEDLAC and build new arenas for multi-stakeholder engagement and consensus-building.

2.3. Theoretical Review

2.3.1. Theoretical foundations of collective bargaining

This literature review adopts the Pluralist Theory as the primary theoretical framework for understanding collective bargaining in the public sector. The study is also supported by other theories, including Neo-Institutional Theory and the Theory of Collective Bargaining, to provide a holistic theoretical perspective on collective bargaining.

2.3.2 Neo-Institutional Theory

Neo-Institutional Theory (NIT) has become the most important analytic framework for understanding how organisations develop, sustain, and alter their structures and practices within wider institutional environments. The origin of this theory goes back to the late 70s through the early 80s, and it was particularly developed owing to the works of Meyer and Rowan (1977), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), and Scott (1995), who sought to explain organisational behaviour beyond the rational, efficiency-driven models that dominated earlier scholarship. NIT, unlike classical institutionalism, often narrows its focus to the legal rules and formal structures but extends this analytical lens to include the cultural norms, beliefs, and taken-for-granted practices established within an organisation that confer legitimacy upon actions within that organisation.

Within the context of public-sector collective bargaining, NIT provides an important explanation of why certain negotiation practices and institutional structures persist over time, despite apparent inefficiencies or political resistance. All institutions, Scott (2014) notes, have regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars that are interrelated. Regulation refers to

rules, laws, and enforcement mechanisms within the definition that constrain and guide behaviour (Mirza, 2023).

From this dimension, one would refer to the guarantee of collective bargaining in South Africa, as well as to the Labour Relations Act (LRA) 66 of 1995 and new statutory bodies such as the Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) and provincial bargaining chambers. These formal structures define the procedural and legal frameworks within which bargaining occurs, ensuring compliance and providing dispute-resolution mechanisms when negotiations reach a deadlock (Mirza, 2023).

The normative pillar of NIT embodies the values, norms, and moral obligations that mould expectations about appropriate behaviour. Other normative pressures of a new dimension are imposed on the South African public sector by the values of democracy, the historical legacy of the workers' rights struggle, and international labour standards, such as those of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Mirza, 2023). Those standards hold that collective bargaining is more than a transactional process; it must also be conceived as a democratic process instrumental in effecting fair and equitable labour relations. In other instances, public sector unions in the North-West Province use both legal entitlements and moral arguments to realise wage increases, improved working conditions, and better service delivery outcomes.

The third pillar, however, speaks to the cultural-cognitive dimension of sharing understandings and taken-for-granted assumptions in shaping how reality is perceived and interpreted (Scott, 2014). In South Africa, both stakeholders believe that trade unions are the legitimate representatives of employees' interests and that collective bargaining is the rightful way to resolve disputes. This prevails, fortunately, even when time-consuming processes yield contested outcomes or when agreements are partially implemented. Cultural-cognitive legitimacy within bargaining institutions leads to their further stabilisation despite the functional performance being questioned (Mirza, 2023).

One of the critical links that NIT has established in public sector bargaining analysis is institutional isomorphism, as articulated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Isomorphism describes the tendency of organisations operating within the same field to adopt similar structures and practices over time. In collective bargaining, coercive isomorphism is the extent to which public sector institutions meet legislative requirements for establishing bargaining councils. Mimetic isomorphism occurs when institutions face significant uncertainty and hence adopt practices from perceived leaders in the field, as in the case of provincial bargaining

chambers in South Africa, which model their dispute-resolution procedures on those of more well-established provinces or on international examples.

From both national legislation and union, public servant, and civil societal normative pressures, the existence and functioning of a provincial bargaining chamber in the North-West Province may be inferred. Such structural patterns demonstrate the province's adherence to democratic governance and respect for labour rights, even when financial constraints limit the success of negotiations.

However, NIT's reputation is not without caveats. One of the most striking criticisms of NIT is that it tends to downplay the roles of power, agency, and conflict in determining institutional outcomes (Greenwood et al., 2008). While it is true that NIT holds the key to explaining the stubborn persistence of bargaining institutions in South Africa, it may not go far enough to account for the substantial weaknesses arising from political patronage, fiscal austerity, or uneven enforcement of agreements. Bargaining structures remain symbolic even when they do not deliver material improvements in workers' conditions. A last message, therefore, should add that NIT should be complemented by other approaches, such as the power-resource theory or pluralism, to address the complexity of public sector labour relations in South Africa.

2.3.3. Theory of Collective Bargaining

Collective Bargaining Theory has been a cornerstone of the study and practice of labour relations for the past hundred years. Its intellectual foundation traces back to early scholars in industrial relations, such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb (1897), John R. Commons (1909), and later John T. Dunlop (1958). These scholars came to see collective bargaining as a formalised procedure for negotiations between employers and employee representatives to determine the terms and conditions of employment. They therefore rejected the idea of the labour market as simply an individual exchange and instead focused on the asymmetry in the power relations between individual workers and employers (Bernstein, 2022). On the contrary, they concluded that collective bargaining serves precisely to redress this imbalance by empowering workers to collaborate, thereby strengthening their negotiating position through trade unions.

The central premise of the theory is that bargaining is bilateral and that both parties have legitimate interests that need to be reconciled through compromise. Since conflict is built into the relationship between the contracting parties, it is not an aberration in industrial relations. However, it can yield positive effects if channelled through existing institutional mechanisms (Keune, 2021). This is especially pertinent in the public sector, where the employer is the state,

and not only are the pay and benefits at stake in negotiations, but also the quality of public services, fiscal stability, and the legitimacy of governance (Uzualu, Ofo & Ochem, 2024).

The theory states that the institutional framework should facilitate. Without legal recognition of unions, procedural rules, and mechanisms that would allow workers to resolve their disputes, collective bargaining cannot be effective. South Africa's post-apartheid labour legislation of 1995, by and large, reflects these theories- the establishment of bargaining councils, the regulation of negotiations, and the provision for conciliation and arbitration in disputes (Zvobga, 2019). Therefore, establishing the PSCBC and its provincial structures puts these principles into practice within the public sector to ensure representative, procedurally fair negotiations.

Both economic and social dimensions are integral to the theory of collective bargaining. Economically, collective bargaining determines key employment variables, including wage rates, working hours, and fringe benefits (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). Socially, it contributes to industrial democracy by allowing workers a say in decisions that affect their livelihoods and working conditions. In the South African public sector, both these dimensions are entangled with the political dynamics, which jeopardise the bargaining process. Wage agreements affect national or provincial budgets, macroeconomic policies, and the Government's political credibility, thereby intersecting these three factors (Webster, 2022). This intertwining of economic, social, and political factors found its most explicit articulation in the North-West Province, where the bargaining environment is shaped by fiscal pressures, service delivery challenges, and political contestation (Webster, 2022).

Different models of collective bargaining offer further analytical insights, and distributive bargaining, which seeks an agreed-upon division of a fixed resource pool, typically characterises wage negotiations in times of fiscal distress (Schnabel, 2020). Integrative bargaining aims to expand the scope of outcomes by recognising mutual gains, typically at stake in considerations of professional development or workplace safety. Concessionary bargaining occurs when unions accept wage or benefit decreases to protect job security, a form of bargaining that usually transpires during tough economic times (Schnabel, 2020). In practice, an amalgamation of these models of bargaining is frequently adopted, with distributive systems usually employed for wage bargaining, while integrative approaches focus on non-monetary issues.

Nonetheless, the theory of collective bargaining has certain limitations, and in most instances, it assumes relatively balanced power relations between the parties; this may not hold when the

employer is also the regulator and policymaker (Lambert & Webster, 2024). The government's dual role in South Africa inevitably creates a conflict of interest, as it must balance its obligations to employees with other interests related to good fiscal and policy practice (Lambert & Webster, 2024). Moreover, the theory does not adequately account for the influence that external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, may exert in upending the bargaining environment almost overnight by stretching budgets and altering policy priorities.

However, despite these limitations, the theory of collective bargaining remains highly relevant for analysing public-sector labour relations in South Africa. It provides a means of understanding the processes, structures, and outcomes of negotiation while delineating the necessary conditions for a fair and effective bargaining process. In the North-West Province, it stresses the importance of highly representative unions, transparent procedures, and an equal willingness to negotiate in good faith by both parties.

2.3.4. Pluralist Theory

Pluralism tells us that workplaces have many interest groups-usual ones are employers and employees with their own legitimate, albeit conflicting goals (Poole, 2021; Ackers, 2021). A pluralist perspective acknowledges the reality of conflict between management and labour without assuming harmony or unity of purpose; it views conflict as an entirely natural and inevitable feature of organisational life, not an unwanted state to be rigidly avoided (Ackers, 2021). Trade unions are key players in this model, serving as a bridge that balances workers' interests and the imbalance of power between employees and employers (Dobbins et al., 2021). It contains the possibility that interests may have to be negotiated and reconciled through a process of collective bargaining. Conflict becomes, far from being a source of instability, a force for constructive change through appropriate institutional channels-it will most likely improve policies, working conditions, and forms of governance (Van Buren III, 2022).

Pluralism plays out even more directly in government, where the employer must juggle budgetary constraints, service-delivery imperatives, and the rights of its workforce simultaneously (Poole, 2021). The argument of trade unions, on the other hand, is that they want public servants to be better paid, assured of their jobs, and able to develop more professionally (Poole, 2021). This will become the intersection of both interests through which compromise, mutual understanding, and shared responsibility will take place.

It accommodates, hence the requirement for institutional arrangements such as bargaining councils and dispute-resolution mechanisms (Sambrook, 2021). In South Africa, bodies such

as the PSCBC and provincial bargaining chambers exemplify the pluralist ideal by providing platforms for dialogue, rulemaking, and conflict resolution (Ackers, 2021). They serve not only to formalise negotiations but also to protect workers' rights and security, and to promote stability in the public service. Pluralist theory makes several contributions to the relationship dynamics of collective bargaining within the public sector. It legitimises trade unions and the critical roles they play in representing the workforce. In provinces such as the North-West, trade unions act as a mediator between public servants and government departments to ensure that employees are heard.

Next, pluralism emphasises the need for institutional mechanisms that regulate the framework within which labour relations should operate (Ackers, 2021). Bargaining processes in the public sector are not spontaneous or informal; instead, they are determined by statutes, collective agreements, and standing orders that structure engagement and stipulate permissible conduct. The institutionalisation of all this supports predictability and transparency, even where agreement or dispute fails. Third, it again posits power and bargaining as parameters in industrial relations. Thus, it admits that, in terms of power, employers and employees do not share equivalent levels of power and that collective bargaining is to level that power asymmetry (Fiebich, 2021). In the case of a public employer that is also a regulator, this balance will be most critical to avoid abuses of power and to ensure democratic governance.

Finally, pluralist theory appreciates that, on a case-by-case basis, not all conflicts are intrinsically evil. Controlled, institutionalised bargaining conflict can boost dialogue, expose inefficiencies, and motivate reforms. For example, when public sector unions raise issues such as wage delays and working conditions in the North-West Province, it might prompt government departments to re-examine ways to improve certain administrative practices or budget allocations.

2.3.4.1 Collective bargaining in the public sector: A Pluralist View

This is the pluralist framework for understanding collective bargaining in the public sector: it recognises that the workplace comprises several interest groups, each with legitimate objectives. In the public sector, these interest groups include government departments as employers, trade unions representing employees, and the believing public that services are delivered on their behalf (Tamanaha, 2021). Pluralism does not assume that these interests can be perfectly aligned; instead, it views conflict as both inevitable and potentially constructive when managed through appropriate institutional channels. In this study, the coordinating role

of the Office of the Premier in the North West Province is central to how those interests are mediated in provincial chambers.

One of pluralism's most significant assets in public sector bargaining is its emphasis on institutionalised conflict. As such, it holds that disputes cannot be inherently destructive between labour and management (Tamanaha, 2021). Still, these disputes are meant to improve policy and practice through appropriate formal channels for resolution, such as bargaining councils or arbitration processes. The PSCBC, along with the provincial chambers in the South African public sector, exemplify this principle by providing structured forums for resolving matters through negotiation (Horst, 2024). Such institutions in the North-West Province have been instrumental in bringing to fruition resolutions of disputes ranging from delayed wages to similar inadequacies in health and education resources. The establishment of forums helps maintain industrial peace by channelling conflict into structured dialogue and ensuring that disagreements are settled in accordance with the law.

Pluralist theory also emphasises the role of trade unions in balancing power asymmetries. In the public sector, where the employer is also a regulator, the registrar often allows extensive unilateral decision-making (Horst, 2024). The trade unions provide a counterweight to this power by taking up the employees' perspective on issues and holding employers accountable. Here in the North-West Province, the unions use this bargaining process to challenge any unilateral changes to employment conditions that would not benefit employees and to pursue commitments on matters ranging from professional development to workplace safety.

Furthermore, pluralism reflects democracy in collective bargaining. It defines the terms under which employment conditions can be negotiated rather than imposed, thereby promoting transparency, participation, and accountability in governance (Gatto, 2020). This is very important in post-apartheid South Africa, where labour relations are part of a larger project of social transformation (Horst, 2024). Even when they become contentious or outcomes fall short of union demands, the mere existence of structured bargaining in public-sector settings keeps reminding one of the democratic gains taken since 1994.

However, the pluralist model does come with challenges: in highly politicised environments, the line between industrial relations and political negotiation may obscure the independence of bargaining institutions (Gatto, 2020). In South Africa, the fact that several public-sector unions are members of political parties sometimes raises questions about whether the basis on which these unions push their members' interests represents the ramparts of their unions against

employers or the political agendas of the parties with which they are affiliated. Increasingly narrow and riskier shades of compromise emerge when clearly defined fiscal ceilings persist, as they have not done so in recent years. Such tensions came to the fore during the 2020 wage conflict, when the government failed to disburse the final year's payments under a multi-year agreement, leading to dissatisfaction and substantial litigation (Gatto, 2020).

The effectiveness of the pluralist model thus rests hugely on both unions and government actors being able and willing to engage in mutually constructive terms in the North-West Province. Although such structures are, in theory, available for understanding conflict management, the success of these measures in producing tangible outcomes varies widely. Most often, gaps appear at the levels of mandating, costing, and post-agreement implementation across departments, given OTP's strong coordinating locus. Agreements can be reached but not implemented, which underscores the gap between the ideals of pluralist theory and the realities of practice (Gatto, 2020). It would therefore require the strengthening of enforcement mechanisms, capacity development within bargaining institutions, and culture-building for good-faith negotiations to realise the potential of pluralism in the public domain.

Lastly, a pluralist perspective provides all the bases for presenting a balanced, hence realistic, model of collective bargaining in the public sector. It recognises the inevitability of conflict accompanying legitimacy without exception of interest and the beauty and utility of negotiation. At the same time, it recognises that these processes are embedded in political, economic, and social contexts that can enhance or restrain effectiveness. In the North West Province, pluralism serves both as a tool for assessing current challenges associated with collective bargaining and as a normative framework to strengthen its role in promoting fair, democratic, and effective public service labour relations.

2.3.4.2. Theoretical implications and future directions

Comparative literature draws on institutionalist and power-resource theories of public-sector collective bargaining. Institutionalists argue that path dependency, legal frameworks, and institutional norms shape bargaining behaviour and its outcomes (Van Buren III, 2022). Power-resource theory, on the other hand, elaborates on the relative strengths of labour vis-à-vis the state and capital, as mediated through political alliances and economic conditions (Van Buren III, 2022). Both lenses have lessons for the South African example.

First of all, the institutional legacy of apartheid requires a strong regulatory framework after 1994; however, the persistence of political patronage and fiscal constraints has weakened its

impact (Shabangu, 2024). At the same time, the unions' leverage in the political arena has brought about substantive outcomes, but at the cost of the future viability of trust. At the provincial level, an institutionalist lens highlights how the OTP's coordination rules, escalation pathways, and monitoring norms shape bargaining efficacy. With respect to power resources, variations in outcomes can be explained when the unions' mobilisation capacity interacts with a provincial-level ceiling on fiscal availability, as dictated by the Provincial/National Treasury.

Future research needs to assess the context and new dynamics of public-sector bargaining amid austerity, digitisation, service-delivery pressures, and public accountability. Comparative work should engage more meaningfully with the Global South because the field's theoretical and empirical foundations are extremely sparse, even less so than in traditional OECD contexts. Among comparative analyses within South Africa, for example, province-to-province comparisons that deliberately model OTP-type coordinating roles, mandate design, and implementation fidelity can deepen theory on how sub-national institutions mediate pluralist conflict into actionable, service-delivery-relevant outcomes.

2.4. Empirical Review

2.4.1. Collective bargaining in the public sector: global and local perspectives

2.4.1.1 Developed countries

The mixed but suggestive view that empirical work from advanced economies offers on the influence of institutional design, legal protections, and bargaining decentralisation on public sector outcomes is further exemplified by García and Han's (2021) US study, which examined state-level changes in public sector bargaining laws. They found that reduced bargaining rights led to lower teacher morale and slight adverse effects on student outcomes. Their cross-state, quasi-experimental design underscores that legal constraints on bargaining can yield noticeable social outcomes beyond pay measures (García & Han, 2021).

Bryson and Forth (2022) longitudinally examined UK public-sector bargaining. Their core finding is that union presence and effective bargaining institutions narrow pay inequalities, especially in gender and ethnic pay gaps in public services, which they attributed to formal collective agreements and union procedures that standardise pay and discipline across agencies (Bryson & Forth, 2022).

Germany is cited as another example where bargaining does not have a significant effect from an equity perspective. Their combined flexibility and reluctance to necessarily speak for an

institutional sectoral-based negotiation Rönmar and Tros (2023) have shown via empirical evidence at the level of both sector and agency that decentralised work in conjunction with strong institutional scaffold has improved procedural fairness and employee satisfaction in many federally funded public services; their findings underscore the advantage of "structured decentralization" that maintains national norms while allowing local responsiveness (Rönmar & Tros, 2023).

According to a recent Canadian study by Weinberg (2024), large historical collective agreement and strike data catalogues from 1978 to 2019 will test the extent to which constitutional and legislative regimes manipulate the frequency, length, and costs of conflict. Robust empirical evidence shows that stronger legal protections and clearer arbitration pathways lead to fewer prolonged disputes and lower fiscal costs for governments. However, it may also shift bargaining power in ways that require fiscal framing (Weinberg, 2024).

Thus, for example, Ellem et al. (2025) summarised decades of empirical evidence from research on labour relations in Australia. They show that, even with declining membership, unions and collective bargaining are still pertinent in shaping workplace voice and institutionalised negotiation. Measurable improvements in worker participation are observed as a result of recent reforms to revive bargaining where policy and institutional support are appropriate (Ellem et al., 2025).

Thus, from an empirical perspective, the developed-country literature has three major lessons: (1) where bargaining is robustly protected, legal protections count, and generally favourable outcomes are observed as to equity and service delivery; (2) dependent but less decisive than the first aspect. Centralisation versus decentralisation is important, just as is the existence of coherent rules, dispute resolution, and monitoring; and (3) unions reproduce their effects on non-wage outcomes (procedural fairness, representation, gender-sensitive clauses) even in stable institutional frameworks.

2.4.1.2 Developing countries

The political economy, administrative capacity, and bargaining agenda in middle-income, fast-growing developing countries have significantly conditioned the impact of collective bargaining. A prime empirical instance is Brazil, where recent rigorous studies have shown the far-reaching effects of unions on contract content relative to Labour market inclusion. The present statement describes an econometric evaluation by Carvalho et al. involving union campaigns across Brazil to "bargain for women".

By using a difference-in-differences design and establishment-level panel data, Corradini, Lagos, and Sharma (2023) confirm that when unions focused on provisions that benefited women, collective bargaining agreements incorporated provisions such as more extended maternity leave and other protections that increased female representation in management and reduced female employee turnover, with no adverse effect on employment levels. The evidence thus underlines how the actual content of bargaining can be a tool of redistribution and inclusion beyond mere wage distribution in developing settings.

The library sector in India presents a different empirical picture: OECD country notes and national studies show near-fractured coverage, with bargaining often highly varied across the central, state, and municipal levels (Jäger, Naidu & Schoefer, 2024). The empirical analysis (labour market microdata and sectoral case study evidence) shows that bargaining outcomes exhibit extreme path dependency: states that have good institutional capacity and clearer legal frameworks have more stable negotiated outcomes, while the weaker states rely more on ad hoc settlements and industrial action (OECD, 2024; Jäger, Naidu & Schoefer, 2024). This has an empirical implication: increasing decentralisation without building capacity usually worsens bargaining performance.

The ILO working papers on South and South-East Asia studies the employees of sub-national governments (Bangladesh, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines) using mixed methods (surveys, administrative data, qualitative interviews) to show that decentralized governance transfer creates both bargaining opportunities and frictions: where local authorities possessed fiscal autonomy and technical HR capacity, negotiated agreements were more likely to be implemented, whereas where fiscal constraints reigned supreme, agreements were often merely symbolic or short-lived (Wijayanti, Wijayanti & Miarsa, 2025; Corradini, Lagos & Sharma, 2025). These empirical findings show that decentralisation interacts with capacity and fiscal space to determine real bargaining effectiveness.

Kenya gives an instance in an African developing country where both survey and case study evidence are at home: national labour market profiles and concentrated sectorial studies document a functioning legal right to unionize in the public service but with lasting problems in its implementation, whereby tensions frequently move into the arena of political or litigation; furthermore, there is uneven coverage of collective agreements among counties and ministries. Empirical work highlights how institutional fragmentation and weak enforcement dilute the bargaining power (Mutie & Macharia, 2025; Wakibi & Oleche, 2024; Ketu & Ningaye, 2024).

Collectively, the developing-country empirical literature shows that bargaining is political and administrative, and that success requires both legal rights and enforcement capacity, fiscal space, and bargaining agendas that include issues beyond wages (for example, gender, safety, procedural rules). Where these elements exist in tandem, collective bargaining is a vehicle for sustainable workplace improvement; where absent, bargaining is likely to be sporadic and conflictual.

2.4.1.3 Underdeveloped (low-income) countries

Empirical evidence from low-income countries is scarcer and more heterogeneous. However, several rigorous field studies, surveys and country profiles illuminate typical constraints: weak formal sectors, limited union penetration, donor influence, and fragile institutions. In Malawi, historical analyses and empirical chapters show that the labour movement's influence declined after independence and that collective bargaining is limited by a small formal sector and a dominant public employer; qualitative interviews and government data reveal weak collective agreement coverage and restricted bargaining power in the public service (Chikalipo, 2024; Hussein, 2024).

Mozambique's trade-union baseline surveys combine primary survey data with administrative records to document low formal coverage, fragmentation of union representation, and an evolving but fragile collective bargaining environment in the public and private formal sectors. The baseline's empirical mapping underlines that union density and bargaining coverage are heavily concentrated in a few industries and that national mechanisms for public-sector bargaining remain underdeveloped (Carnicelli, Kosonen & Pirttila, 2022).

At a regional level, ILO empirical work on workers' negotiations in the informal economy demonstrates that, where formal bargaining is weak, workers' negotiations are more prevalent (Ndevu et al., 2024). Alternative negotiation mechanisms, such as sectoral agreements, community bargaining, and NGO-mediated pacts, emerge, but their legal enforceability and coverage are limited; the studies use mixed-methods fieldwork across African and Asian low-income contexts and show that these "informal collective bargaining" arrangements can improve working conditions locally, though they rarely scale (Schmidt et al., 2023).

Country profiles and working papers also show that in many low-income states the public employer dominates the formal labour market, and bargaining outcomes are shaped by central budgetary constraints and donor conditionalities (Xhafa & Serrano, 2024). This means that, empirically, bargaining gains are often constrained by immediate affordability rather than

negotiation technique; several country reports document frequent deadlocks, short-term settlements and dependence on political mediation (Xhafa & Serrano, 2024).

A consistent empirical conclusion across low-income contexts is that collective bargaining's promise is real but fragile: where stronger social dialogue institutions (even donor-supported) and modest technical capacity exist, incremental gains (safety clauses, limited wage adjustments, protections) are achievable; without those, bargaining regresses into episodic contestation with weak implementation.

2.4.2 The South African context: Legacies, tensions, and institutional complexities

Public sector collective bargaining in South Africa has a more substantial empirical literature than in other countries. This has strong unionisation, backed by an allied bargaining architecture (PSCBC and provincial chambers) and, above all, the legal framework in post-apartheid South Africa. Mapping out the empirical data by Godfrey, Theron, and Visser (2007) served as the foundation for that coverage of bargaining, showing high historical institutional density but slumping in recent years due to political and fiscal stress (Godfrey et al., 2007).

Both types of empirical doctoral and policy work that focused on provincial bargaining councils and unions (e.g., Skosana, 2022; Tiro, 2022) include case studies, interviews with negotiators, and analysis of bargaining documents. They point to similar themes: (1) provincial capacity gaps mean uneven implementation of national agreements; (2) political embeddedness of unions (COSATU-ANC ties) complicates bargaining autonomy and can skew priorities; and (3) fiscal austerity frequently constrains agreement durability- the 2020 wage dispute is a strong empirical example where affordability arguments led to breakdowns and litigation (Skosana, 2022; Tiro, 2022; Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024).

Government and PSCBC documentation, as well as empirical studies, show that the PSCBC continues to hold the high ground on transversal public service issues. While provincial chambers of the PSCBC varied considerably in their technical capabilities, field interviews with labour relations practitioners showed how low-resourced chambers struggle to enforce agreements. At the same time, long timelines for dispute resolution would push parties to strikes or litigation.

Research on union strategy during crises, for example, COVID-19, provides recent empirical evidence about resilience of bargaining and shifts: case studies of NEHAWU and other public-sector unions highlight how union mobilization, negotiation mandates, and member

engagement changed under the pressures of the pandemic; evidence points toward adaptive strategies (remote organizing, prioritizing health and safety clauses) but also continued friction over pay and austerity.

Putting together the findings of South African empirical studies leads to practical conclusions for the case study in North-West Province: (1) the formal legal architecture and established bargaining forums provide an important platform for negotiated outcomes; (2) however, the real effectiveness is shaped dramatically by provincial variations in capacity, political interference and fiscal constraints; and (3) strengthening dispute resolution, transparency and union capacity at provincial/departmental levels empirically correlates with more sustainable bargaining outcomes. These are consistent findings across multiple empirical sources (DPRU, doctoral theses, PSCBC materials, peer-reviewed policy notes).

2.4.2.1 Short critical synthesis and implications for the North-West Province

Across contexts, the empirical literature converges on several actionable points relevant to the North-West Province case study. First, legal rights alone are insufficient: effective bargaining requires administrative capacity, credible dispute resolution, fiscal clarity and inclusive mandate-setting (evidence: Brazil, ILO studies, Canada, South Africa). Second, institutional design matters not whether bargaining is centralised or decentralised per se, but whether the design preserves coherent rules, enforcement and channels for provincial implementation (Germany, OECD, PSCBC evidence).

Third, agenda breadth matters: collective bargaining that includes procedural fairness, gender and workplace amenities (not just wages) has empirically observable social gains (Brazil, UK, OECD analyses). Finally, the South African literature shows that provincial bargaining effectiveness will hinge on practical capacity building (negotiators' skills, data systems), transparent mandates, and dispute mechanisms that avoid protracted strikes, all empirically linked to better implementation.

2.5 Determinants of Collective Bargaining Outcomes: Beyond Isolated Factors

The outcomes of collective bargaining in the public sector are shaped by a constellation of interrelated factors that extend beyond the bargaining table itself. While the formal legal framework and institutional arrangements create the procedural context for negotiations, the effectiveness of bargaining processes depends heavily on the capacity, strategy, and political positioning of the actors involved, as well as the fiscal and socio-political environment in which they operate. These determinants are rarely static; they interact dynamically, reinforcing or

constraining one another in ways that significantly influence whether bargaining produces equitable, sustainable, and implementable agreements. In South Africa, particularly in the North-West Province, the determinants of collective bargaining outcomes are deeply embedded in the post-apartheid political economy, marked by high union density, politicised state–labour relations, fiscal austerity, and pressing service delivery demands.

Existing studies identify several determinants of collective bargaining outcomes in the public sector, including union capacity, political interference, fiscal constraints, and institutional design (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021; Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024). While these factors are well documented, the literature largely treats them as discrete variables, rather than as interacting conditions within a bargaining system.

For example, union capacity is frequently cited as a determinant of negotiation success, with larger unions possessing greater technical expertise and organisational reach (Botiveau, 2017). However, other studies demonstrate that capacity alone does not guarantee effective outcomes when bargaining mandates are unclear or when implementation authority is fragmented across departments (Shabangu, 2024). Similarly, political alignment between unions and governing parties is often framed as either empowering labour or undermining accountability, yet empirical findings remain inconsistent across contexts (Maake-Malatji, 2023).

This inconsistency suggests that bargaining outcomes cannot be explained by single variables in isolation. Instead, outcomes emerge from the interaction between institutional capacity, mandate coherence, trust, and implementation mechanisms. The literature does not sufficiently explain how these interactions unfold at provincial level, where national agreements must be operationalised. This study addresses this gap by analysing how these determinants collectively shape bargaining efficacy within OTP-coordinated structures

2.5.1 Union leadership and organisational strategy

Leadership within trade unions is one of the most important internal determinants of bargaining outcomes. Effective leadership combines the ability to mobilise membership support, articulate transparent and credible demands, and negotiate strategically, balancing immediate gains with long-term sustainability (Van Buren III, 2022). The literature distinguishes between militant and collaborative leadership styles. Militant leaders prioritise assertive confrontation, often deploying strikes and other forms of industrial action to extract concessions from employers. This approach can yield short-term victories, particularly in contexts where employers are

sensitive to public pressure or political fallout. However, militancy carries risks, including the erosion of trust between negotiating parties and the potential for public backlash, especially when industrial action disrupts essential services (Darlington, 2009).

Collaborative leadership, in contrast, emphasises problem-solving, relationship-building, and the pursuit of integrative bargaining outcomes. This style can foster stable, long-term industrial relations. However, it risks being perceived by rank-and-file members as overly accommodating, especially when economic conditions are complex, and wage increases fail to keep pace with inflation (Buhlungu, 2010). In the South African public sector, union leadership often embodies elements of both styles, reflecting the dual pressures of maintaining credibility with members and engaging constructively with the state.

A distinctive feature of South African union leadership is its political dualism. Leaders in central public sector unions such as the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union (NEHAWU) and the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) frequently hold positions or maintain close ties within the ruling African National Congress (ANC) through its alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). This dual role can be a source of influence, enabling union leaders to shape policy agendas and access decision-makers directly. However, it can also create conflicts of interest, with leaders prioritising political loyalty over uncompromising advocacy for their members (Shabangu, 2024). In the North-West Province, such political entanglements have at times led to inconsistent bargaining strategies, in which hardline wage demands coexist uneasily with reluctance to challenge ANC-led provincial administrations too aggressively.

2.5.2 Political interference and partisan alignment

Political interference is a pervasive determinant of collective bargaining outcomes in contexts where unions are closely integrated into ruling party structures. In theory, corporatist arrangements, in which unions participate in policy formulation alongside government and business, are intended to promote consensus and stability. In practice, however, such arrangements in South Africa have often blurred the line between social partnership and partisan alignment, enabling forms of political patronage and clientelism that distort bargaining processes (Maake-Malatji, 2023).

Political interference can manifest in several ways. Firstly, it may privilege politically aligned unions in bargaining forums, granting them greater access to decision-makers and more favourable consideration of their demands, while marginalising independent or rival unions.

This undermines collective solidarity and weakens labour's overall bargaining position (Mokgolo & Dikotla, 2021). Secondly, political actors may intervene in negotiations to delay or expedite agreements based on electoral calculations rather than substantive labour relations considerations. Thirdly, bargaining outcomes themselves may be shaped to serve political ends, such as securing wage increases ahead of elections or postponing unpopular austerity measures until after political milestones.

In the North-West Province, where ANC dominance has been accompanied by intense intra-party competition, political interference in public sector bargaining has at times reflected factional dynamics. Union leaders aligned with provincial political factions may use bargaining processes as platforms to demonstrate political strength or undermine rivals, thereby complicating efforts to reach agreements grounded in evidence and mutual interest. Such politicisation not only distorts priorities but also risks undermining the credibility of bargaining institutions in the eyes of both workers and the public.

2.5.3 Union capacity and organisational effectiveness

Union capacity refers to the organisational, technical, and strategic resources that enable unions to engage effectively in collective bargaining. Capacity is multidimensional, encompassing factors such as membership engagement, internal governance, financial stability, research and policy expertise, and negotiation skills (O'Connor & Mortimer, 2013). High-capacity unions can articulate coherent demands grounded in empirical evidence, mobilise members strategically, and sustain industrial action when necessary.

In the South African public sector, union capacity varies considerably. Large unions such as NEHAWU and SADTU maintain extensive organisational networks, dedicated research units, and experienced negotiators (Botiveau, 2017). However, even these unions face challenges related to internal democracy, leadership contestation, and the centralisation of decision-making. In some cases, grassroots participation in bargaining mandates is limited, resulting in a disconnect between the demands tabled at bargaining forums and the priorities of ordinary members (Tiro, 2022). Smaller unions, meanwhile, often struggle with inadequate resources, limited access to bargaining platforms, and marginalisation in multi-union forums.

Inter-union rivalry further undermines organisational effectiveness. The proliferation of breakaway unions and sector-specific associations in South Africa has fragmented labour representation, allowing employers to exploit divisions by engaging selectively with certain unions or playing them off against one another. In the North-West Province, such fragmentation

has occasionally led to parallel negotiations and inconsistent messaging, weakening labour's overall bargaining position and delaying the resolution of disputes.

2.5.4 Resource constraints and fiscal limitations

The fiscal context within which public sector bargaining takes place exerts a profound influence on outcomes. Resource constraints are not merely a matter of accounting; they are deeply political, reflecting choices about taxation, public spending priorities, and macroeconomic policy. In South Africa, persistent economic stagnation, rising public debt, and a disproportionately large public wage bill have prompted the National Treasury to adopt a more restrictive fiscal stance, emphasising wage restraint and headcount reductions (Nkuna-Mavutane et al., 2024; Solanke et al., 2021).

From the state's perspective, affordability concerns limit the scope for wage increases, particularly multi-year agreements with high cumulative costs. From the unions' perspective, such constraints are often viewed as the result of corruption, mismanagement, and policy incoherence rather than genuine fiscal necessity. This divergence in interpretation fuels mistrust and adversarial bargaining dynamics (Van der Walt, 2018). In the North-West Province, fiscal limitations are compounded by administrative inefficiencies, service delivery backlogs, and political instability, which further erode the capacity to implement agreements even when they are reached.

For example, wage agreements concluded at the provincial chamber level have sometimes been delayed due to budgetary reallocations or shortfalls, exacerbating tensions between unions and government departments. Institutional resource constraints also affect the functioning of bargaining structures themselves. Provincial bargaining chambers may lack sufficient administrative staff, technical expertise, or logistical support to manage negotiations and monitor implementation effectively. This under-resourcing undermines the credibility of collective bargaining as a mechanism for delivering timely and meaningful outcomes.

2.5.5 Legal and procedural complexity

South Africa's public sector bargaining system operates within a comprehensive legal framework, encompassing constitutional provisions, the LRA, and sector-specific regulations. While this framework provides important safeguards for workers and ensures procedural fairness, it can also create legal and procedural complexities that delay or derail negotiations. The system's formalism, while promoting predictability, often entrenches adversaries by encouraging parties to seek legal remedies rather than pursue negotiated settlements

(Benjamin, 2013). Disputes over the interpretation of agreements, procedural compliance, or the legality of strikes frequently escalate to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) or the Labour Court. While these bodies play an important role in enforcing rights, their involvement can prolong disputes and increase costs for both sides.

Contradictory court rulings further complicate matters, creating uncertainty about the scope and enforceability of bargaining rights. The judicialisation of collective bargaining also shifts decision-making power from elected negotiators to legal professionals, potentially weakening the democratic legitimacy of outcomes. In the North-West Province, legal disputes over the implementation of wage agreements have at times paralysed negotiations, diverting attention from substantive issues and fostering cynicism among workers about the efficacy of the bargaining process.

2.5.6 Sociopolitical environment and public perception

Collective bargaining in the public sector does not occur in isolation from the broader sociopolitical environment. Public opinion, media framing, and civil society engagement all influence the legitimacy and effectiveness of bargaining outcomes. Where unions are perceived as defenders of workers' rights and champions of equitable service delivery, they enjoy greater moral authority and political leverage. Conversely, when unions are seen as self-serving, resistant to performance accountability, or willing to disrupt essential services, public support wanes (Tiro, 2022).

The ethical dilemmas surrounding strikes in essential services are particularly salient in shaping public perception. For example, the 2010 public sector strike, which saw significant disruption to hospitals and schools, generated widespread criticism and strained relations between unions and the communities they serve (Arnold & Ukpere, 2012). In such contexts, governments may capitalise on public dissatisfaction to justify a hardline stance in negotiations, thereby reducing unions' bargaining power.

In the North-West Province, where service delivery challenges are acute, public patience with industrial action is often limited. Communities reliant on public healthcare and education are quick to feel the impact of strikes, making it difficult for unions to sustain public sympathy. The media's portrayal of disputes further shapes perceptions, often simplifying complex fiscal and policy issues into moral binaries that obscure the structural determinants of conflict.

2.6 Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of Collective Bargaining

Understanding these systemic challenges in public-sector collective bargaining in South Africa underscores the need to adopt evidence-based strategies to legitimise the process and make it more efficient and responsive (De Spiegelaere, 2024). Structural and behavioural dimensions must be taken into account when developing such strategies (Garnero, 2021), and they must be adaptive to the changing economic, political, and social contexts in which bargaining occurs. Drawing on international experiences and the South African case, particularly the realities of the North-West Province, six interrelated strategies are proposed: rethink institutional design and governance; capacity building and the professionalisation of unions; depoliticising bargaining processes; digitalisation and analytics; strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms; and integrating social dialogue with citizen engagement.

2.6.1 Rethinking institutional design and governance

Institutional architecture is crucial to the effectiveness of collective bargaining. The South African dual-level Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) at the national level, integrated with provincial bargaining chambers at the subnational level, was intended to provide national coherence and regional responsiveness. In practice, however, this decentralised design has resulted in fragmentation and confusion over jurisdiction, as well as inconsistent implementation of agreements at times (Tiro, 2022).

Reform of institutional design must start by understanding the mandates, decision-making authority, and accountability mechanisms of each bargaining tier (Garnero, 2021). A more precise definition of the roles of the two forums, national and provincial, would reduce duplication and avoid disputes over which body has authority to negotiate specific issues. For example, negotiations over wages affecting the national fiscal position may be the prerogative of the PSCBC; meanwhile, workplace safety, local conditions, or the implementation of policy at a regional level could be cited as the prerogative of provincial chambers with binding authority.

Several successful instructional experiences can be drawn from international experiences worldwide. Nordic countries, for instance, are characterised by some highly coordinated bargaining, where central frameworks limit to broad parameters appropriate, for example, wage growth targets, and decentralised negotiations that allow for adaptation to sector-specific and local conditions (Marutlulle, 2021). The key is in vertical alignment between levels to avoid the

known contradictions that arise when decentralised agreements deviate from national commitments.

Governance reforms in the North-West Province could also include addressing weaknesses in the provincial chamber's administration. An increase in staff capacity, with a right-on-time budget for implementing agreements, and a system of transparent reporting mechanisms could improve efficiency and trustworthiness. Institutional governance could also be improved by rotating independent chairs to the bargaining sessions and by reducing the perceived bias of political influence over the facilitation.

2.6.2 Capacity building and professionalisation of unions

Union organisation, technical capacity, and professionalism in representation are all contributing factors that underpin negotiation efficiency. Although mobilisation power is quite representative, it primarily resides in South African public-sector unions, particularly within federations that form large social bodies. Such unions are often deficient in the technical skills needed for evidence-based negotiations on important topics such as fiscal analysis, comparative wage benchmarking, and policy evaluation (O'Connor & Mortimer, 2023).

From the above, it is clear that capacity building must focus on developing the analysis, strategy, and communication skills of trade union negotiators. Structured training programs should be put in place, possibly in partnership with academic institutions, research organisations, and international bodies such as PSI. For instance, Public Services International (PSI) has introduced training modules in Latin America that incorporate negotiation skills, financial literacy, and a gender equity perspective, preparing unions to build more solid and inclusive bargaining agendas (ILO, 2020).

Professionalisation also means reforming the institution within trade unions. In transparent, participatory mandate-setting, white men's negotiators tend to legitimise and succeed in their bargaining positions, as these positions actually reflect member priorities. Rotating leadership roles within negotiation teams also builds a broader base of skilled representatives, avoiding dependency on a small cadre of senior officials. In the North-West, for example, where most smaller unions lack many resources, cooperation among them in training will help level the playing field so that larger unions do not monopolise technical knowledge in multi-union forums.

Professionalisation should also include ethical standards and codes of conduct for negotiators to prevent conflicts of interest and promote consistency in their bargaining behaviour. Most

importantly for the South African unions, such codes might insulate bargaining positions against partisan manipulation, given that some union leadership is entangled with political issues.

2.6.3 Depoliticising bargaining processes

The politicisation of public sector collective bargaining in South Africa is one of its most persistent sources of dysfunction. While the historical alliance between COSATU and the ANC afforded unions significant influence in shaping post-apartheid labour policy, it has also blurred the line between industrial negotiation and political bargaining (Von Broembsen, 2024). In some cases, political loyalty has tempered unions' willingness to confront government employers robustly, while in others, political factionalism has intensified intra-union rivalry and destabilised bargaining forums.

Depoliticising bargaining processes does not imply severing all connections between unions and political parties, but rather establishing institutional safeguards to ensure that negotiations are guided primarily by labour relations considerations and evidence-based analysis. This could involve formal rules preventing negotiators from holding active political office during their tenure, or requiring full disclosure of political affiliations in leadership roles.

Internationally, countries with strong traditions of social dialogue, such as Germany and the Netherlands, demonstrate that political pluralism within unions need not undermine bargaining effectiveness when institutional norms prioritise professional negotiation over partisan positioning (Schmidt & Müller, 2018). In the South African context, independent facilitation of high-stakes negotiations could help reduce the influence of political actors.

In the North-West Province, depoliticisation could also be supported by diversifying representation on provincial bargaining teams to include seasoned negotiators, technical specialists, and grassroots leaders. This balance could ensure that bargaining positions remain rooted in workplace realities rather than political strategy.

2.6.4 Leveraging digital tools and data analytics

The digital transformation of labour relations holds the promise of making collective bargaining more transparent, responsive, and inclusive. In many instances, large-scale engagement with the membership is hindered by logistical constraints, leading to information about bargaining progress filtered through limited communication channels. Digital tools can quickly eliminate

barriers by enabling real-time updates, online consultations, and secure voting on ballot proposals to approve the proposed contracts (Voss & Bertossa, 2022).

Meanwhile, data analytics could solidify the bargaining case. Union and employer now seem set on negotiating from a shared empirical perspective, aggregating and analysing, respectively, data on salaries, cost-of-living indices, productivity metrics, and budgetary projections. E-negotiation platforms operating in Estonia and parts of Scandinavia have incorporated data dashboards into the bargaining process, allowing both sides to visualise the impacts of different proposals on budgets and household incomes (Majam & Jarbandhan, 2022).

The digital transformation of bargaining in South Africa's public sector could demonstrate the potential of e-platforms to bridge the gap between the national union leadership and provincial members. In a North-West context, a mobile app could poll members on bargaining priorities, progress updates, and feedback on settlement offers before signing. This would improve both transparency and democratic legitimacy of bargaining results.

2.6.5 Strengthening dispute resolution mechanisms

The credibility and stability of collective bargaining depend in part on effective mechanisms to resolve disputes that may arise when negotiations break down. To this end, the CCMA and the PSCBC's respective dispute resolution mechanisms are vital in the South African context. However, problems of backlogged cases, enforcement limitations, and perceived bias pose challenges to such institutions (Benjamin, 2023).

On the one hand, enhancing dispute resolution should encompass procedural reforms and capacity-building initiatives. In terms of process, it is proposed that timelines for conciliation and arbitration should be expedited; protracted disputes tend to escalate into strikes or litigation. The proposal for a "cooling-off" period before industrial action in essential services may provide an opportunity to attempt a facilitated resolution.

Capacity building could include establishing a public-sector-focused arbitration body to handle cases with greater expertise in the unique fiscal, political, and service-delivery dimensions of public-sector disputes, thereby allowing it to provide binding decisions in deadlocked cases before it, particularly in those cases where the public interest is most directly at stake in essential services.

Internationally, there is strong evidence that multi-tier dispute-resolution approaches, namely the combination of informal mediation and formal arbitration, work very well. In New Zealand, for example, a team intervenes with the parties involved in the dispute before the commencement of formal proceedings, often resolving the dispute amicably well before it could escalate further (ILO, 2017). Application of this model in the North-West Province could reduce dependency on strikes as the key means of dispute resolution.

2.7 Summary of Contribution to Literature

In light of the very significant effects of extensive global scholarship on collective bargaining in the public sector, the gaps-conceptual, empirical, and methodological-remain largely in South Africa and other such contexts. The majority of the literature relies on evidence gathered from very stable, highly industrialised countries, where many fiscal constraints, political challenges, and implementation concerns are absent compared to developing regions. The literature on the Global South ranges from descriptive to overgeneralised, missing the finer-grained differences that often emerge at the intercountry or subnational levels. Perhaps the most significant gap has been the lack of deep empirical analysis of subnational variation, something particularly acute in a country like South Africa, where provincial chambers face few specialised resources, expertise, and capacity constraints.

The preceding review of literature demonstrates that collective bargaining in the public sector has been widely examined across legal, institutional, political, and economic dimensions. Scholars consistently recognise collective bargaining as a central mechanism for regulating employment relations and institutionalising conflict within democratic governance systems (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020; Baccaro & Howell, 2017). However, the review also reveals that much of the existing scholarship remains fragmented, with studies often focusing on isolated variables such as union militancy, fiscal constraints, political interference, or strike outcomes, rather than analysing how these factors interact within specific institutional settings.

A key contribution of this study lies in moving beyond descriptive and outcome-based analyses of collective bargaining—particularly the tendency to use strike frequency as a proxy for bargaining failure. Instead, this study advances the literature by conceptualising collective bargaining efficacy as a multidimensional construct encompassing process functionality, mandate clarity, relational trust, and implementation fidelity. This approach responds directly to calls in the literature for more nuanced, institutionally grounded analyses of public-sector bargaining systems (Skosana, 2022; Shabangu, 2024).

Furthermore, the literature review highlights a notable empirical gap concerning provincial-level collective bargaining coordination. While national bargaining institutions such as the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) have received substantial scholarly attention, there is limited empirical research examining how provincial coordination structures operationalise national agreements and manage labour relations in practice. The role of the Office of the Premier, as the central coordinating authority for provincial collective bargaining, remains underexplored despite its strategic importance in mandate consolidation, affordability alignment, and implementation oversight. By focusing on the North West Province and the Office of the Premier as the unit of analysis, this study contributes new empirical insights into this under-researched level of public-sector bargaining.

From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the application of Pluralist Industrial Relations Theory by demonstrating how institutionalised conflict management is shaped not only by the existence of bargaining structures, but by their operational capacity and relational dynamics. The integration of Neo-Institutional Theory further enhances this contribution by explaining why formally robust bargaining frameworks may fail to deliver effective outcomes due to decoupling between rules and practice. In doing so, the study advances theoretical understanding by linking abstract institutional theories to observable bargaining behaviours and outcomes within a provincial administration.

Importantly, this study also contributes to the literature by clarifying and justifying the relationships between key variables identified in previous research. Rather than treating factors such as capacity, political dynamics, fiscal constraints, and trust as independent determinants, the study demonstrates how these variables interact within a centrally coordinated bargaining system to influence collective bargaining efficacy and, ultimately, public service delivery. This integrative perspective addresses a key limitation in existing studies, which often fail to explain *why* and *how* these relationships manifest in specific institutional contexts.

In sum, this study contributes to public-sector industrial relations scholarship by providing a theoretically informed, empirically grounded, and institutionally focused analysis of collective bargaining efficacy at the provincial level. The findings are expected to enrich academic debates on public-sector labour relations, inform policy and administrative reforms, and offer practical guidance for strengthening collective bargaining systems in South Africa and comparable governance contexts.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically explored the multifaceted dimensions of collective bargaining in the public sector, with particular emphasis on its conceptual foundations, legal-institutional context, global and local practices, determinants of outcomes, and the roles of key stakeholders. The literature reveals that, while collective bargaining is constitutionally and legislatively protected in South Africa, its practical effectiveness is hindered by political interference, weak institutional coordination, leadership challenges, and capacity deficits within unions and government structures. Comparative international experiences underscore the value of coordinated bargaining systems, professionalised unions, inclusive representation, and robust dispute resolution mechanisms.

Prolonged negotiations, wage disputes, and service delivery disruptions continue to be recurring challenges in South Africa. Stakeholder roles, particularly those of unions, government, mediators, and bargaining councils, are central to both the strengths and shortcomings of the system. The chapter concluded by identifying evidence-based strategies to strengthen bargaining frameworks, including institutional reform, digital innovation, and enhanced social dialogue. These insights closely align with the study's objectives: to critically examine the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North-West Province and to propose informed recommendations for its improvement. The next chapter outlines the research methodology used to empirically investigate these themes.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Hence, the research methodology that underpinned this study on the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the public sector in the province of North-West focused explicitly on the Premier's Office (OTP) as a provincial coordinating locus. Methodology is the theoretical and systematic analysis of methods applied to a field. The theoretical underpinning of the research in methodology for explaining and justifying choices in terms of the research design and methods of data collection and analysis.

This presents the epistemological-ontological assumptions of the study, as well as the reasons for interpreting the paradigm and qualitative approach within a case study design. It outlines the strategy for selecting participants, the methods for data collection and analysis, and concludes with a thorough discussion of the ethical considerations of this study and its trustworthiness. Each section of this chapter contains an argument for the methodological choices made and how they have helped to advance the research objectives.

3.2 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is the general philosophical framework that guides a research project: a viewpoint adopted by the researcher to make sense of the world and construct knowledge (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In this study, the interpretivist paradigm was employed-the reality is considered to be a social construct and best understood through subjective interpretations of individual experience (Pham, 2018). Interpretivism rests on the assumption that knowledge is not objective and generalisable, but rather context-based on human experiences and social interactions (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

This interpretivist paradigm was deemed appropriate, as the core of this research was the exploration of human behaviours, perceptions, and experiences surrounding collective bargaining processes in the public sector. The emphasis in the research would be on understanding how individuals render meaning to their experiences, interpreting the context of a phenomenon; the contrast here with the positivist paradigms is that, more often than not, the positivists have sought only measurable, observable facts (Pham, 2018; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). It requires rich, in-depth descriptions of the motivations, beliefs, and actions of public servants, union leaders, and government officials engaged in collective bargaining (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

Thus, the interpretivist paradigm enabled the study to explore complexities of the negotiation process, observe and interpret the dynamics of power, and examine the causes of perceived successes and failures in the collective bargaining process. This sits nicely within the OTP-centred focus of the study, whereby meanings are co-constructed within provincial chambers (CCPNWP; GPSSBC/PELRC/PHSDSBC) coordinated through the OTP. This interpretative paradigm enabled the researcher to observe social phenomena in their natural setting, thereby capturing the participants' lived realities and fostering a more holistic understanding of the research problem.

3.3 Research Approach

The study adopted an inductive approach consistent with qualitative inquiry and interpretivist philosophy. In inductive research, theory or pattern development precedes the testing of any testable hypothesis (Azungah, 2018) and proceeds from specific observations to a more general level of generalisation and theory (Azungah, 2018).

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the efficacy of collective bargaining within a selected public sector department in the North West Province. A qualitative approach is appropriate where the objective is to gain in-depth understanding of processes, perceptions, and institutional dynamics rather than to test predefined hypotheses or measure variables numerically (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Collective bargaining efficacy is a complex, socially constructed phenomenon shaped by institutional arrangements, power relations, trust, and lived experiences of participants. These dimensions cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. A qualitative approach therefore enables the researcher to explore *how* and *why* collective bargaining processes function as they do within a specific provincial context, aligning directly with the exploratory nature of the study's objectives.

The inductive approach also required flexibility and an iterative linking of data collection and data analysis (McFarland et al., 2018). Therefore, the researcher was constantly engaged with the data to identify patterns, rework research questions, and rethink prior findings as the analysis was refined. This cyclical nature of research sustained an interplay between data collection and analysis, enriching the study in terms of depth and breadth while ensuring that findings were firmly grounded in the empirical realities of the participants.

3.4 Research Design

A qualitative case study design was employed, focusing on the Office of the Premier (OTP) as the central coordinating authority for collective bargaining in the North West Province. Case study research is particularly suitable when the study seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018).

The choice of a single-case design is justified by the institutional centrality of the OTP in coordinating bargaining mandates, negotiations, and implementation across provincial departments. Rather than aiming for statistical generalisation, the study seeks analytical generalisation by generating contextually rich insights into collective bargaining efficacy at the provincial coordination level. Alternative designs, such as surveys or experimental methods, were deemed unsuitable because they would not capture the depth of institutional interactions, power dynamics, and interpretive meanings required to address the research objectives.

Several reasons were advanced for considering a case study appropriate for this research. The first is that case study design allows the study of social phenomena in their natural settings; hence, this design was fitting for investigating collective bargaining processes, which are steeped in institutional, political, and economic contexts (Ridder, 2017). A second rationale is that case studies allow the use of multiple sources of evidence, such as interviews, documents, and observations, adding depth and credibility to the findings (Schoch, 2020).

This research examined a single, bounded case: the Office of the Premier (OTP) as the lead department in provincial collective bargaining in the North West Province. Within this embedded case, the sub-units of analysis included (i) OTP Labour Relations/HR (mandate-setting and coordination), (ii) Provincial Treasury (affordability/costing support), (iii) recognised trade unions active in provincial chambers (e.g. NEHAWU, PSA, SADTU, DENOSA, POPCRU), (iv) chamber secretariat/administration where applicable, and (v) a selected line department (e.g., Health) in terms of its engagement with OTP at implementation. This OTP-anchored embedded design allowed the researcher to scrutinise the dynamics of collective bargaining across multiple levels and perspectives while keeping a coherent focus on the provincial public sector context.

3.5 Population and Sampling Strategy

3.5.1 Population

The population for this study comprised key stakeholders involved in collective bargaining within the North West provincial public service, including Office of the Premier officials, recognised trade union representatives, and selected departmental stakeholders interfacing with the OTP.

The population in this study consisted of individuals involved in collective bargaining processes in the public sector of the North-West Province. In line with the OTP centred design, the population constituted OTP labour relations/HR officials with Province Treasury officials involved in costing and mandates, recognised union representatives active in CCPNWP and sectoral chambers, secretariat/administration of the chamber and a limited number of line-department representatives (e.g., Health) interfacing directly with the OTP on agreement implementation. The population surveyed in this study was selected for their direct involvement in negotiating, making policies, and implementing labour agreements.

This population selection was guided by the study's aim to assess the effectiveness of collective bargaining as perceived by different stakeholders. Whereas public-sector employees discussed the lived realities of union leaders and their members, government officials presented a managerial and policy perspective. The population is diverse enough to capture a fair representation of the institutional, relational, and procedural factors that influence collective bargaining.

3.5.2 Sampling technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who possessed direct experience and institutional knowledge of provincial collective bargaining processes. Purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research where the aim is to obtain information-rich cases capable of providing deep insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). The study adopted purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling method most commonly used in qualitative research. It selects rich, information-rich cases that offer fascinating, in-depth insight into the phenomenon under study (Robinson, 2024). The participants were selected based on inclusive criteria that require direct participation in OTP-coordinated provincial collective bargaining (CCPNWP/GPSSBC/PELRC/PHSDSBC process), a minimum of 5 years' experience in collective bargaining or provincial labour relations/HR functions, and willingness to participate in the study.

Purposive sampling was appropriate for the study, as it would allow the researcher to identify and involve individuals with the relevant knowledge and experience (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). This sampling method could thus produce a meaningful representation of information specific to context and pertains to collective bargaining processes in North West Province. Snowball sampling was also used to access additional participants through member referral, particularly when access to key informants was limited by bureaucratic or political barriers (Robinson, 2024).

Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Direct involvement in provincial or sectoral bargaining chambers
- Experience in mandate formulation, negotiation, or implementation
- Institutional roles relevant to labour relations within the OTP or recognised unions

This ensured that participants were well positioned to provide informed and credible perspectives on collective bargaining efficacy.

3.5.3 Sample size

Although an initial sample of 20 participants was targeted, data saturation was reached after 10 interviews. Data saturation occurs when additional data collection no longer yields new themes or insights relevant to the research questions (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The decision to conclude data collection at this point was guided by the repetition of patterns across interviews rather than by numerical thresholds.

In qualitative case study research, sample size adequacy is determined by depth and richness of data rather than representativeness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final sample was therefore sufficient to capture diverse yet convergent perspectives across labour and management stakeholders, thereby enhancing the credibility and robustness of the findings.

The distribution of participants was as follows:

Table 3.1 Breakdown of participant sample and the units they represented

Organisational Unit	Number of Participants
---------------------	------------------------

Provincial Treasury	2
Office of the Premier (OTP)	3
Unions	2
Department of Health	2
Local Government	1
Total	10

The sample size was considered adequate for qualitative inquiry, providing sufficient diversity of perspectives while allowing for in-depth engagement with each participant. The aim was not statistical generalisation but theoretical generalisation, where insights derived from the data could inform broader understandings of collective bargaining effectiveness in similar contexts (Lakens, 2022; Nørreklit, Nørreklit & Mitchell, 2016).

3.6 Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interview guides, which allowed for consistency across interviews while providing flexibility to probe emerging issues and clarify participant responses. Semi-structured interviews are well suited to qualitative case studies as they facilitate in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, interpretations, and institutional perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The interview guide was developed based on the study's research objectives and informed by key themes emerging from the literature, including bargaining processes, mandate clarity, capacity, trust, and implementation challenges. This alignment ensured content validity, as the instrument adequately covered constructs relevant to collective bargaining efficacy.

To enhance credibility and dependability, the interview guide was reviewed by the research supervisor prior to data collection, and minor refinements were made to improve clarity and sequencing of questions. Probing questions were used consistently to elicit detailed responses and ensure comparability across interviews.

In qualitative research, reliability is addressed through consistency of procedures rather than replication of results. The use of a standardised interview guide and systematic data analysis procedures contributed to methodological rigour and transparency.

Each interview lasted about 60 minutes in a confidential, private setting, either face-to-face or via secure online platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. The interviews were done according to an interview protocol covering four thematic areas:

- a) the structure and practice of collective bargaining;
- b) success and failure factors;
- c) impact on service delivery;
- d) proposed improvement.

The probes explicitly examined OTP's coordination role, in line with the study's focus (mandating, affordability testing with the Provincial Treasury, and chamber agenda management), and the fidelity of agreement implementation across departments. Additionally, while the protocol ensured consistency across all interviews, it also allowed each participant to speak freely about any topic.

All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed word-for-word. Field notes would also be compiled to document nonverbal cues, as well as contextual observations and reflections. The researcher maintained a diary documenting the interviewing process, along with logistical challenges and personal insights that can contribute to reflexivity in the study and enhance its credibility. Special care was taken to ensure that all procedures that would generate data would be in the best interests of participants' rights, autonomy, and dignity.

3.7 Data Analysis

As the primary data analysis method, thematic analysis was used. The systematic yet flexible approach allows the researcher to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meanings within qualitative data. Thematic analysis organises data according to key emergent themes, offering a potentially insightful mechanism for exploratory research aimed at understanding nebulous social phenomena (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The procedure adopted follows that specified in Braun and Clarke (2006), with the six phases:

- a) familiarisation with the data;
- b) generating initial codes;
- c) search for themes;
- d) review themes;
- e) define and name themes;
- f) writing a report.

The first step involved the researcher exhaustively reading and re-reading all the interview transcripts to develop insight into the data. After that, the coding process commenced through manual coding and the use of the ATLAS. ti software to identify significant statements and N recurring ideas.

Codes were then grouped into larger chunks or themes based on conceptual similarities. These themes were iteratively refined through the comparison of raw data and peer feedback. For instance, codes related to trust, transparency, and communication were grouped under the broader theme "Relational Dynamics in Bargaining." In the same way, codes reflecting bureaucratic constraints and resource limitations were categorised under "Institutional Barriers."

With thematic analysis, the study did not produce mere descriptive reports; instead, it provided classic analytical insights. The themes captured not only the surface-level content of the interviews but also the deeper underlying assumptions, values, and contradictions that informed participants' perspectives on collective bargaining. Key findings were illustrated with verbatim quotations to preserve participants' voices and strengthen the analysis's authenticity.

3.8 Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness concerns the rigour and thus the validity of the study's findings. Merit was given to the Lincoln and Guba (1985) framework for ensuring the study met the criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria, in turn, were used as benchmarks to judge the quality and reliability of the research process and the outcome.

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility concerns the extent to which one can have confidence in the truth of the findings. Several strategies were used to enhance credibility further (Little & Green, 2022). First, triangulation compares data from different participants across the sectors: health, local government, unions, and Treasury. Second, member checking was conducted, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of their interview transcripts and interpretations.

Third, prolonged engagement in the research setting and with its participants would help to build trust and develop a more nuanced understanding of the context. Prolonged engagement with participants and key stakeholders, both in and out of the research setting, enabled repeated interactions and follow-up questions to clarify ambiguous statements. Finally, the

researcher underwent peer debriefing with academic supervisors and experts in labour relations, where the researcher's interpretations and assumptions could be challenged.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings are applicable in other contexts or settings (Wu & He, 2023). This was addressed through detailed thick descriptions of the research context, participants' backgrounds, and the socio-political landscape of the North-West Province. By discussing the particularities of the case study, including the participating institutions, policy frameworks, and negotiating practices, the authors positioned the reader to judge the applicability of the findings to their context. The researcher also ensured that the themes and interpretations made from the data were grounded in real-world experiences, thereby enhancing their resonance with practitioners and scholars in contexts similar to theirs. While not intended to be statistically generalizable, the study offered theoretical propositions that could inform policy and practice beyond the immediate case.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of research findings over time (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2019). This has been achieved through a detailed audit trail documenting each step of the research process. The audit trail contained records of interview schedules, data coding processes, thematic frameworks, and methodological choices. In addition, ATLAS.ti software was utilised to ensure systematic coding while maintaining transparency in data management. An external audit by an experienced qualitative researcher was carried out to review the research protocols, coding schemes, and analytical logic. This external validation confirmed that the research process was logical, traceable, and replicable.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the evidence found is influenced more by participants' input than by the researcher's bias (Amankwaa, 2016). The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study that tracked personal biases, preconceptions, and emotional reactions. There were opportunities for critical reflection on these throughout supervision to maintain an objective stance. Furthermore, all interpretations remained firmly anchored in the data, with verbatim support included through citations of participant quotations. Records were kept of anonymised transcripts and coding, which were available for audit. The triangulation of data sources and feedback integrates perspectives from multiple stakeholders to ensure that findings reflect participants' authentic voices and experiences.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are an important aspect of any research, as they are critical to determining the authenticity of a study's findings (Resnik, 2013:04). The North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) approved this study's ethics on 11 June 2025, under ethics number NWU-00729-25-A4. This study was conducted with the subjects' consent and in accordance with the right to privacy and anonymity. The data collected was handled with integrity and utmost honesty, especially in terms of the administration of questionnaires. The study also ensured a lack of bias and persuasion whilst targeting a high response rate (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:193). Participants were informed that the study was intended solely for academic purposes and that participation was voluntary.

3.9.1 Permission and informed consent

It is of paramount importance that all researchers should be equipped and aware of research ethics. The study was carried out with objectivity to limit potential risks of bias, manipulation by other motives, and oversimplification of issues that arose during the research. The study got approval from the North West University to be conducted. All researchers must be equipped and aware of research ethics. A study should be based, as far as possible and practicable, on the freely given informed consent of those under study and is the principal means by which participant autonomy is recognised and given meaning (Dyck & Allen, 2013). The participants were given both verbal and written consent forms. The researcher explained to participants what happens to the data once the research project is completed, making it as transparent as possible.

It is the mandate of the researcher to explain as fully as is reasonable and appropriate, and in terms meaningful to the participants: the aims and nature of the research, who is undertaking it, who is funding it, its likely duration, why it is being undertaken, the possible consequences of the research, and how the results are to be disseminated (Israel & Hay, 2006).

3.9.2 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

To maintain participants' anonymity, pseudonyms were used in place of their real names. All participants, 10 recruited for the study, were anonymous. The study used tags of Participants 1-10, as the terms were used to identify the 10 participants. The participants were also informed that the information derived from this study was for academic purposes only. The data was

highly protected, and none of their personal information or identities would be given away. It is imperative to note that the study was conducted with the subjects' confidentiality and the right to privacy and anonymity protected. The data collected was handled with integrity and honesty, especially during the administration of the interview guides.

The privacy of research participants should be respected at all times, and personal information relating to participants should be kept confidential and secure (Kruger, Ndebele & Horn, 2014). A study must comply with current data protection and privacy legislation and should consider whether it is appropriate to record certain sensitive information (World Health Organisation, 2009). The study addressed these aspects by anonymising personal details and limiting access to individuals' information and their responses to the researcher only. The aspect of obtaining informed consent and clearly explaining data use and protection was intended to respect participants' privacy. The study also avoided collecting unnecessary sensitive information.

3.9.3 Right to withdrawal

As a complement to the ethical aspects of informed consent and permission, the research provided participants with the right and opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without judgment or prejudice.

3.9.4 Justice and fairness

A study must be conducted in a manner that is fair and respectful of participants' dignity (Kara, 2018). The researcher conducted the research with fairness and justice in mind, treating all participants equally and fairly regardless of their background or socio-economic standing. Equality and fairness were very much present in all stages and areas of the research.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed account of the research methodology used to explore the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North-West Province's public sector. Guided by the interpretivist paradigm and an inductive qualitative approach, the study adopted a case study design to examine the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. Purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews facilitated the collection of rich, context-specific data, which were analysed using thematic analysis. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were systematically implemented.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, ensuring that the rights and dignity of participants were upheld. This methodological foundation enabled a robust exploration of collective bargaining dynamics and laid the groundwork for the findings and discussion presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter involves the analysis, interpretation, and discussion of findings from the in-depth interviews with participants in collective bargaining activities in the North-West Province civil sector. Data were coded and organised in ATLAS.ti into themes that captured the lived experiences, challenges, and perceptions of union representatives, employer officials, and other participants in the bargaining process. The discussion relies on the interpretive and inductive paradigms embraced in the present research, which enable themes to arise from participants' stories and are critically reviewed through the theoretical framework and literature reviewed in the previous chapters. The chapter is organised around the following themes: capacity gaps, mandating and preparation, implementation issues, trust and communication, structural frameworks, fiscal constraints and the effect of bargaining on service delivery. Every theme is discussed through direct quotations from participants, followed by an analytical interpretation and comparison with existing scholarship and policy frameworks.

4.2 Demographic Profile

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, the study had earmarked 20 participants. However, data saturation was reached after conducting 10 interviews with individuals from key institutions responsible for collective bargaining in the public sector of the North-West Province. It comprised representatives from the Department of Health, local government, unions, Office of the Premier, and the Provincial Treasury. This distributed institutional representation was intended to facilitate the capture of views across a breadth of local administrative and labour structures involved in the negotiation process, thereby ensuring that the study drew participants from a wide range of perspectives.

Demographic data were cross-tabulated by participants' job roles and years of experience to contextualise participants' views and determine whether perceptions of bargaining effectiveness vary by personal or organisational characteristics. Table 4.1 below provides the breakdown of the participants per the units they represented:

Table 4.1 Job Roles of Participants

Organisational Unit	Number of Participants
Provincial Treasury	2
Office of the Premier (OTP)	3

Unions	2
Department of Health	2
Local Government	1
Total	10

The distribution of participants across organisational units reflects a balanced representation of key stakeholders involved in collective bargaining in the North-West Province. The Provincial Treasury (n=2) and the Office of the Premier (n=3) together form the largest group, consistent with their central roles in mandate-setting and provincial coordination. Union representatives (n=2) provide critical labour-side perspectives, while the Department of Health (n=2) provides sector-specific insights linked to service-delivery implications. The inclusion of Local Government (n=1) ensures that municipal-level dynamics are captured. Overall, the spread supports a multi-perspective understanding of bargaining processes and outcomes.

Regarding the years of experience in collective bargaining, Table 4.2 provides a breakdown:

Table 4.2 Participant years of experience in collective bargaining

Experience Category	Frequency (n=10)	Percentage
5–9 years	3	30%
10–14 years	4	40%
15+ years	3	30%
Total	10	100%

Table 4.2 indicates that participants had considerably longer collective bargaining experience, thereby enhancing the credibility and depth of the study's findings. However, the group comprising 40% had between 10 and 14 years of experience and was quite familiar with different bargaining cycles and prolonged institutional processes. Equal proportions (30% each) represented individuals with 5-9 years and those with 15 years or more, indicating a combination of novices, mid-career, and very experienced practitioners. This had to take care that the reflections gathered were informed by history and current bargaining realities. The experience profile then provides informed insights into the efficacy and challenges of collective bargaining in the province.

4.3 Overview of the Themes

Analysis of the interview data, supported by the coding patterns and thematic structures generated in the transcript results document, produced four overarching themes. These themes align directly with the four secondary objectives of the study and reflect the core dynamics shaping collective bargaining in the North-West Province. Although several sub-themes emerged during the coding process, the following four constitute the primary analytical pillars for this chapter.

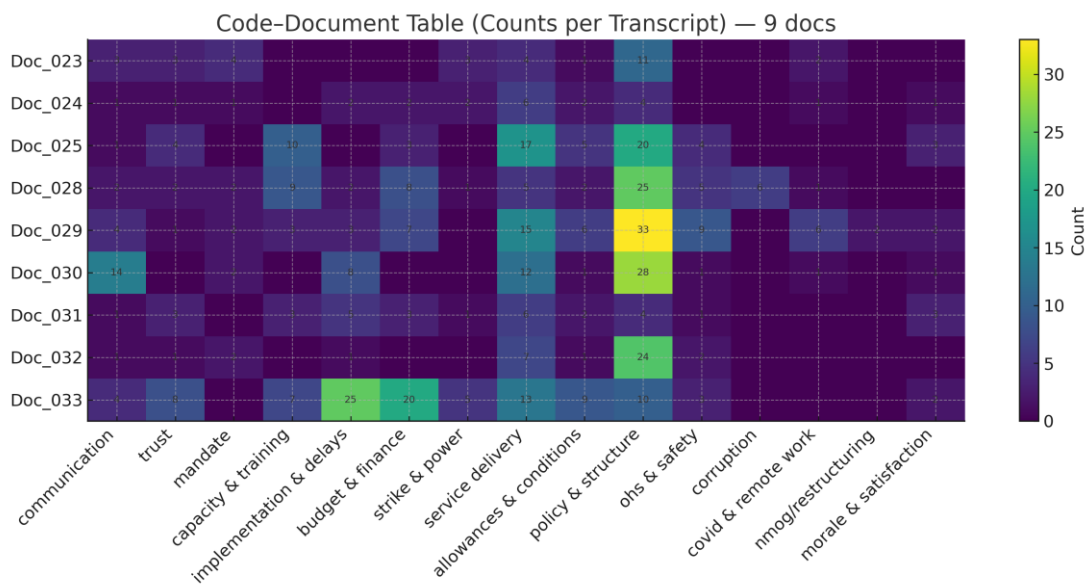


Figure 4.2 Code-document table

Theme 1: Functionality of the collective bargaining process (Objective 1)

The first theme captures participants' views on how collective bargaining operates in the province today. Negotiations mandate clarity, agenda-setting, institutional roles, and coordination between employer structures, which come across strongly in the transcripts. Participants frequently pointed to procedural bottlenecks, unclear participation opportunities, and decision-making delays, which collectively undermine bargaining effectiveness. This theme lays the groundwork for assessing the administrative and structural conditions that have underpinned civil society and bargaining.

The findings indicate that a majority of participants perceived institutional capacity within the Office of the Premier as insufficient to support effective collective bargaining. Participants

highlighted limited technical expertise, high staff turnover, and constrained negotiation preparation as recurring challenges.

Analytically, this finding suggests that collective bargaining challenges in the North West Province are not primarily rooted in adversarial union behaviour, but rather in the institutional weakness of the coordinating authority. Limited capacity undermines mandate formulation, negotiation coherence, and the ability to manage post-agreement implementation, thereby weakening the overall efficacy of the bargaining system.

This finding aligns with Skosana (2022) and Shabangu (2024), who argue that public-sector bargaining failures are often driven by administrative and institutional deficiencies rather than the absence of formal bargaining frameworks. However, this study extends existing literature by locating capacity constraints specifically within provincial coordination structures, an area that has received limited empirical attention. Unlike national-level analyses, the findings demonstrate how capacity deficits at provincial level directly shape bargaining outcomes.

The implication of this finding is that strengthening collective bargaining efficacy requires targeted investment in institutional capacity within Offices of the Premier, including negotiation training, continuity of representation, and technical support. Without addressing these structural weaknesses, reforms focused solely on legal compliance or union regulation are unlikely to yield sustainable improvements.

Theme 2: Determinants of success and failure in collective bargaining (objective 2)

The second theme brings forward the relational and organisational variables that drive bargaining outcomes. The transcripts lay bare deep concerns about a trust deficit, communication hurdles, representation difficulties, and capability issues from both labour and employers' perspectives. Leadership turnover, inadequate preparation, and the quality of interpersonal relations between negotiators, among others, are considered sub-themes within this theme. In this manner, the theme provides an understanding of the human and institutional dynamics that assist or derail constructive bargaining.

Theme 3: The Impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery (Objective 3)

The third theme captures participants' perceptions of how bargaining outcomes affect service delivery. Interviewees noted both positive and negative impacts, including better allowances, improved working conditions, and higher staff morale, as well as lengthy disputes, illegal industrial actions, and other delays in implementation. High-impact areas, such as health, in

which the consequences of bargaining outcomes directly affect service delivery, have received particular emphasis. Thus, this theme links labour relations processes with broader societal concerns.

Theme 4: Strategies for strengthening the effectiveness of collective bargaining (Objective 4)

The last theme summarises participants' suggestions for improving bargaining effectiveness. Suggestions include improving mandate-setting practices, strengthening feedback mechanisms, building capacity, improving data sharing, and formalising workplace forums for early issue resolution. Also stressed were issues such as leadership stability, improved preparation, and clarity on provincial-national links. That is where this theme signals a transition to action-oriented insights and potential policy interventions.

4.4 Theme 1: Functionality of the Collective Bargaining Process

The first theme concerns participants' perceptions of how the collective bargaining process functions in the public sector of the North West Province. The interviews reveal a confusing dissonance between the formalised structure of the process and its inconsistent application, characterised by delays in mandates, fragmentation of coordination, and limited communication across levels of government. A strongly accented theme, found throughout the transcripts, is breakdowns in administrative coordination, especially between actors at the provincial and national levels.

4.4.1 Theme 1 Findings

Several participants noted that the bargaining process is often compromised even before negotiations begin, as negotiators are never given a clear mandate in good time or are not given a mandate at all. Critical comment on this issue made by one participant is that;

"We go to the chamber without a clear mandate because the province delays, and that makes negotiations drag unnecessarily" (Participant 3).

Mandate-setting delays proved to be one of the strongest operational constraints on preparedness, negotiation confidence, and the quality of engagements in the chamber. Participant 6 said similarly:

"By the time the province responds, the issue has escalated; then we are negotiating under pressure instead of planning properly."

Such procedural gaps engender reactive rather than strategic bargaining, which several participants deemed destructive to constructive negotiation. However, another persistent point was the blurring of the roles of employer representatives and labour unions, as well as within the employer side itself. Participant 1 stated that;

"Sometimes you do not even know who must take the final decision-the HOD, the MEC, or someone from the national, and this confuses the whole process."

Hence, decision-making paralysis sets in and becomes one of the contributors to delays and frustrations from the stakeholders in negotiating trials. Participants highlighted inconsistencies in the implementation of the collectively agreed procedures for agenda setting. While methods exist on paper, their actual practice is very weak. In this regard, Participant 7 stated:

"We submit items, but they disappear or come back months later. It disrupts continuity and makes the agenda chaotic".

The absence of a structured, regularly repeated agenda cycle undermines the efficiency of negotiations and, in so doing, increases mistrust between the parties.

Also, communication barriers have emerged as a key issue, with several participants mentioning ruptured information pipelines between provincial structures, departmental representatives, and unions. From Participant 4's comment:

"Information sharing is poor. Sometimes unions get documents late or incomplete, and that causes fights before we even start negotiating".

Poor communication undermines trust in the process, thereby creating undue delay in reaching an agreement. Alongside issues, participants mentioned lapses in coordination between the provincial and national levels of the bargaining structure. Most of them felt that decisions or directives from the national sphere did not accurately reflect provincial realities. Participant 8 stated that;

"National decides something and expects provinces to comply, but provinces do not have the budget or the capacity. Then it becomes a problem in the chamber".

Overall, the findings point to a highly bureaucratic process constrained by inefficiencies stemming from mandates, communication failures, and vague assignment of institutional responsibilities. Although the structural framework for bargaining has been well established,

the problems lie in its execution, leading to delays, conflict escalation, and degraded negotiation outcomes.

The results are consistent with the already substantial literature on collective bargaining in the public sector, particularly in decentralised contexts such as South Africa. Scholars tend to enhance clarity of mandates, institutional coherence, and effective communication during bargaining. Ndlovu (2022), for example, has found that collective bargaining functions optimally when mandate-setting is predictable and coordinated, thereby enabling negotiators to engage with confidence and authority. Participants' experiences in this study support this view, as delays in provincial mandates weaken bargaining leverage and disrupt planning cycles.

The literature on public-sector labour relations similarly states that bargaining is institutionally dependent. Uncertainty about who holds authority to make decisions, as noted by Tshukudu (2021), results in stalemated negotiations, misinterpretation, and needless disputes. Participants who display signs of not knowing who, between the HOD, MEC, and national department, has the last word show how institutional ambiguity, which is generally known as an obstacle to effective bargaining, manifests itself.

Procedural bottlenecks and fractured communication are also consistent with Nyathi's (2023) and Ibrahin et al. (2023) findings, in that inefficient administration leads to delays in negotiations, distrust, and "strained relations" between employer and employee. These concrete realities resonate with participants' complaints about agenda items that either "disappear" or resurface late. A mismatch between national and provincial capacities is a significant source of pressure. Oluwatimileyin (2023), for example, points out that national-level decisions often fail to account for provincial budget constraints, thereby causing problems with subsequent implementation.

"The expectation from national decisions is that provinces comply."

Participant 8 says, and indeed, it resonates well with the academic critique.

4.5 Theme 2: Determinants of Success and Failure in Collective Bargaining.

The second theme deals with organisational and relational conditions that enable or hinder bargaining effectiveness in the North West Province. Mandate clarity, capacity constraints, administrative weaknesses, leadership and representation issues, communication failures, and provincial-national misalignment were repeatedly highlighted by participants as key determinants of bargaining outcomes.

The results further reveal that unclear and inconsistent bargaining mandates significantly undermine negotiation processes. Participants reported instances where provincial negotiators lacked final decision-making authority or where mandates were revised during negotiations, leading to delays and mistrust.

From an interpretive perspective, mandate ambiguity reflects deeper coordination failures between the Office of the Premier, Provincial Treasury, and line departments. This supports a neo-institutional explanation whereby formal bargaining structures exist, but internal misalignments result in ineffective execution. The finding suggests that bargaining inefficacy stems less from negotiation deadlock and more from internal government fragmentation.

This result corroborates findings by Nkuna-Mavutane et al. (2024), who highlight mandate incoherence as a persistent feature of South Africa's public-sector bargaining system. However, while previous studies identify mandate problems broadly, this study provides empirical detail on how mandate instability manifests at provincial level and disrupts bargaining trust and credibility. The implications are significant: without clear and binding mandates, collective bargaining becomes procedural rather than substantive, eroding confidence among labour representatives and increasing the likelihood of industrial action. Strengthening interdepartmental coordination is therefore central to improving bargaining outcomes.

These interact to determine whether negotiations progress constructively or devolve into disputes.

4.5.1 Theme 2 Findings

The following are the sub-themes that make up theme 2:

4.5.1.1 Mandate clarity as a decisive determinant

A significant concern raised by all participants was the chronic absence of clear and timely mandates. A few respondents directly linked delays and failures to negotiators arriving at the meeting without the authority to conclude agreements. Participant 3 stated the situation plainly:

"One of the things is that this mandate... these negotiators go to these meetings without a mandate."

Participant 9 added the following:

"Breakdowns frequently appear because... what fails is where there is a lack of mandate from the negotiators... the authorities did not give them the mandate."

The absence of a mandate creates uncertainty, frustrates both parties, and prolongs negotiations. Most importantly, it forces representatives to retreat to deferments rather than actively pursue agreed positions, making the bargaining process reactive rather than strategic. Missing mandates were cited as among the worst systemic weaknesses, very detrimental to bargaining outcomes.

4.5.1.2 Capacity and skills gaps, especially on the labour side

Capacity is regarded as one of the primary determinants of success, as both employer and worker representatives may lack the required technical knowledge, procedures, or legislation to conduct effective engagements. Participant 3 said,

"Most of the people that come into the environment... are not given enough training..."

On the other side, Participant 2 pointed out that this really affects the quality of engagement:

"Capacity is a problem... mainly from labour."

Capacity was at its worst when inexperienced delegates entered the chambers without a briefing or handover. As Participant 7 commented;

"You would see somebody who is not abreast of the previous discussions... that is where it lacks in terms of representation."

Without proper preparation, this turnover leads to much of the same discussion, movement over resolved matters, and easily avoidable tension. Capacity challenges also emerged on the more technical tasks, such as drafting submissions. Participant 5, a union representative, described frequent administrative rejections because union representatives lacked drafting skills:

"Some of my colleagues do not even know how actually to submit a submission... it gets rejected because it does not have motivation."

It is clear that inadequate capacity diminishes continuity, lowers negotiation standards, and impedes procedural compliance; hence, it is a significant determinant of bargaining outcomes.

4.5.1.3 Communication and transparency challenges

Poor loop feedback, partially shared information, and consultation inconsistency are all accusations levelled at significant detrimental elements in negotiation frameworks. An example of this is when Participant 2 commented on a lack of feedback structures in the union:

“One important part of feedback... labour does not give any feedback to their members.”

On the other hand, some interviewees stated that the employer's side had held out or failed to provide them with important information. Participant 6, a union representative, noted the following;

“There is a lack of transparency from the employer... they do not put everything on the table.”

In negotiations, mistrust and suspicion often lead to unsuccessful outcomes before the substance of the discussion is reached. Examples of this are already emerging, where partial or delayed information has provoked hostility or procedural objections. A communication breakdown is a fundamental component of constructive versus adversarial processes in bargaining.

4.5.1.4 Trust deficits and problematic interpersonal dynamics

Distrust, both within labour and between labour and employer, was also stated as a determinant. Participant 8 commented that informal or overly cordial relationships among certain representatives create opportunities for conflicts of interest:

“Parties have a cordial relationship, and they forget that they are representing the interests of employees...issues get suppressed.”

On the reverse side, yet another observation was made about the adversarial and confrontational behaviour observed in the chamber. There were comments about “power plays,” deliberate thwarting, and a lack of willingness to consider facilitated resolutions. This adversarial climate often leads to deadlocks or procedural blocks rather than constructive negotiations.

Trust deficits thus become a key relational determinant, strongly shaping the tone, pace, and outcome of negotiations.

4.5.1.5 Fragmented leadership, role confusion, and unstable representation

Some factors that led to negotiation failures include unstable leadership and confusion about decision-making authority. At the time, the contention was the fragmentation of authority between the Office of the Premier and line departments. Participant 2 explained:

“The Office of the Premier does not have power over the HODs of other departments... that causes a problem.”

This fragmentation creates inconsistent instructions, conflicting messages, and competing mandates, which make bargaining unpredictable. The frequent turnover of representatives, especially in unions, aggravates the situation. There is no succession planning, so new delegates enter chambers without institutional memory, resulting in inefficiency and conflict. Leadership instability and confusion about authority are thus significant, affecting bargaining efficiency.

Participants have repeatedly emphasised the negative impact of misaligned decisions within national and provincial government structures. One interviewee remarked:

“Decisions are taken at the national level; whatever is agreed upon at the national level will filter down to the provinces.”

Problems arise when national-level agreements become obligations that provincial budgets or administrative capabilities cannot meet. Such misalignment leads to delays in implementation, disputes, and an inability to reach agreements at the provincial level, thereby directly affecting bargaining outcomes.

4.5.2 Literature comparison

Findings from Theme 2 align with the literature on collective bargaining in South Africa and other countries. For Godfrey (2010) and Godfrey et al. (2007), the outcomes of bargaining depend more on the administrative machinery underpinning negotiations. Mandates are unclear or delayed; bargaining becomes more symbolic than substantive, and that is precisely what participants demonstrate in this particular study.

According to Carnicelli et al. (2022), training and development contribute to the effectiveness of bargaining; reports emphasising a lack of training and poor representation can confirm this. In comparison, Skosana (2022) holds a similar view, stating that public-sector bargaining councils are devalued when representatives are technically incompetent, which directly correlates with participants' experience.

Pluralist scholarship, such as Ackers (2021) and Dobbins et al. (2021), is all about an ongoing managed process of trust, competing interests, and institutional norms as seen. The trust deficits and suppressed issues described by the participants show how complex the relationship becomes. Rulashe and Jam (2025) also show that union fragmentation negatively

affects service delivery and the quality of decisions made. Indications on the transcript of fragmented representation, frequent turnover in leadership, and ambiguous authority provide an example of a provincial feature of this more general institutional problem.

De Becker (2021) notes that there is misalignment, manifested across levels of government, as a structural constraint on public-sector systems in countries with a devolved governance system, more or less similar to that in South Africa. Evidence from the North West Province reinforces this, providing insight into how national decisions limit the constraints imposed by a province's location.

4.6 Theme 3: The Impact of Collective Bargaining on Public Service Delivery

Theme 3 examines how participants perceive the role of collective bargaining processes in the quality, stability, and efficiency of public administration activities in the North West Province. While the participants did not always use the term "service delivery" directly, their observations about the mandate's incompetence, administrative dysfunction, poor communication, and tensions between labour and employers expose clear pathways through which bargaining outcomes shape the conditions under which public services are delivered. The theme thus analyses how these dynamics, through bargaining issues, might influence staffing, morale, delays in operational decision-making, and implementation timelines, thereby affecting the functioning of public departments in health, education, and social services.

4.6.1 Sub-themes

4.6.1.1 Administrative delays and decision-making paralysis affect the timeliness of service delivery

It is no surprise that participants would have taken time to protest the persistent delays in the bargaining process, which stemmed from incomplete mandates, constant deferrals, and unresolved agenda items. Bargaining serves as the platform for addressing operational decisions through negotiations over staffing levels, conditions of service, resource allocation, and workplace improvements. The delays directly affected service delivery because, if negotiators arrive without mandates or deferred issues, an administrative bottleneck is created, and department directors cannot respond to operational needs quickly.

"Many labour conflicts and strikes within the local municipalities in the province are avoidable only if administrative delays are fixed" (Participant 10)

Such delays effectively postpone decisions on overtime approval, uniform procurement, job evaluations, safety provisions, and other choices that directly affect employees' capacity to fulfil their duties. As a result, clinics, schools, and administrative departments, as well as public institutions, operated under antiquated or unresolved conditions that impair their capacity to deliver effective services or adapt quickly to new challenges. Participant 9 stated the following:

“The recent Nehawu strike affected the provision of services to the community, as it took an industrial action by the workers to force an agreement that had been on the table for a longer period”

Thus, decision-making paralysis erodes the public sector's responsiveness and delays the resolution of issues affecting the well-being of both workers and the communities they serve.

4.6.1.2 Capacity gaps reduce the quality of bargaining outcomes

Another major factor in the delivery of service is the bargaining representatives' insufficient training and institutional knowledge. Participants described limited experience, inadequate preparation, and deficiencies in technical expertise among certain representatives, particularly in the labour arena. Such capacity deficiencies have resulted in poorly drafted or incomplete submissions and, in many instances, the rejection of proposals for failing to meet procedural requirements. Participant 3 shared the sentiments below and provided a contextual response upon further probing by the researcher:

“The quality and capacity of leadership in unions is questionable... hospitals were closed during the strike, and patients were chased away...something that is even illegal to do, but union leaders seemingly encouraged it or let it happen”

These, however, have resulted in increased delays in the bargaining cycle and have detracted from the quality of decisions that shape working conditions. When representatives lack the skills for effective bargaining or for articulating service delivery-related workplace concerns, including shift systems, staffing norms or needs for infrastructure, and workload arrangements, these concerns are not adequately addressed. The outcomes of poor-quality bargaining then reverberate through the operational environment, leaving unresolved resource constraints, inconsistent policy application, and inefficiencies in workforce management.

4.6.1.3 Trust and relational deficits

The participants also shared some facts about the relational conflicts during collective bargaining, mostly referencing mistrust, suppressed issues, and tension between management

and labour. These really create an adversarial environment, where negotiations are more about positional conflict than problem-solving. The absence of strong, trust-based relationships limits parties' capacity to jointly manage operational bottlenecks or the effects of jointly agreed solutions. Participant 1 shared the following account;

“Previous engagements have shown that labour unions cannot be trusted...we engaged with them in full confidence and faith that we were on course to achieve a solution, only for them to opt for an industrial action where there was no need for one”

The deficit of trust has a compounding effect on the quality of service delivery. When such a situation arises, problems concerning trust would be reflected in a more confrontational or resistant attitude from labour representatives. The opposite is much more likely: when management thinks labour has untrained or inconsistent representatives, cooperation tends to decline. That puts pressure on joint decision-making processes, lengthens the time it takes to resolve matters on the front lines, and increases the risk that grievances will escalate into disputes.

“Unions have not provided us with a reason to trust them during negotiations”

Participant 5 echoed the same sentiments.

“Government cannot be trusted...they tend to play to the gallery, buying time and explaining themselves away from their commitments...they tend to just blame unions for the very things they would have caused...this explains why unions are confrontational.”

In those fields requiring coordinated teamwork, be it health, education, or social services, strained labour-management relationships slow reform processes, demoralise employees, and undermine the commitment needed to provide high-quality services. All in all, weakened trust in bargaining becomes a diminishing factor in public service delivery.

4.6.1.4 Representation discontinuity

Participants highlighted the high turnover of union or departmental representatives, which led to the repetition of issues and loss of institutional memory. Obviously, redoing issues previously discussed when new representatives are appointed without sufficient briefing significantly delays the bargaining process.

These inefficiencies are further worsened for service delivery. Staffing issues, safety, and working conditions tend to take longer to resolve, and the speed of institutional improvement slows. In environments where one needs to act quickly and in an organised manner to respond to operational challenges, such as hospitals or emergency services, these delays affect the quality and stability of some of the most essential public services.

4.6.2 Literature comparison

Theme 3's results correlate well with present labour relations literature, stressing the vital link between the quality of bargaining and the performance of the public sector. Scholars like Godfrey (2010) and De Becker (2021) argue that collective bargaining systems have a significant impact on institutional stability, worker satisfaction, and institutional responsiveness. The administrative bottlenecks and delayed decision-making across all instances in the North West Province point to systemic shortcomings, as these scholars cautioned. When bargaining structures lack coherence and efficiency, decision-making quality regarding working conditions deteriorates, thereby undermining public institutions' capability to deliver services in a timely and effective manner.

Carnicelli et al. (2022) argue forcefully that skilled training and representative capacity translate into good workplace outcomes, while poorly equipped bargaining teams contribute to delays, weak submissions, and avoidable disputes. Issues such as inexperience, unpreparedness, and turnover, as reported by participants, are consistent with the global literature, which shows that capacity deficits reduce workplace stability and disrupt the implementation of decisions. In a similar vein, the study by Rulashe and Jam (2025) on union fragmentation and organisational inefficiencies demonstrates how inconsistent representation, internal division, and poor communication undermine collective outcomes. The participants' narratives of suppressed issues, limited feedback, and broken bargaining relationships resonate with the literature, reinforcing the assertion that relational instability within unions and between the parties negatively affects service delivery.

4.7 Theme 4: Strategies for Strengthening the Effectiveness of Collective Bargaining

Theme 4 concerns the approaches participants offer to strengthen the impact of collective bargaining processes in the North West Province. Earlier themes disclose the nature of structural, relational, and procedural challenges; this theme discusses how participants think those weaknesses could be remedied through specific improvements. Those improvements include developing skills, enhancing information sharing, restoring trust in labour–management

relations, addressing deficiencies in administration and implementation, and facilitating greater union–employer collaboration. Direct quotations illustrate that many of the barriers to effective bargaining are not structural flaws in legislation or frameworks that restrict bargaining, but somewhat operational and relational deficits within the provincial collective bargaining environment itself.

4.7.1 Theme findings

4.7.1.1 Strengthening skills development and capacity of bargaining delegates

Out of the different views on what should be done, one of the clearest strategies articulated by most participants is the need for stronger skills development. In the transcripts, participants emphasised that building representative capacity is fundamental for improving bargaining performance. Skills development is one of the first areas participants mention when asked directly about improvements needed for the system, as noted in the interview transcript. Participants identified skills development not merely as a theoretical need but as a practical requirement for strengthening the bargaining environment. Participants emphasised the indicator linking the development of bargaining representatives to improved organisational functionality. Participant 5 stated the following:

“If we are all developed as chamber members...as chamber members we can share with the below structures what we get from there, what we have left at work.”

This quote reveals two critical insights. First, that the development of representatives is seen as a collective requirement-"if we are all developed"-implying that uneven capacity among representatives is currently a challenge. Second, it links representative capacity directly to information dissemination within the system. Well-developed, according to the participant, representatives are better able to participate in the bargaining process and maintain communication with their constituencies. Participant 6 stated the following:

“Sometimes decisions from bargaining sessions do not reach our members because we do not know how to communicate them properly. Developing our skills in both negotiation and communication would really help the whole system work better.”

Such statements support concluding that strengthening representative capacity and professionalism is a fundamental requirement for improving the quality, speed, and effectiveness of negotiations. Underprepared representatives weaken the process, delay it,

and cause miscommunication. Thus, capacity building is viewed not merely as a training requirement but as a critical foundation for effective bargaining.

4.7.1.2 Enhancing information sharing and communication

Another salient point that has been extrapolated from the transcripts concerns the need to improve information sharing at both inter-chamber and organisational levels. Participants' responses suggest that one of the core strategies for enhancing bargaining ability is to ensure a proper flow of information within departments and unions, as well as between bargaining representatives and their constituencies. Good communication, as noted by participants, improves relations. Participant 1 states the following:

"The relationship between the employer and management was far better."

Although the statement refers to a specific instance, it effectively supports the broader premise that, when handled properly, communication can improve workplace relations and operational effectiveness. By this, the participants implicitly compared the present situation in the provincial bargaining context, which is often marred by unresolved issues, miscommunication, and information gaps that prevent negotiations from bearing fruit.

Participants also indicate that information sharing helps the downward flow of decisions and reduces the likelihood of repeat disputes at the workplace level. In this manner, communication itself becomes a preventive and corrective activity—preventing misinformation from spreading among members, and correcting misunderstandings that later escalate to disputes and reappear in bargaining agendas.

"When we share information properly with our members, it stops small misunderstandings from becoming big disputes later." (Participant 6)

Cumulatively, the quotes cited above highlight how participants perceive communication not merely as procedural, but as a strategy that nurtures the relationships at the heart of collective bargaining.

4.7.1.3 Restoring trust and rebuilding labour–management relationships

A consistent theme throughout the discussions over transcripts is the failure of trust relations between labour and employer structures. Participant 2 said in concrete terms:

"From what I have seen with union officials, this boils down to a lack of trust."

This lack again comes through in another angle from Participant 1:

"With labour...the relationship was inferior for sure."

Without trust, collective bargaining becomes hostile, communication becomes tortured, and negotiations take longer. Support for the inference that trust restoration is not just a relationship concern but also a functional strategy for enhanced effectiveness and legitimacy of bargaining outcomes is found in these quotations. Trust plays a vital role in the operation's functionality. Participant 7 stated the following:

If there is a good relationship, it helps really with the management, the employer, to run the school."

Although this quote is specific, the meaning is clear: Relationships and trust, according to the participant, create an enabling environment for problem-solving, decision-making, and effective organisational functioning. In the context of bargaining, trust increases cooperation, reduces conflict, and enhances the efficiency of agreement implementation. Rebuilding trust would therefore emerge as the primary response supported by participant testimony as well.

4.7.1.4 Addressing administrative weaknesses and improving implementation of resolutions

Another series of quotes directly highlights the weaknesses in administrative follow-up and resolution measures. A significant challenge identified by the participants is the inconsistent or absent implementation of agreed resolutions. For example, Participant 10 stated,

"The resolution of ICT must also be implemented."

This quote fairly captures a widely shared feeling: that bargaining resolutions, and sometimes even negotiations themselves, seem to sit on paper and never get put into practice. Participant 5 went further and gave an example of a failure to implement:

"I could not implement the resolution relating to PMDS because the Head Office was refusing."

This statement reflects both administrative breakdowns and structural barriers to the consistent implementation of agreements. It shows that even when negotiations succeed at the chamber level, decisions by the department or the head office may sabotage implementation, reigniting tensions and repeating items on the agenda. These quotes support the view that strengthening administrative systems, ensuring accountability for implementation, and aligning departmental

structures with bargaining outcomes are key strategies toward enhancing the overall efficacy of collective bargaining.

4.7.1.5 Promoting cooperative working relationships between unions and employers

The last series of quotations concerns strengthening the cooperation between unions and employers. Participant 10 shares the following account:

"My wish is to see unions and the employer working together and having one understanding."

This quote speaks very much to the need for collaborative rather than adversarial relationships in collective bargaining. The participant suggests that cooperation is a strategic direction for both parties to achieve a common understanding and alignment. The responses also speak to the stability that collective bargaining is meant to promote. Participant 4 stated:

"Participating in collective bargaining helps to maintain stability between labour and the employer within the province."

This strengthens the argument that efficient bargaining plays a foundational role in maintaining labour peace, organisational efficiency, and overall governance stability across the province. The statements above support the conclusion that improved cooperation and cohesion among the bargaining parties are not only desirable but also fundamental to enhancing the overall effectiveness of the bargaining process.

4.7.2 Conclusion

Responses from participants that have completely reflected the participant's perspective view the strengthening of collective bargaining as one in which the operation is due to improved efficiencies rather than structural reconfiguration. Some major ones suggested by the participant include skills development, improved information sharing, trust restoration, enhanced cooperation, and more consistent implementation of resolutions. Within each of these strategies, targets are weaknesses identified in other findings that will ultimately build a vision for a more functional, efficient, and cooperative provincial bargaining environment.

For participants, collective bargaining is a stabilising factor and a relationship builder between employers and labour, particularly when it works well. Quotations amplify that the most critical strengthening for improved bargaining is improving the people and process, improving the chances that representatives will be scholars, informed, trusted, cooperative, and backed by a reliable administrative system.

4.8 Chapter Summary

The analysis of the empirical interview findings in this chapter on key stakeholders involved in collective bargaining in the North West Province is thorough. The chapter focused on four major themes apparent in the data regarding participants' experiences, perceptions, and concerns about the functionality and effectiveness of the bargaining system. Earlier themes provided insight into procedural inefficiencies, relational tensions, capacity gaps, and systemic constraints, whereas Theme 4 placed focus on ways to strengthen the process.

Findings indicate low levels of trust between labour and management, with participants attributing this to historical non-implementation of agreements and inconsistent communication.

Analytically, this suggests that trust functions as a mediating variable between bargaining processes and outcomes. Even where formal negotiations occur, the absence of trust reduces the perceived legitimacy of agreements and increases conflict escalation. This reinforces pluralist theory, which emphasises that institutionalised conflict management depends not only on rules but on relational stability.

This finding is consistent with Baccaro and Howell (2017), who argue that trust deficits weaken collective bargaining institutions despite formal compliance. However, the present study deepens this analysis by demonstrating how trust erosion is linked specifically to provincial-level implementation failures, rather than national policy disputes.

The implication is that restoring bargaining efficacy requires rebuilding relational trust through consistent implementation, transparency, and follow-through. Failure to address relational dynamics risks perpetuating a cycle of negotiation breakdown and industrial unrest.

Participants highlighted the need for better skills development, greater communication, rebuilding trust, consistent implementation of resolutions, and greater cooperation between unions and employers. The chapter showed that, although collective bargaining's institutional framework is well established, its effectiveness is hampered by operational weaknesses that require targeted intervention. Generally, the findings have highlighted the critical importance of strengthening human capacity, administrative systems, and relational dynamics to ensure the credibility and efficiency of collective bargaining within the province.

The next chapter provides a summative and conclusive point of discussion of the study.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter concludes the study, and recommendations have been derived from the main findings discussed in Chapter Four. It integrates the most pertinent insights from analysing participants' experiences and perceptions of collective bargaining in the North West Province. The chapter opens with a summary of the research's overall purpose and the extent to which the research objectives were achieved. The chapter then provides an overall interpretation of the findings vis-à-vis the research questions, highlighting their implications for policy, practice, and future research. The chapter, through the identified challenges and proposed strategies, also presents practical recommendations meant to strengthen the effectiveness of the collective bargaining processes. This concludes by surveying what needs further investigation to enrich the provincial collective bargaining environment in support of sustainable labour relations.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The intention of this study has always been to investigate the effectiveness of collective bargaining processes in the North West Province. It focuses on stakeholder experiences and perceptions within provincial bargaining structures. This study is set against the backdrop of seemingly endless wars waged by labourers, inconsistent application of decisions, and occasional breakdowns in co-operation between unions and employers. The study examines the underlying operational, relational, and structural issues that may be affecting the bargaining environment. Thus, not only the challenges but also participants' proposals to address them would have been explored toward a strengthened system that enhances peace in labour and organisational stability.

In fact, the study had to contextualise collective bargaining relative to South African legislation, as represented by the Labour Relations Act (LRA), which prescribes orderly, predictable, and structured negotiation processes. Although the LRA and the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) provide a strong institutional foundation, the existing literature indicates that provincial-level bargaining remains beset by specific challenges arising from resource constraints, political dynamics, capacity disparities, and fragmented communication. This broader context justifies inquiry into the North West Province, one of those labour relations that has its history clouded by administrative instability, service delivery pressures, and differing levels of cooperation among departments.

Most problem statements emphasised that, despite effective bargaining structures, inefficient and tense situations continue to beset the province, compromising the credibility of negotiations and their implementation. This suggested that the problems in collective bargaining may have less to do with institutional design and more with operational weaknesses embedded in the system. This framing necessarily led to the main research question: What is the effectiveness of the collective bargaining process in the North West Province, and what factors hinder or enhance its functionality? Some other supporting research objectives were to explore participants' different experiences with negotiation structures, identify factors that inhibit or promote bargaining efficacy, and define practical methods to strengthen provincial bargaining processes.

There was therefore a need to explore these objectives through a qualitative research design, adopting semi-structured interviews with all stakeholders, including union representatives, management officials, and individuals involved in provincial bargaining councils. This was to enable the free articulation of the lived experience, perceptions, and plights of each of the defined participant groups regarding the subject under investigation. The qualitative method was deliberately chosen since nuances in interpersonal relations, institutional dynamics, and procedural intricacies are not captured by quantitative tools. There was, therefore, data to be analysed thematically, drawn by established qualitative analysis techniques that facilitate the identification of patterns, categories, and possibly themes that emerge from the interview transcripts.

The data unfolded into four major themes. Theme 1 focused on the functioning of the collective bargaining process. While participants admitted that the structural architecture of bargaining committees, chambers, mandates, and procedures is sound and consistent with national frameworks, they argued that, in the majority of cases, this system fails to operate effectively. Some of them are prolonged negotiations, recurring agenda items, inconsistent representation, and limited authority of delegates, which compromise the effectiveness of decision-making processes. They have further stressed an important point: that representatives lacked preparation or were unready when they arrived at the negotiations, with no clear mandate; the meetings turned out to be redundant and meaningless. This theme begins with the well-placed primary insight that structural adequacy does not guarantee operational effectiveness.

Theme 2 addressed relational and communication dynamics within the overall bargaining system. Union–employer relationships, as described by participants, were thus strained,

characterised at times by mistrust, miscommunication, and adversarial behaviour. Unclear communication was frequently referred to by both bargaining parties and beyond union and departmental structures as the cause of unresolved disputes and repetition in the provincial chamber. Participants noted that, outside the formal sessions, all other interactions involving labour and management tended to be unconstructive, leading to disapproval and undermining constructive problem-solving. This theme also highlighted the importance of relational aspects of the process, about trust, openness, and continual dialogue, not just as a technical process, but as an inherently relational process.

Theme 3 focused on systemic and structural hindrances affecting the entire bargaining environment. The principal challenge, as stated, was multi-level public-sector bargaining, with national decisions on salaries and conditions of service sometimes not consonant with what a province could accommodate. Participants had difficulty implementing national resolutions in the absence of provincial resources or guidance. There were many bottlenecks due to a lack of cooperation among departments, especially delays in providing information, in decision-making, and in defining mandates and decision-making authorities. These systemic limitations show how structural misalignments weaken provincial effectiveness when participants are committed at the local level.

Theme 4 suggested ways to enhance the efficiency of collective bargaining and formed a core part of this study's analysis. The participants suggested practical and relational improvements, such as strengthening skills, enhancing information sharing, implementing one another's processes more fairly, and increasing cooperation between the union and the employer. Quotes from the transcripts clearly state the need for skills development and information sharing, stressing that well-developed members of the chamber will better communicate decisions to workplace structures. The participants also noted that trust restoration was necessary, saying that;

"...with union officials, lack of trust", and "with labour... the relationship was very, very poor"

which directly impaired the functioning of bargaining structures. Another area discussed was administrative improvement, mainly strengthening the resolutions to be implemented. A participant cites,

"The resolution of ICT must also be implemented"

alluding to the challenge of implementation. Strengthened cooperation is also heartfelt in the submission:

"My wish is to see unions and the employer working together and having one understanding".

Bringing the themes together, this study sustains that the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North West Province is highly reliant on human, relational, and administrative variables rather than on structural or legislative shortcomings. Legislative frameworks are essentially sound; however, the outcomes of bargaining are severely compromised by poor communication, under-capacity among participants, distrust, misaligned departmental processes, and poor agreement implementation. Participants did not put forth major structural reforms; instead, the focus remained on fine-tuning an already employed mechanism. This aligns with the literature, which states that the success of bargaining institutions often rests on the capabilities, behaviour, and coordination of individuals operating within them.

In conclusion, in achieving its objectives, the study identified relevant challenges, documented participants' perspectives, and outlined realistic strategies to strengthen provincial bargaining processes. These findings stress that sustainable and effective collective bargaining must bring programs and investments for capacity building, relationship management, communication, and accountability mechanisms for implementation. These meanings inform the recommendations given in the next chapter.

5.3 Key Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study, drawn from a thematic analysis of both participant interviews and the research objectives that guided the investigation. Findings provide a consolidated picture of how participants perceive the functioning of collective bargaining in the North West Province, outlining the challenges that make it ineffective and what they think could strengthen the system. In summary, the findings indicate that, even though a national collective bargaining framework has been established in South Africa, the factors that usually shape its effectiveness at the provincial level are operational, relational, and administrative.

5.3.1 The collective bargaining structure is sound, but operational functioning is weak

One key finding of the study is that participants consider the structural and legal framework governing collective bargaining to be fundamentally sound. Under the Labour Relations Act (LRA), the PSCBC and the provincial chambers indeed have well-defined procedures, representation systems, and dispute-resolution mechanisms. It seemed that none of the respondents felt it necessary to mention that the problem lies within the structure itself. However, they did stress that the breakage occurs in the operationalising of these structures.

- Weaknesses in operations include:
- Delay in obtaining full mandates.
- Under-prepared representatives.
- Inconsistent representation and turnover of delegates.
- Revisiting discussions on the same agenda items yields no results.
- Meetings are marred by a lack of documentation or misalignment between departments.

These operational weaknesses have definitely been a blow to the credibility of the bargaining process and affected labour stability. Therefore, a structurally sound system becomes weak through inconsistent practice. This indicates that much of the success in bargaining depends on how participants execute their respective roles.

5.3.2 Capacity gaps among representatives' compromise negotiation quality

One important finding is the general concern about the inadequate skills and capacity of many representatives, particularly from labour structures, but some within government delegations also expressed such concerns. The participants have revealed an apparent need for designed training, as indicated by direct assertions about skills development, with little emphasis on the need for effective representatives to be “developed to be chamber members.” This confirms that representatives are often incompetent in important negotiations, interpretation of agreements, policy analysis, and procedural processes.

Capacity challenges manifest in various ways:

- Structurally incorrect submissions, in which sometimes submissions are poorly written or come in the wrong structure.
- Entering negotiations with neither clarity on procedure nor prior agreements.
- Continual disruption by new or rotating delegates who have little institutional memory.

- More often than not, bargaining becomes adversarial when representatives depend on positional power rather than negotiation skills.

Capacity is more than a technical concern. It is a core determinant of bargaining effectiveness, shaping the pace, quality, and sustainability of agreements.

5.3.3 Communication breakdowns and poor information sharing weaken the system

Ineffective communication within unions, internally within departments and across bargaining parties significantly undermines the bargaining process. The study found that incorrect or incomplete information often reaches the bargaining table, creating confusion, delays, or disputes. Information sharing was cited as one priority area for improvement, directly related to the better functioning of the organisation:

"If we are all developed as chamber members...the information will trickle down to the structures below."

This really emphasises that communication is not just about transparency; it is also about ensuring accurate, timely downward dissemination of information. The effects of poor communication are as follows:

- Previous issues are again popping up on the meeting agenda.
- Members not knowing or being misinformed about decisions.
- Building tension between labour and management, culminating in opposing information.
- Poor alignment between departmental officials and employer representatives.

Overall, the findings state that communication deficiencies create systemic inefficiencies and erode trust in the bargaining process.

5.3.4 Trust between labour and employer is fragile and often compromised

Perceptions of tension frequently arise due to dishonesty or apparent dishonesty, incredulity, or transparency concerning the conduct of the negotiations themselves, which often result in friction amongst parties involved in union-employer relationships. Distrust engenders positional bargaining rather than constructive dialogue, which in turn holds the relationship environment responsible for any disagreement and escalation. Trust-impaired perceptions reduce the legitimacy of agreements and hamper cooperation.

Positive relationships are said to significantly boost organisational operations. This theory, in turn, indicates that trust is an important facilitator of agreement implementation and of general workplace stability.

5.3.5 Implementation of agreements is inconsistent and often blocked

Another significant finding is that inconsistent implementation of bargaining agreements at the departmental or provincial level seriously impedes the progress of many matters. Participants noted that some resolutions are not implemented due to bureaucratic resistance, while in others, there are misalignments between the chambers and the national structures. From a pattern analysis of the interviews, it could be deduced that:

- Delays in implementation lead to frustration, disputes, and repeated agenda cycles.
- Sometimes, departments lack the resources or authority to implement resolutions.
- National decisions are in contradiction with provincial resolutions, backed by policy.
- Inadequate monitoring systems do not track implementation progress or enforce compliance.

These findings reveal that even when bargaining is successful, the lack of implementation diminishes the realised outcome, thereby eroding trust and significantly depreciating the perceived value of the collective bargaining process.

5.3.6 Structural misalignment between national and provincial mandates creates tension

The study's findings indicated that bargaining in the public sector is multi-layered; national agreements must be implemented at the provincial level, and, as a result, structural constraints limit their effectiveness. Participants noted that there are challenges when provincial departments are unable to mobilise resources or capacity to implement national decisions on salaries or terms and conditions of service.

Out of the research come the following findings:

- Limited discretion to negotiate within the provincial chambers.
- Such national agreements do not necessarily reflect the realities at provincial levels.
- Aligning budgets to negotiated outcomes becomes a challenging task for the departments.
- Hence, the mandate processes become extremely clumsy and politicised.

As a result, there is an escalation in delays, the under-realisation of equity in implementation, and high tensions between unions and provincial departments.

5.3.7 Strengthening cooperation and mutual understanding is essential

Ultimately, the study found that participants firmly believed in cooperation within the unions and the employer for functional bargaining, as one participant clearly put it in a wishful expression about improvement of working relations: Such a finding is an indication that:

- Collaboration among parties improves the bargaining process instead of practising corrective measures.
- In mutual understanding, problem-solving, and effective negotiation processes will work well.
- Stabilisation will then build at the organisational and provincial levels.

As participants agreed, agreements are generally more meaningful, sustainable, and easier to implement when negotiation parties work together.

The overall findings indicate that the impact of collective bargaining in the North West Province depends on numerous factors, such as operational processes, human capacity, communication quality, and relational dynamics, rather than on the system's structural design. Improvements thus need to be targeted in areas such as skills development, communication mechanisms, trust building, administrative coordination, and intergovernmental alignment to strengthen the process. These findings serve as the foundation upon which the recommendations that form the content of the next section are derived.

5.4 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for public-sector labour relations policy and provincial governance. First, the evidence suggests that reforms aimed at improving collective bargaining efficacy should prioritise institutional strengthening at the provincial coordination level, rather than focusing exclusively on national bargaining structures or legislative amendments.

Second, the study highlights the need for clearer mandate-setting mechanisms that align political authority, fiscal constraints, and administrative responsibility prior to negotiations. Without such alignment, collective bargaining risks becoming symbolic rather than functional.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of trust and relational governance in sustaining bargaining stability. Policy interventions that overlook relational dynamics in favour of procedural compliance are unlikely to address the root causes of bargaining failure.

5.4.1 Functionality of collective bargaining

The findings indicate several key improvements required to enhance the working of collective bargaining in the North West Province. Firstly, the mandate-setting process requires fixed timelines, clearer escalation procedures, and digital tracking tools to eliminate delays and enhance negotiators' readiness. Clarity on institutional roles, especially regarding the authority of the MEC, HOD, and national structures, is also critical to avoid decision-making paralysis. This would be coupled with a commitment to upgraded agenda and document management systems, where registry information is accessible and submission times are strictly adhered to, ensuring continuity, accountability, and administrative efficiency.

Equally vital is improving communication among all stakeholders. Regular pre-bargaining briefing sessions, standardised templates for sharing information, and timely information flows are all required to reduce misunderstandings and enhance trust. Improved provincial–national coordination through joint planning meetings and shared budgeting forecasts would ensure policy and capacity alignment. Last but not least, professionalising the bargaining support administration by deploying trained workers dedicated to labour relations and negotiating logistics would help rectify many procedural inconsistencies and could contribute to establishing a more stable and effective bargaining environment.

5.4.2 Determinants of success and failure in collective bargaining

The findings suggest that various interventions targeted at strengthening the collective bargaining environment have had a significant impact in the North West Province. First, delays in mandated processes are persistent challenges that, as participants identified, point to the need for strict, digitally tracked timelines to ensure negotiators arrive at the session fully mandated by their principals. This ought to be combined with an annual training programme, complete with structured content for both employer and labour representatives, so that delegates have the technical, procedural, and legislative knowledge necessary to engage meaningfully. Administrative efficiency is equally as paramount as making life easier through standardised document templates and a centralised document management system, so that intractable problems such as incomplete submissions or missing agenda items do not recur.

Secondly, the communication and decision-making processes are direly in need of institutionalisation. Formalised reporting and information-sharing systems would foster transparency, reduce suspicion, and engender trust between parties. Clarity in decision-making authority matrices will eliminate confusion between the Office of the Premier and line departments, thereby mitigating paralysis in negotiations. Finally, routine coordination meetings between the province and the national will ensure coordinated decisions on bargaining, aligned with resource availability and administrative capacity, thereby minimising implementation delays and further tightening the boundaries of the bargaining system.

5.4.3 Impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery

Based on the analysis, it is concluded that targeted reforms are needed to strengthen the processes underpinning collective bargaining to improve service delivery in the North West Province. It is inadequate to hand out such mandates; delayed mandates merely hamper operational decision-making and prolong the resolution of workplace disputes affecting frontline operations. Continuous investment in structured training for representatives of both labour and employer parties is expected to enhance procedural compliance, improve negotiation quality, and reduce administrative delays caused by poorly drafted submissions and inconsistent representation practices. Better communication systems, encompassing feedback loops, transparent dissemination of information, and standardised system channels, would also help rebuild trust, mitigate conflict, and foster a well-informed, coordinated workforce.

At a structural level, clarifying leadership roles and decision-making authority would also address the fragmentation identified in the bargaining process and improve the implementation of agreements across jurisdictions. An interface must be formalised between provincial and national structures to reconcile the outcomes of bargaining with the realities of implementation, thereby avoiding agreements that exceed the province's capacities. Ultimately, these reforms ought not only to stabilise the bargaining process but also substantially enhance the quality, consistency, and responsiveness of public service delivery in the province.

5.5 Assessment of the Research Aim and Objectives

The thrust of this section is premised on the need to assess the extent to which the study accomplished its overall general aim and specific research objectives.

5.5.1 Research aim

The study's primary aim is to explore the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North-West Province's public sector.

The primary aim of the study was to examine the effectiveness of collective bargaining processes in the North West Province and identify factors that inhibit or enhance functionality. The study fully realised its aim through a comprehensive thematic analysis of participant experiences and insights drawn from semi-structured interviews. Such findings provide a detailed and nuanced representation of the operative, relational and structural dynamics affecting bargaining effectiveness.

5.5.2 Objective 1: To evaluate the current collective bargaining process in the public sector of North-West Province.

The first research objective was to evaluate the current collective bargaining process in the public sector of the North West Province. The study met this objective by utilising rich qualitative narratives that showed both the positive aspects of the bargaining system and the ongoing operational difficulties.

5.5.3 Objective 2: To identify factors that contribute to the success or failure of collective bargaining

The second objective focused on identifying the factors that influence bargaining effectiveness. This was met by identifying key themes such as capacity gaps, poor communication, strained relationships, and implementation challenges, which, according to the evidence, clearly indicated the factors that either support or undermine bargaining processes.

5.5.4 Objective 3: To assess the impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery.

The findings indicate that collective bargaining has a significantly complex influence on service delivery. Participants have said that effective bargaining processes, marked by trust, cooperation, and timeliness, foster a stabilising environment in workplaces and enhance public services.

By contrast, weaknesses in collective bargaining frequently led to interruptions in service delivery. Scenarios such as delayed application of agreements, ineffective communication, mistrust among stakeholders, and inconsistent departmental cooperation were shown to lead to administrative bottlenecks and labour tensions. Participants expressed concern about the

perception that unresolved disputes and poor coordination undermine workplace morale, create operational inefficiencies, and slow the deployment of critical functions.

5.5.5 Objective 4: To propose strategies for improving the effectiveness of collective bargaining in government.

This thematic analysis was conducted by gathering insights and recommendations from participants through interviews. The discussion in Chapter Four's Theme 4 emphasised ways to improve the bargaining environment, and participants offered numerous practical, experience-based recommendations.

5.6 Recommendations of the Study

This section presents recommendations derived directly from the empirical findings and the literature review. They are categorised into policy, practice, and institutional levels, as effective collective bargaining in the North West Province public sector involved a multi-layered response. The recommendations align with the themes identified in Chapter 4 and are situated within the theoretical and empirical controversies surrounding collective bargaining's efficacy.

5.6.1 Training and capacity development

The research found significant differences in capacity between union and employer representatives who negotiated with each other, and, in most cases, the result was disequilibrium in bargaining power and waste in the negotiation process. There is thus a need to institutionalise structured training through policy intervention. The Government and the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC) should, at a policy level, require that all members of the chamber be trained annually. They should be created together with universities and labour institutes, including negotiation skills, labour legislation, policy, and financial literacy. As shown by international experience, including the corporatist systems of Sweden and Germany, well-trained representatives are needed to maintain a strong bargaining structure (Baccaro & Howell, 2017).

At the practice level, unions need to focus more on mentorship and peer-learning programs that orient new representatives by experienced negotiators. The employers should also ensure that the department officials chosen to bargain are well informed about labour law and the collective agreement. This will institutionalise the interactions and limit the use of informal, on-the-job learning. At the institutional level, provincial bargaining chambers in office must maintain a capacity register to monitor the training history of their representatives, ensuring

that mandatory programmes are observed. The presence of such mechanisms will minimise the number of untrained people entering negotiations, thereby improving the overall quality of representation.

5.6.2 Strengthening mandates and continuity

The study has highlighted how the concept of collective bargaining was commonly sabotaged due to a lack of mandate and frequent rotation of representatives. To entrench mandating requirements within PSCBC and provincial chamber regulations, a policy change is required to force representatives to report with written mandates to identify the scope and boundaries of negotiation. At the practice level, both unions and departments must dedicate themselves to using their specific representatives, whose terms of service must be a minimum and not be rotators. Such continuation would preserve institutional memory and enable chambers to move on without disruption to matters they have settled countless times.

Continuity should also be instilled by introducing institutional procedures, especially the orientation of new representatives. Chambers should also hold official briefings to help new members become conversant with previous agreements and any unresolved items on the agenda. This will reduce interference in the event of turnover and is aligned with the best practice of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on maintaining continuity in social dialogue procedures.

5.6.3 Improving implementation and accountability

Confidence in collective bargaining was undermined by the constant delay in enforcing agreements and the longstanding practice of leaving unresolved items on the agenda from one meeting to another. In this regard, the Office of the Premier should have a centralised monitoring and enforcement mechanism. At the policy level, this office must require departments to report quarterly on their progress in implementing resolutions. This will enhance checks and balances.

In practice, joint monitoring committees are supposed to be adopted by unions and departments to monitor progress. This would shift the adversarial form of scrutiny to oversight, thereby improving transparency. At the institutional level, chambers ought to set strict deadlines for the execution of agreements. Escalation mechanisms should also be implemented so that, in the event of continued non-observance, it is referred to the Public Service Commission or oversight bodies. These will help build back credibility and make bargaining results more than mere farces.

5.6.4 Building trust and communication channels

The researchers discovered that a lack of trust and breakdown in communication were rife. There should be a policy reform to institutionalise information-sharing procedures, with regular updates on fiscal positions, implementation progress, and the agenda. This transparency is a must under the pluralist theory of industrial relations, which focuses on communication as a tool for conflict management.

On a practical level, employers and unions need to be involved in more organised relationship-building workshops beyond the nature of negotiations. Existing evidence from other parts of the world, including Canada, indicates that these programs lead to long-term improvements in trust (Thornquist & Thornqvist, 2018). On an institutional scale, chambers ought to establish feedback loops under which unions are mandated to provide feedback to their members, and departments are mandated to provide feedback to their workers. The concept of weak feedback loops kept recurring throughout this study, and their strengthening will address misinformation and inspire trust in the process.

5.6.5 Addressing fiscal constraints strategically

The fiscal limitations were always presented as impediments to the effectiveness of bargaining. The National Treasury also needs to take a multi-year budgeting approach in wage bargaining at the policy level to encourage predictability and minimise fiscal shocks. Examples of comparative models in Germany and Sweden show that forward-looking systems stabilise expectations and help resolve conflicts (Schmidt & Muller, 2018).

In practice, the unions need to be briefed by the various departments on the pre-bargaining fiscal briefing to explain the real budget restraints. This would moderate unrealistic demands and allow negotiators to meet expectations to fiscal realities. At an institutional level, it would be desirable to form, through bargaining chambers, technical fiscal committees composed of financial experts who can model various wage scenarios and articulate their consequences to both sides. This would avoid perceptions of bad faith and foster confidence that the negotiations are grounded in financial realism.

5.6.6 Protecting bargaining from political interference

The results of the empirical studies revealed that the politicisation of the bargaining negatively affected the impartiality of the bargaining process. The Public Service Commission ought to put in place independent oversight mechanisms to safeguard the process and prevent political

actors from exerting undue influence. On the practice level, unions and departments should be mindful of their professional line separating their collective bargaining and political mobilisation. Codes of conduct should clearly address the use of chambers as a partisan.

Chambers should also require representatives to declare any potential conflicts of interest, especially those arising from political affiliations. This will maximise the transparency, protect the neutrality, and improve the validity of collective bargaining.

5.6.7 Enhancing linkages between bargaining outcomes and service delivery

The research established that the outcomes of collective bargaining had direct consequences for service delivery in other areas, including health, education, and local government. It should then be the policy reforms that require agreements to include a service delivery impact assessment before adoption. This would ensure that outcomes are aligned with the province's broader developmental priorities.

On the practical level, the departments should be proactive in assessing the impact of agreements on workers' morale, efficiency, and service quality. The effect of providing uniforms and tools of trade to traffic officers, for example, was directly related to morale and service delivery. At the institutional level, bargaining chambers are encouraged to include service delivery indicators in their agreements, with any wage and benefit improvements correlated with quantifiable service delivery outcomes. This would make the bargaining more legitimate and would prove its worth to the larger community.

5.7 Limitations and Suggestions of the Study

Although the research produced some helpful insights into the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North West Province, several weaknesses should be acknowledged. It was limited to one province, where a selected department was used (the Office of the Premier). Results, therefore, cannot be extrapolated to all the provinces in South Africa where the political environment, financial status, and relations between unions can vary. The provincial emphasis, however, allowed one to study in detail at the expense of scope. It is therefore suggested that other comparative studies be undertaken using other provinces or public sector units in South Africa.

The research used a qualitative case study approach, primarily based on semi-structured interviews. Although this facilitated a deep, detailed understanding, it also introduced potential biases stemming from participants' views. The sample size is somewhat limited and is suitable

for qualitative studies, but the statistical generalisability of the results is limited. Dependence on participants' recall might also have contributed to memory bias. It is therefore suggested that other studies use quantitative methods to enable larger samples, or mixed methods to obtain a holistic picture of the study matter at hand.

A purposively selected sample of participants (i.e., those who engaged directly in the bargaining process) was interviewed, suggesting that the results are representative of their experiences. Some views may have been avoided due to the exclusion of broader employee voices, including those not directly in the bargaining process, e.g., rank-and-file workers. Also, although document analysis was used to triangulate evidence, not every agreement or record was available, which limited its comprehensiveness.

The researcher's positionality could have affected interpretation, as is the case with all qualitative research. Despite applying other validity-strengthening techniques, such as member checking and peer debriefing, the researcher, his background, assumptions, and relationship with the subjects could not remain purely neutral.

Given the study's contextual and methodological limitations, its results should be understood as illustrative rather than generalisable. They offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the North West Province, but should be applied cautiously to other contexts. Irrespective of these constraints, the study has a contribution to make on the understanding of provincial-level collective bargaining both empirically and theoretically. It should be followed by future studies on a comparative, multi-provincial scale, using quantitative data to test and generalise these results.

5.8 Considerations for Future Research

The current research provided a rigorous understanding of the efficacy of collective bargaining in the selected department of the North West Province. Nonetheless, as noted in the limitations, its scope and methodology offer several opportunities for future research.

5.8.1 Comparative provincial studies

A good future research direction would be comparative research among several provinces. The Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape may have different collective bargaining processes due to fiscal capacity, population density, and political environments. Comparing provinces would assist future research in identifying best practices and situational issues,

thereby providing a more holistic picture of the effectiveness of collective bargaining at the national level.

5.8.2 Quantitative follow-up research

Although this research used a qualitative case study design, future research might include quantitative surveys involving a larger group of public-sector employees. This type of study would quantify the prevalence of perceptions of training, trust, implementation, and service delivery outcomes, enabling statistical generalisation and more rigorous testing of hypotheses based on qualitative results.

5.8.3 Longitudinal studies on bargaining outcomes

Future researchers should also embrace longitudinal designs to monitor the effects of collective agreements over time. Most of the challenges identified in this study, including delays in implementation and erosion of trust, are dynamic processes that change over time. A longitudinal design would enable the researcher to determine whether reforms (e.g., better mandates or training interventions) have long-term effects on the effectiveness of the bargaining process and service delivery.

5.8.4 Interdisciplinary approaches

Due to the complexity of interactions among labour relations, fiscal policy, politics, and service delivery, subsequent research must be interdisciplinary. A blend of the political economy perspective and human resource management theories, insights from the field of public administration, and measures of service delivery would enhance the analysis. For example, the way in which fiscal austerity policies shape labour relations and affect collective agreements, and the resultant HR outcomes, such as absenteeism and morale, would benefit understanding.

5.8.5 Exploration of union renewal

Lastly, future research could examine how the unions realign with evolving workforce compositions and dwindling membership. According to the qualitative data, the younger employees feel that unions are less important. The discussion of the ideas of union renewal and relevance in the digital era would be crucial to defining the sustainability of collective bargaining.

5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter was the final part of the research, summarising the results, concluding, and providing practical advice. The introduction repeated the study's objectives and made the aim of Chapter 5 clear as the linking point between the evidence and the practical implications.

The literature review findings summary restated the structural, fiscal, and relational factors that influence collective bargaining worldwide and in South Africa. These were then compared with empirical evidence from the North West Province, which indicated the existence of continuing capacity gaps, poor mandates, long implementation delays, a lack of trust, financial constraints, and political interference. Nevertheless, as hard as this may be, there was also some evidence that collective bargaining could further enhance working conditions, worker morale, and service delivery when used effectively.

The study concluded by directly addressing the research questions and revealed that collective bargaining structures were well developed but were limited in effectiveness by institutional weaknesses. Recommendations were organised into policy, practice, and institutional areas and aimed at developing capacity, strengthening the mandate, improving accountability, increasing communication, promoting fiscal realism, maintaining political neutrality, and better integrating the fruits of bargaining into service delivery.

The study's constraints were recognised, especially its provincial nature and its qualitative methodology, and a reflection on future studies was well laid out. They comprised comparative, quantitative, longitudinal and interdisciplinary research to reinforce and build on the knowledge of bargaining efficacy in South Africa.

REFERENCES

- Ackers, P. (2021). Pluralisms? Social philosophy, social science and public policy in employment relations and human resource management. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 63(2), pp.263–279.
- Ahumada, P.P. (2021). Why is it so difficult to reform collective labour law? Associational power and policy continuity in Chile in comparative perspective. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 53(1), pp.81–105.
- Arnold, N. & Ukpere, W.I. (2012). Leadership model for appraising employees' readiness within a solidarity trade union in South Africa. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(35), pp.9814–9845.
- Aruleba, K. & Jere, N. (2022). Exploring digital transformation challenges in rural areas of South Africa through a systematic review of empirical studies. *Scientific African*, 16, pp. e01190-e01199.
- Baccaro, L. & Howell, C. (2017). *Trajectories of neoliberal transformation: European industrial relations since the 1970s*. Cambridge University Press.
- Barry, M. & Wilkinson, A. (2021). Old frames and new lenses: Frames of reference revisited. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 63(2), pp.114–125.
- Bernstein, I. (2022). *The New Deal collective bargaining policy*. University of California Press.
- Berry, L. L., & Stuart, B. (2021). An “essential services” workforce for crisis response. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 40(1), 92–93.
- Bhuller, M., Moene, K.O., Mogstad, M. & Vestad, O.L. (2022). Facts and fantasies about wage setting and collective bargaining. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 36(4), pp.29–52.
- Botiveau, R. (2017). *Organise or Die: Democracy and Leadership in South Africa's National Union of Mineworkers*. NYU Press.
- Brandl, B. (2023). Everything we do know (and do not know) about collective bargaining: The Zeitgeist in the academic and political debate on the role and effects of collective bargaining. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 44(3), pp.660–678.
- Brunner, E.J. & Ju, A. (2019). State collective bargaining laws and public-sector pay. *ILR Review*, 72(2), pp.480–508.

- Bryson, A., Forth, J. & Theodoropoulos, N. (2022). The Role of the Workplace in Ethnic Wage Differentials. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*.
- Campolieti, M. (2025). Collective Bargaining and Public-Sector Wage Setting. *ILR Review*, 78(3), 494–516.
- Carnicelli, L., Kosonen, T. & Pirttila, J. (2022). The impacts of union-led training on working conditions: Experimental evidence from Mozambique. *Policy Report*.
- Charles, R. (2024). *The Development of Industrial Relations in Britain, 1911–1939: Studies in the Evolution of Collective Bargaining at National and Industry Level*. Taylor & Francis.
- Chikalipo, A. (2024). *Determinants of Employee Engagement in Local Councils in Malawi* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Malawi-The Polytechnic).
- Corradini, V., Lagos, L. & Sharma, G. (2025). Collective bargaining for women: How unions can create female-friendly jobs. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, p.qjaf024.
- Darlington, R. (2009). Leadership and union militancy: The case of the RMT. *Capital & Class*, 33(3), pp.3–32.
- De Becker, A. (2021). Collective bargaining in the public sector: different models in a distinct international framework. In *EU Collective Labour Law* (pp. 292–309). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- De Spiegelaere, S. (2024). Policies to strengthen collective bargaining. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, p.09596801251351303.
- Dobbins, T., Hughes, E. & Dundon, T. (2021). ‘Zones of contention industrial relations: framing pluralism as praxis. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 63(2), pp.149–176.
- Doellgast, V. & Benassi, C. (2020). Collective bargaining. In *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 239–258). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Dwayi, V.M. (2024, November). The Emperor and the New Clothes: Engaging the Frivolity of Ethical and Moral Leadership as Espoused Values Against the Values of Use. In *Proceedings of The 19th European Conference on Management, Leadership and Governance*. Academic Conferences International.
- Ellem, B., Wright, C.F., Clibborn, S., Cooper, R., Flanagan, F. & Veen, A. (2025). Voice: worker representation and collective bargaining. In: *Work and industrial relations policy in*

- Australia. [online] Global Social Challenges: The Future of Work, Finance and the Economy. Bristol: Bristol University Press, pp.51–65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529239089.ch005> [Accessed 22 Jul. 2025].
- Farazmand, A. (Ed.). (2023). *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance*. Springer Nature.
- Fesmire, S. (2024). *Beyond moral fundamentalism: Toward a pragmatic pluralism*. Oxford University Press.
- Fiebich, A. (2021). In defence of pluralist theory. *Synthese*, 198(7), pp.6815–6834.
- García, E. and Han, E., 2021. The impact of changes in public-sector bargaining laws on districts' spending on teacher compensation. Washington, D.C.: Economic Policy Institute.
- Garnero, A. (2021). The impact of collective bargaining on employment and wage inequality: Evidence from a new taxonomy of bargaining systems. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27(2), pp.185–202.
- Gatto, A. (2020). A pluralistic approach to economic and business sustainability: A critical meta-synthesis of foundations, metrics, and evidence of human and local development. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(4), pp.1525–1539.
- Godfrey, S. (2010). *Collective Bargaining in South Africa: past, present and future?* Juta and Company Ltd.
- Godfrey, S., Theron, J. & Visser, M. (2007). The state of collective bargaining in South Africa: An empirical and conceptual study of collective bargaining.
- Griffith, K.L., Gleeson, S., Campos-Medina, P., & Darlene, D. (2025). *Legalised Inequalities: Immigration and Race in the Low-wage Workplace*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Held, D., 2022. *The overlapping crises of democracy, globalisation, and global governance* (pp. 303 - 323). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Horst, S. (2024). *Cognitive pluralism*. MIT Press.

- Hussein, M.K. (2024). Leadership and Management Development in the Public Sector: Controversies Facing Human Resource Development in Malawi. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives (JPADA)*, 9(si1), pp.146–158.
- Ibrahim, A., Daniel, A. A., Oladipo, O. N., & Rildwan, O. B. (2023). Corporate governance and firm performance: evidence from deposit money bank in Nigeria. *EuroEconomica*, 42(1), 138-151.
- Jäger, S., Naidu, S. & Schoefer, B. (2024). *Collective bargaining, unions, and the wage structure: An international perspective* (No. w33267). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Ketu, I. & Ningaye, P. (2024). Sectoral employment shares shape economic complexity: Empirical evidence from African countries. *Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies*, 16(2), pp.168–187.
- Keune, M. (2021). Inequality between capital and labour and among wage-earners: the role of collective bargaining and trade unions. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 27(1), pp 29-46.
- Khumalo, N., & Olaleye, B. R. (2025). Emotional Demands and Role Ambiguity Influence on Intentions to Quit: Does Trust in Management Matter?. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(11), 424.
- Kusumasari, B., Munajat, M.E., & Fauzi, F.Z. (2023). Measuring global pandemic governance: how countries respond to COVID-19. *Journal of Management and Governance*, 27(2), pp.603–629.
- Lambert, R., & Webster, E. (2024). The re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa?. In *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (pp. 20–41). Routledge.
- Limb, P., 2024. *The ANC's Early Years: Nation, Class, and Place in South Africa before 1940*. Routledge.
- Liu, Y., Lee, J. M., & Lee, C. (2020). The challenges and opportunities of a global health crisis: the management and business implications of COVID-19 from an Asian perspective. *Asian Business & Management*, 19(3), pp.260–287.
- Liukkunen, U., 2021. The ILO and the transformation of labour law. *International Labour Organisation and Global Social Governance*, pp.17-49.

- Maake-Malatji, M.I. (2023). The role of collective bargaining in business sustainability and the future of work: A South African perspective.
- Majam, T. and Jarbandhan, D.B., (2022). Data-driven human resource management in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 10(1), pp.580–595.
- MALEKA, R. (2024). Collective Bargaining Challenges In The Public Service Sector.
- Mareschal, P. M., & Kearney, R. C. (2025). *Labour Relations in the Public Sector*. Taylor & Francis.
- Marutlulle, N.K., 2021. A critical analysis of housing inadequacy in South Africa and its ramifications. *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 9(1), pp.370 - 287.
- Mirza, A. (2023). *The association of formal and informal institutions with total entrepreneurial activity: a neo-institutional theory approach* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow).
- Mokgolo, M.M. and Dikotla, M.A., 2021. The management of disciplinary cases in the South African public service from 2009 to 2018. *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review*, 9(1), pp.520 - 534.
- Mutie, C.K. & Macharia, J.N. (2025). Gendered Analysis of the Effect of Displacement on Labour Market Outcomes: A Focus on Nairobi County, Kenya. *Economies*, 13(2), pp.45–57.
- Naidoo, V. (2021). SME sustainability in South Africa post-COVID-19. In *Handbook of research on sustaining SMEs and entrepreneurial innovation in the post-COVID-19 era* (pp. 419–437). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Ndevu, Z.J., Mangai, M.S., Carrión-Crespo, C. & Kapyia, D. (2024). *Working conditions of subnational government workers in selected African countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, and South Africa)* (No. 109). ILO Working Paper.
- Ndlovu, T. (2022). *The impact of organisational trust on collective bargaining* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Johannesburg).
- Nguyen, T.P. (2020). Coping with Precariousness: How Social Insurance Law Shapes Workers' Survival Strategies in Vietnam. *Law & Society Review*, 54(3), pp.544–570.

- Nkuna-Mavutane, M.E., Barends, B., Sibiyi, V.E., Tshoose, C.I. & Letseku, R. (2024). The Future of Collective Bargaining between Labour and the Employer after the Case of Public Servants Association v Minister of Public Service [2021] 3 BLLR 255 (LAC). *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal (PELJ)*, 27(1), pp.1–30.
- North-West Provincial Government. (2023). *Public sector labour stability and service delivery update*. Office of the Premier. <https://www.nwpg.gov.za/public-sector-labour-update>
- Nyathi, F. (2023). The potential role of Corporate Governance in promoting worker participation in Companies.
- O Connor, C. & Mortimer, D. (2013). Union leadership: What is transformational leadership, and can it make a difference? *International Employment Relations Review*, 19(2), pp.62–77.
- Oluwatimileyin, A. (2023). Understanding Employment Relationships and Trade Unions in South. *Employee Relations and Trade Unions in Africa: A Critical Approach*, 119.
- Pieterse, H. (2021). The cyber threat landscape in South Africa: A 10-year review. *The African Journal of Information and Communication*, 28, 1–21.
- Poole, M. (2021). *Theories of trade unionism: a sociology of industrial relations*. Routledge.
- Rönmar, M., Tros, F. (ed.), 2023. Trade union participation and influence in decentralised collective bargaining. In: F. Tros, ed. *Pathways in decentralised collective bargaining in Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp.211–238. [online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/ji.6773409.9> [Accessed 22 Jul. 2025].
- Rotimi, O., Olusola, I. E., Olusegun, E. A., Oluwayemisi, A. M. B., Rildwan, O. B., Rahmon, T. A., & Gbenga, A. C. (2021). Public financial management tools and performance in Nigeria public sector. *Academy of Accounting and Financial Studies Journal*, 25, 1-15.
- Rulashe, T. & Jam, A. (2025). The Impact of Labour Union Fragmentation on Service Delivery in The South African Public Sector. *Journal of Governance and Administrative Reform*, 6(1), pp.160–193.
- Rulashe, T. (2024). A theory-based analysis of labour unions in the South African Public Service. *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 14(3), 751-771.

- Sabri, O.K. (2025). Strategic negotiation in construction disputes: overcoming power imbalances and enhancing resolution through structured approaches. *Frontiers in Built Environment*, 11, 1580290–1580312.
- Sambrook, S. (2021). The life-cycle of engagement: Towards a divergent critical HR/pluralist conceptualisation. *Human Resource Development International*, 24(5), pp.468–489.
- Schmidt, V., Webster, E., Mhlana, S. & Forrest, K. (2023). *Negotiations by workers in the informal economy* (No. 86). ILO Working Paper.
- Schmidt, W. & Müller, A. (2018). Germany: an intertwined two-part system of unilateralism and collective bargaining. *Labour History*, 59(1), pp.71–86.
- Schnabel, C. (2020). Union membership and collective bargaining: Trends and determinants. In *Handbook of labour, human resources and population economics* (pp. 1–37). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Serrano, M.R. & Xhafa, E. (2024). *Industrial relations in micro and small enterprises: patterns, trends and prospects* (No. 129). ILO Working Paper.
- Shabangu, K. (2024). The Importance of Departmental Bargaining Chambers as Required in the Public Service Workplaces. *Journal of Public Administration*, 59(1), pp.32–43.
- Shilinge, F. (2023). Freedom of Association, the right to organise and collective bargaining in the Namibian Correctional Service: recommendations for law reform.
- Simms, M. (2024). Radical pluralism, high inflation, and trust in historical context: the continued relevance of Fox in understanding UK public sector strikes. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 46(6), pp.1306–1319.
- Skosana, Z.R., 2022. *Exploring the effectiveness and efficiencies of the bargaining council in the South African public service sector* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Johannesburg).
- Solanke, F. T., Olaleye, R., Efuntade, A. O. & Williams, Y. (2021). Impact of tax penalty on government revenue in Nigeria. *UMYU Journal of Accounting and Finance Research*, 1(1), pp. 155-164
- Tamanaha, B. Z. (2021). *Legal pluralism explained: History, theory, consequences*. Oxford University Press.

- Thörnquist, A. & Thörnqvist, C. (2018). Do public sector industrial relations challenge the Swedish model? *Labour History*, 59(1), pp.87–104.
- Thörnquist, A., & Thörnqvist, C. (2018). Do public-sector industrial relations challenge the Swedish model? *Labour History*, 59(1), 87–104.
- Tiro, B.J. (2022). *The influence of trade unions on leadership decision-making*. University of Johannesburg (South Africa).
- Tshukudu, T. T. (2021). Collective bargaining in Southern Africa: Reflections on Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia. *Rev. Eur. Dr Soc.*, 50, pp.153 – 165.
- Uzualu, J. E., Ofo, N., & Ochem, C. E. (2024). A Critical Review of Collective Bargaining Indices of Industrial Relations in Nigeria. *NIU Journal of Humanities*, 9(1), pp.249-261.
- Van Buren III, H.J., 2022. The value of including employees: a pluralist perspective on sustainable HRM. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 44(3), pp.686-701.
- Van Buren, H.J., Greenwood, M., Donaghey, J., & Reinecke, J. (2021). Agonising over industrial relations: Bringing agonism and dissensus to the pluralist frames of reference. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 63(2), pp.177–203.
- Van der Walt, F. (2018). Workplace spirituality, work engagement and thriving at work. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 44(1), 1–10.
- Von Broembsen, M. (2024). New frontiers for Labour Law: Collective Bargaining for Workers in Global Supply Chains and Informal Self-Employed Workers.
- Voss, E. & Bertossa, D. (2022). Collective bargaining and digitalisation: A global survey of union use of collective bargaining to increase worker control over digitalisation. *New England Journal of Public Policy*, 34(1), pp.01–23.
- Wakibi, S. & Oleche, M. (2024). *A study on women in the labour Force in Kenya*. Women's Economic Empowerment Hub (WEE-Hub), University of Nairobi.
- Webster, E. (2022). The rise of social-movement unionism: the two faces of the black trade union movement in South Africa. In *State, resistance and change in South Africa* (pp. 174–196). Routledge.

- Weinberg, B.R. (2024). A tale of two centuries? Expanding constitutional labour rights in Canada and their impact on legislation, conflict and wages. *Employment Relations Studies*, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
- Wijayanti, L., Wijayanti, A. and Miarsa, F.R.D., 2025. The Existence of Workers' Rights to Job Loss Insurance in the Event of Termination of Employment Due to Violation of Collective Agreements. *Law and Economics*, 19(2), pp.297-205.
- Williams, P. (2018, December 21). *Troubled North West province is back on its feet again*. South African Government. <https://www.gov.za/blog/troubled-north-west-province-back-its-feet-again>
- Khafa, E. & Serrano, M.R. (2024). *Workers in informal employment organising and collaborating: The role of trade unions* (No. 59). GLU Working Paper.
- Zvobga, J. (2019). Collective bargaining and collective agreements in Africa. *Turin School of Development Working Paper*, 11.

Appendix A: Ethics Approval



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>
Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 018 299-484
Fezile.Mselele@nwu.ac.za

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the North-West University Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC) on _____, the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-REC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title:													
Study leader/Supervisor (Principal investigator/Researcher):							University no.:						
Student:							University no.:						
Ethics number:	N	W	U	-					-	2	5	-	4
	Institution			Study number				Year		Status			
	Status: S = Submission; R = Re-submission; P = Provisional authorisation; A = Authorisation												
Application type:							Risk level:						
Commencement date:													
Expiry date:													
Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.													

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the EMS-REC:*
 - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*
 - *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the EMS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and EMS-REC reserves the right to:*
 - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
 - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
 - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
 - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
 - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the EMS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
 - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
 - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
- *EMS-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates through the secretariat, Botlenyana Maluleka (Botlenyana.Maluleka@nwu.ac.za; +27 18 2852436) or the chair Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout (Diana.Viljoen@nwu.ac.za / +27 16 9103403).*

The EMS-REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the EMS-REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Diana Viljoen-Bezuidenhout

Chairperson: NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Permission to Conduct Research



Office of the Premier

North West Provincial Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Gauteng Building
Private Bag A129
Mmabatho
2720

DIRECTOR GENERAL

Tel: +27 (0) 560 4951
Email: Premier@nw.gov.za

REF:4/2/3

Mr M.J Tshipo
Bray Road,
Moooseng Village,
Mahikeng
2745

Dear Mr Tshipo

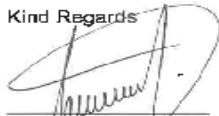
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITHIN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

1. Kindly note that your request to collect data and conduct research study within the Provincial Government of North West titled **"Exploring the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the Public Sector: A Case Study of the North West Province."** is acknowledged and supported.
2. However, it should be noted that further permission needs to be requested for sector departments that you might need to approach and present this approval.
3. Please note that certain information in the Public Service is classified and that might not be in your favour. On behalf of Provincial Government, we would like to wish you all the best with your research project.
4. The Office of the Premier will require a copy of your endorsed mini dissertation after the research project. For further assistance, please contact Dr. M Mosenogi, Director

Let's Grow North West Together

for Research and Evaluation Office of the Premier on [tel:018 388 2845/5173](tel:0183882845), emails:
mmosenogi@nwpg.gov.za or cseakgwa@nwpg.gov.za.

Kind Regards



M. P. MOGOTLHE
DIRECTOR GENERAL

DATE: 08/05/2025



Office of the Premier

North West Provincial Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



94 Fick, Co-Stone Building
Private Bag X129,
Mafikeng 01
2735

DG SUPPORT

Tel: +27 (0) 56 358-127
E-mail: GMA311035@nw.gov.za

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

TO : MR. JT MAWELELA
DDG PME&I

SUBJECT : REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH MR TSHIPO

For your attention

For your signature

For your approval



At your request

Take appropriate
action

Return with more
details

By the directive of the Director General, kindly receive the attached regarding the subject matter for your attention and action.

Kind regards

MS. R BLOEM
AD: DG SUPPORT

DATE 29/05/2025

Let's Grow North West Together

23 April 2025

NWU Business School Research Office
Joseph.Lekunze@nwu.ac.za
Tel: +27 (0) 183892235

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

This letter serves as a confirmation that **Mr. Maruping John Tshipa** student number **33481679** is a registered MBA student with the NWU Business School for the academic year 2025.

The student is working on his/her mini-dissertation titled "**Exploring the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the Public Sector: A Case Study of the North West Province.**" for the completion of an MBA degree. The student will need your support for him to collect data for the finalization of his mini-dissertation as part of the requirement for the completion of an MBA degree.

The student (**Mr. Maruping John Tshipa**) will use the collected data for research purposes only and nothing else. The Business School, therefore, requests the student be offered help in whatever way to access data.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. JN Lekunze
Research Program Chair
NWU Business School
Joseph.Lekunze@nwu.ac.za
Kind regards



Appendix C: Interview Guide



INTERVIEW GUIDE

I am an MBA (Master's in Business Administration) student at the North-West University Business School. This interview we are about to conduct seeks to “*Explore the Effectiveness of Collective Bargaining in the Public Sector: A Case Study of the North-West Province*”.

Objective: To structure the interviews effectively, ensuring that all key themes are covered within the allocated time and that insights align with the study's purpose.

Duration: 60 minutes per interview

Location: This interview will be conducted online (Zoom/MS Teams). It will be scheduled at your convenience on a platform of your choice.

Part A: Exploration of Key Themes

I sincerely appreciate your valuable insights and experiences. Your input is crucial and will significantly influence the development of a framework to explore the factors that drive successful or unsuccessful negotiations and to examine the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the public sector of the North-West Province.

Next, we will transcribe and analyse the interview responses and those from other participants to identify common themes and insights. These findings will help identify factors and validate the proposed framework, ensuring it remains practical, effective, and responsive to the public sector's needs in provinces like yours.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to share any further insights or information after this session. We will summarise the key findings for all interested participants upon completing the research.

Thank you once again for your valuable time and input. Have a great day.

Preliminary Section: Demographic Profile

- a. Entity you are representing:
- b. What is your job role:
- c. How many years of experience dealing with collective bargaining issues:

Section 1: Current collective bargaining process in the North-West Province public sector.

- 1. How would you describe your experience with the collective bargaining process in the public sector in the North-West Province?
- 2. What are your main challenges in the collective bargaining process?
- 3. How do you think the structure and procedures of collective bargaining in North-West Province could be improved?

Section 2: Factors that contribute to the success or failure of collective bargaining

- 4. What are the main elements that, in your opinion, determine the success or failure of collective bargaining in the public sector?
- 5. What roles do union and employer representatives play in the success or failure of collective bargaining?
- 6. How do the levels of trust and communication between negotiating parties affect the outcomes of collective bargaining?

Section 3: Impact of collective bargaining on public service delivery

- 7. In your view, how has collective bargaining affected workplace conditions, employee morale, and job satisfaction?
- 8. How would you describe the relationship between collective bargaining processes and the quality or efficiency of public service delivery in the North-West Province?
- 9. Can you share any examples where collective bargaining may have influenced service delivery, either positively or negatively? How were those situations handled?

Section 4: Strategies to improve the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the government

- 10. Do you believe that improved labour relations between management and employees in the public sector have been achieved through collective bargaining?
- 11. What improvements would you suggest to enhance the efficiency of collective bargaining in the North-West Province's public sector?

12. What policy or structural changes would you recommend to enhance collective bargaining and minimise disputes in the public sector?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

25 January 2026

DEAR PARTICIPANT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this study. Please ask the researcher or person explaining the research to you any questions about any part of this study you do not fully understand. You must be delighted that you know this research and how you might be involved. Also, your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to say no to participating, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You can also withdraw from the study at any point, even if you agree to participate now.

This study has been approved by the NWU Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC). It will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the North-West University and other international ethical guidelines applicable to this study.

Title of the project: Exploring the Effectiveness of Collective Bargaining in the Public Sector: A Case Study of the North-West Province

Institution: NWU Business School

Ethics Reference Number: NWU-00729-25-A4

Names and contact details of project staff

	Supervisor	Researcher
Title, name & surname	Dr. Banji Rildwan Olaleye	Mr. Maruping John Tshipo
Function in Project	Academic research supervisor	Researcher
Email	banji.olaar@gmail.com	33481679@mynwu.ac.za

What is this research study all about?

You will be expected to:

- participate in a 60-minute face-to-face or virtual interview via Zoom or Microsoft Teams
- Interviews will be recorded (with consent) for accuracy and transcribed for analysis.
- Respond to the questions openly and honestly.
- Inform the supervisor should you feel or experience any discomfort or distress during the research process, and inform the supervisor if you sometimes feel the need to terminate your involvement in the research process. You can withdraw from the research process at any time before, during, or after the research process.

Will you gain anything from taking part in this research?

This study is self-funded and does not offer participants direct financial or personal benefits. However, your participation will contribute to a deeper academic understanding of the collective bargaining process and its efficiency in the Public Sector of the North-West Province.

Are there risks involved in participating in this research, and how will they be addressed?

No physical risks are involved, as the study does not require physical participation or experiments. However, as your input may contain sensitive information, the following ethical safeguards will be implemented:

- Your identity will be protected through anonymisation.
- All personal data will be treated as strictly confidential
- The research will be conducted in accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), Act No. 4 of 2013, ensuring lawful and secure handling of your data.
- Your responses will be safely secured in a password-protected cloud-based system.
- No interviews will be undertaken. This is an entirely online process.

Your Rights under POPIA

In accordance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), Act No. 4 of 2013, you have the right to:

- Access your personal data held by the researcher.

- Request correction or deletion of your data at any time.
- Withdraw your consent and participation at any stage without negative consequences.
- Be informed about how your information will be stored, protected, and used.

How will your confidentiality be protected, and who will access your data?

- You will be assigned a unique participant ID.
- Questionnaire responses will be captured and stored securely concerning this ID.
- No identifiable personal information (e.g., name, contact details) will be disclosed or published.
- Data will only be accessible to the researcher and the authorised supervisor and will be stored in a secure, password-protected computer-based system.
- The findings will be presented in aggregated form, and no raw data will be published or shared with external parties.
- All research data will be retained for five years, as per NWU and POPIA regulations, and then permanently deleted or destroyed.

- All research data will be retained for five years, as per NWU and POPIA regulations, and then permanently deleted or destroyed.

What will happen with the research findings?

The findings will be used exclusively for academic purposes to contribute to scholarly literature. No commercially sensitive or personally identifiable information will be used or disclosed. However, please note that the results may be published in academic journals and that the completed MBA study will be available in the NWU library for research purposes.

How will you access the study's results?

- If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, a copy of the final research report will be sent to you via email upon request.

Will you receive payment or incur any costs for participation?

Participation is voluntary and unpaid. There are no costs involved except for the time you spend participating in the study.

Additional Information or Questions

- If you have questions, you may contact:
- Researcher: Maruping John Tshipo | Email: 33481679@mynwu.ac.za
- Supervisor: Dr Banji Rildwan Olaleye | Email: banji.olaar@gmail.com
- You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Please note that your responses are anonymous and no personally identifiable data will be collected.

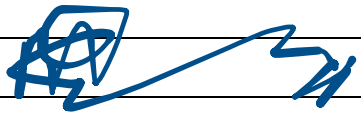
DECLARATION

Declaration by participant

By selecting the option below, I agree to take part in the research study titled:
Exploring the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the Public Sector: A case study of the North-West Province

Yes	No
1	2

Please sign below to show that you have read, understand, and agree to abide by the study's terms and conditions.



Signature

20/11/2025

Date

Appendix E: Turnitin Report



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that Turnitin received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author: MJ TSHIPO
Assignment title: Turnitin test
Submission title: 33481679:M_J_Tshipo_St_no_33481679_Reworked_Mini_Disser...
File name: po_St_no_33481679_Reworked_Mini_Dissertation_Chapter1-5_...
File size: 7.42M
Page count: 139
Word count: 36,819
Character count: 233,594
Submission date: 21-Nov-2025 05:08AM (UTC-0800)
Submission ID: 2823044855



33481679:M_J_Tshipo_St_no_33481679_Reworked_Mini_Diss...
5_(2).docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

13%

SIMILARITY INDEX

10%

INTERNET SOURCES

8%

PUBLICATIONS

5%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	repository.nwu.ac.za Internet Source	2%
2	Submitted to University of South Africa Student Paper	1%
3	hdl.handle.net Internet Source	1%
4	Submitted to North West University Student Paper	1%
5	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
6	core.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
7	d-nb.info Internet Source	<1%
8	Shabangu, Pay Ernest. "Towards a Framework Using Stakeholder Engagement as a Strategic Communication Approach in Mitigating Conflict in the Local Government Collective Bargaining Process", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2023 Publication	<1%
9	Bodilenyane, Keratilwe. "Problems and Prospects of Collective Bargaining in the Public Sector in Botswana", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2025 Publication	<1%

Appendix F: Proof of Language Editing

LifeMark Consulting
3050 Unit 9
Mahikeng
Email: info@lifemarkconsulting.co.za



26 November 2025

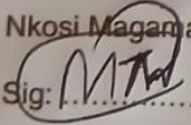
To the Research Supervisor

REF: Acknowledgement of Proofreading and Editing

This letter serves to confirm and acknowledge that this research, titled, **Exploring the collective bargaining efficacy in a selected public sector department within the North West Province**, by **M J Tshipo**, has been proofread and edited by LifeMark Consulting.

LifeMark Consulting has made all the necessary changes that improved the quality of this document.

Regards

Nkosi Magama
Sig: 

LIFEMARK CONSULTING
3050 OCKIE ACKERMAN CRESCENT
UNIT 9 MMABATHO
Email: info@lifemarkconsulting.co.za
WEBSITE: www.lifemarkconsulting.co.za
CELL: +27 62 003 7432
DATE: