



# Increasing Public Sector Trade Union Power & its Implication on Labour & Employee Relations

Theophilus T. Tshukudu

7-11<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2015

CAPETOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

# Presentation outline

- Introduction
- Background of unionism in the public sector
- Challenges in the employment relations
- Impact of an influential t/union or Federation
- The Balancing Act
- Recommendation
- Conclusion

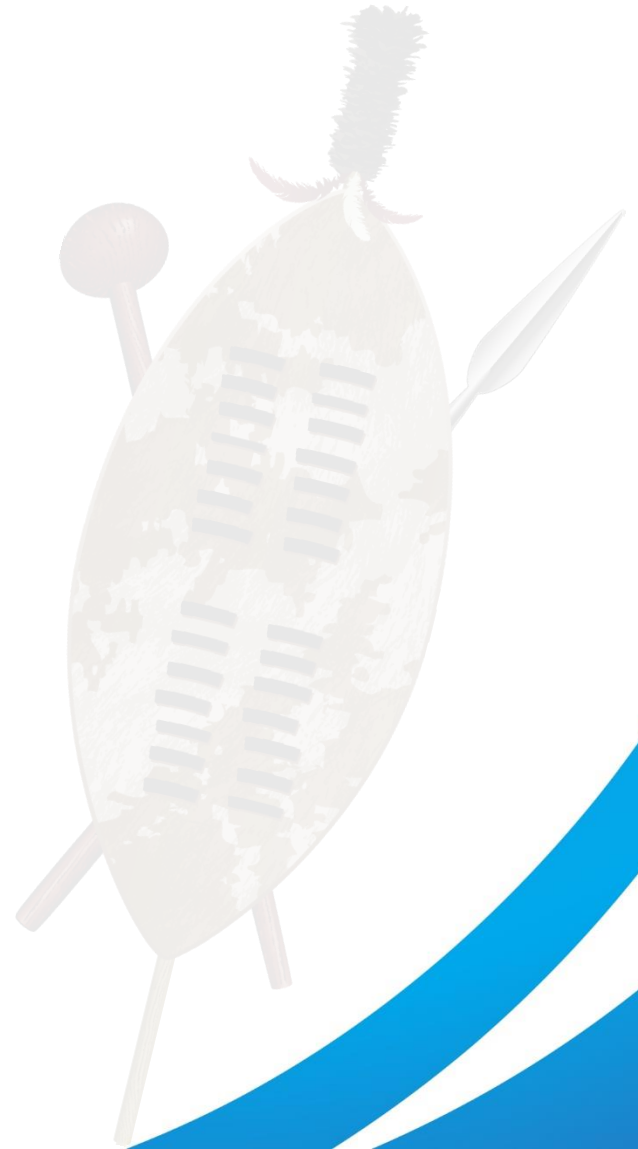


# Introduction

- when labour markets are seen as imperfect,
- when the employment relationship includes conflicts of interest,
- then one cannot rely on markets or managers to always serve workers' interests, and in extreme cases to prevent worker exploitation.

## Introduction continue....

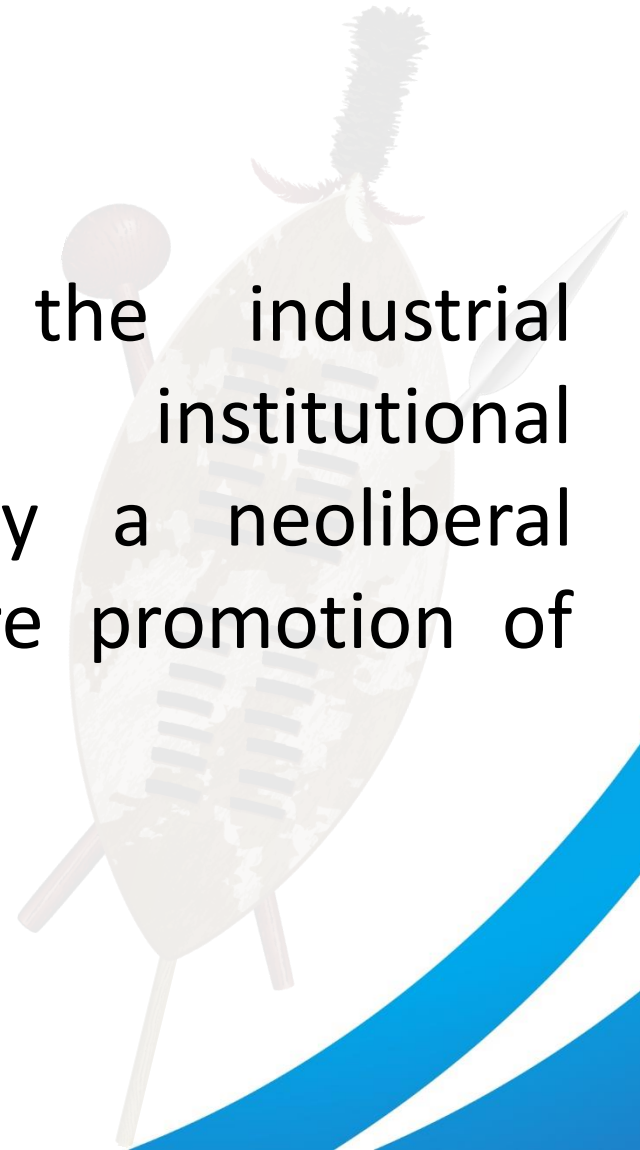
- Institutional interventions are all seen as methods for **balancing the employment relationship** to generate not only economic efficiency, but also employee equity and voice.
- A balance in the employment relations is critical in all aspects of collective bargaining, hence theme for this paper.



# Industrial relations today

- By many accounts, industrial relations today is in crisis
- In academia, its traditional positions are threatened on one side by the dominance of mainstream economics and organizational behaviour, and on the other by postmodernism.

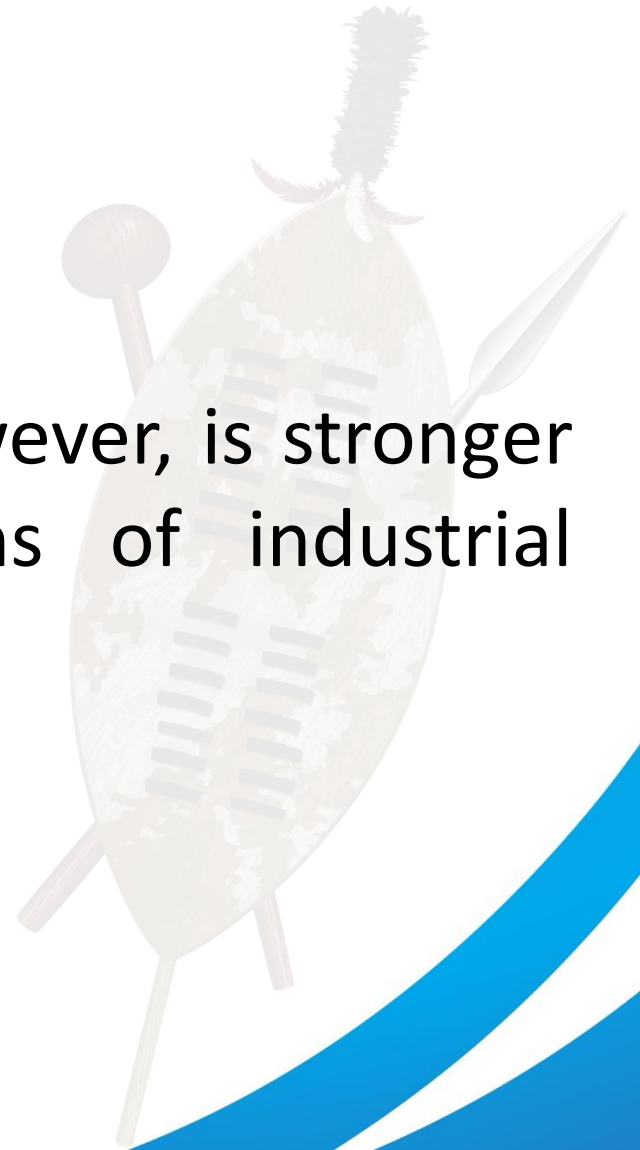
- In policy-making circles, the industrial relations emphasis on institutional intervention is trumped by a neoliberal emphasis on the laissez faire promotion of free markets



- In practice, labour unions are declining and fewer companies have industrial relations functions
- The number of academic programs in industrial relations is therefore shrinking, and scholars are leaving the field for other areas, especially human resource management and organizational behaviour.



- The importance of work, however, is stronger than ever, and the lessons of industrial relations remain vital.



## **Labour Laws and employee relations SSA**

- Most countries in SSA adopted their laws from their colonial Masters and this influence led to a continuation of non-recognition of trade unions in the region
- Most if not all the countries struggled to come up with suitable labour laws and those who did so were under immense pressure from the ILO

- Clearly, employment laws provide for the review of statutes and other regulation and it is the responsibility of the government of the day to ensure that there is harmony between labour and the employers.

- The establishment of industrial courts in SSA became daunting tasks for most governments, not because of lack of resources, but rather due to unwillingness and because of fear of losing control of control and that unions may unduly benefit from the decisions of these courts.

## **Challenges faced by governments in dealing with influential Unions/Federations**

- Influential unions have negative impacts on the public service labour relations.
- These challenges include amongst others the following:
  - it puts pressure on the employer,
  - discourages foreign investors, bargaining becomes a lengthy process and
  - regular and lengthy strikes.

# Leadership & political aspirations

- In many sub-Saharan countries, trade unions are used as stepping stone for political office.
- Differently put, politician in most Africa states started their political ambitions during their tenures as trade union leaders.

- These leaders use the privilege position to negotiate with government to get the insight of critical issues in the areas of social, economic, and political spheres



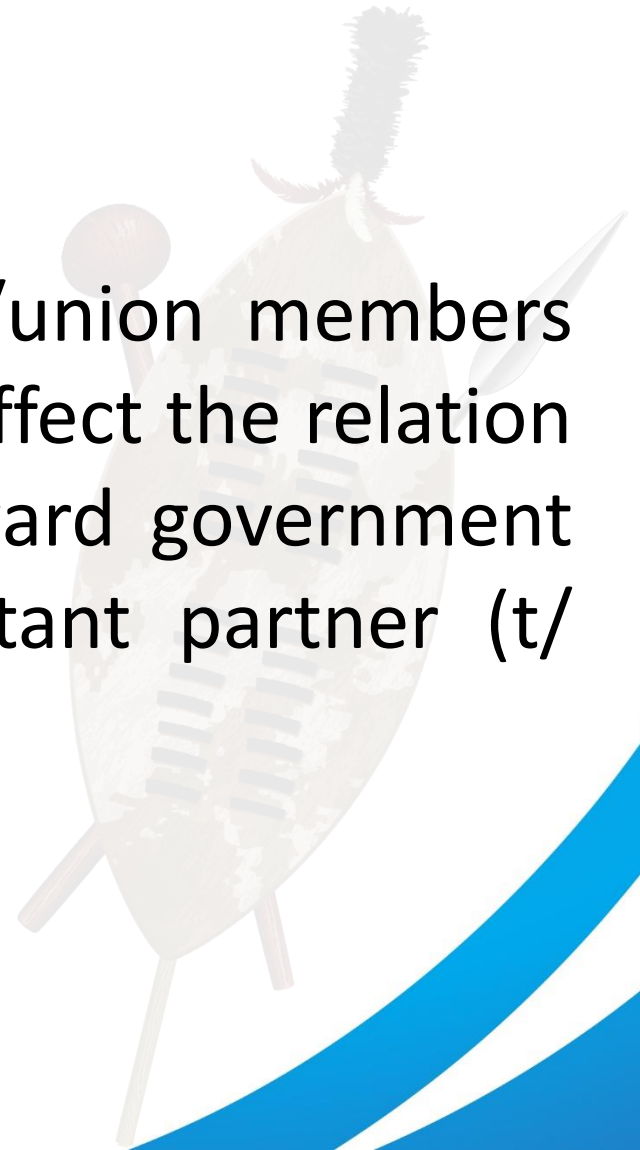
- In the event that a public employee union is influential, chances are that union leaders may aspire for political office knowing that it will be easy for them to canvas for votes with their respective trade union or federation.



- Mogalakwe (1997) emphasis that these leaders will be gathering sensitive information from government during their interactions, knowing that the information gather will come handy at the time when they join active politics.

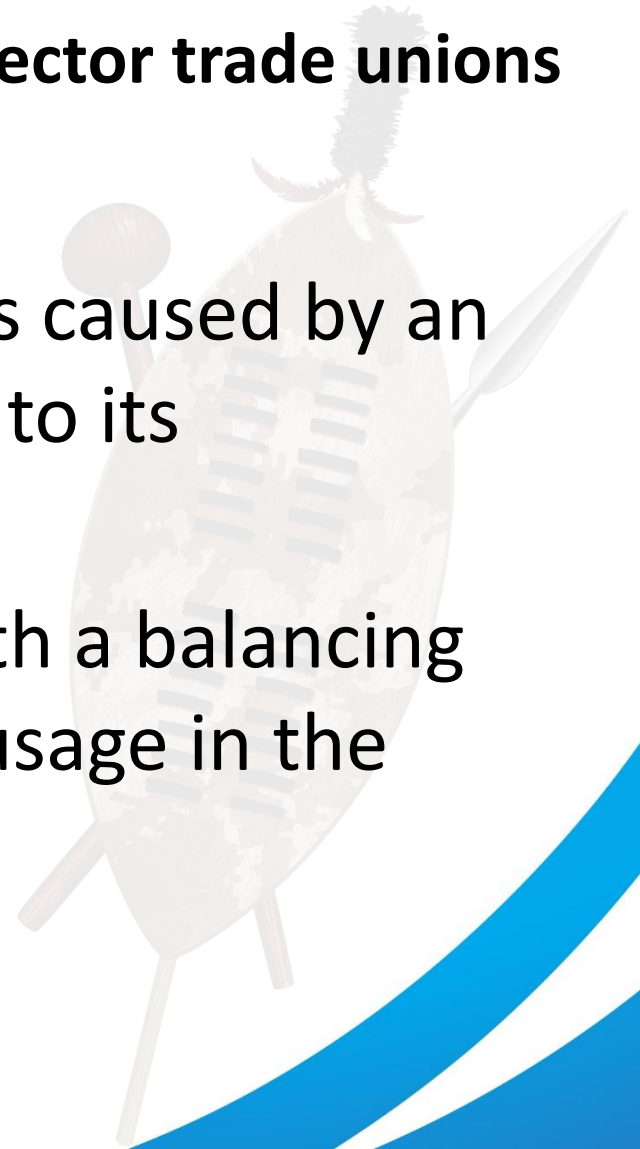
- Either way, members may approach a popular unionist to represent their political interest against the government of the day there are many instances whereby active unionist left their position to campaign for a political office under the opposition umbrella.

- This move on the part of t/union members and their leader will further affect the relation negatively in that going forward government will lose trust on its important partner (t/union).

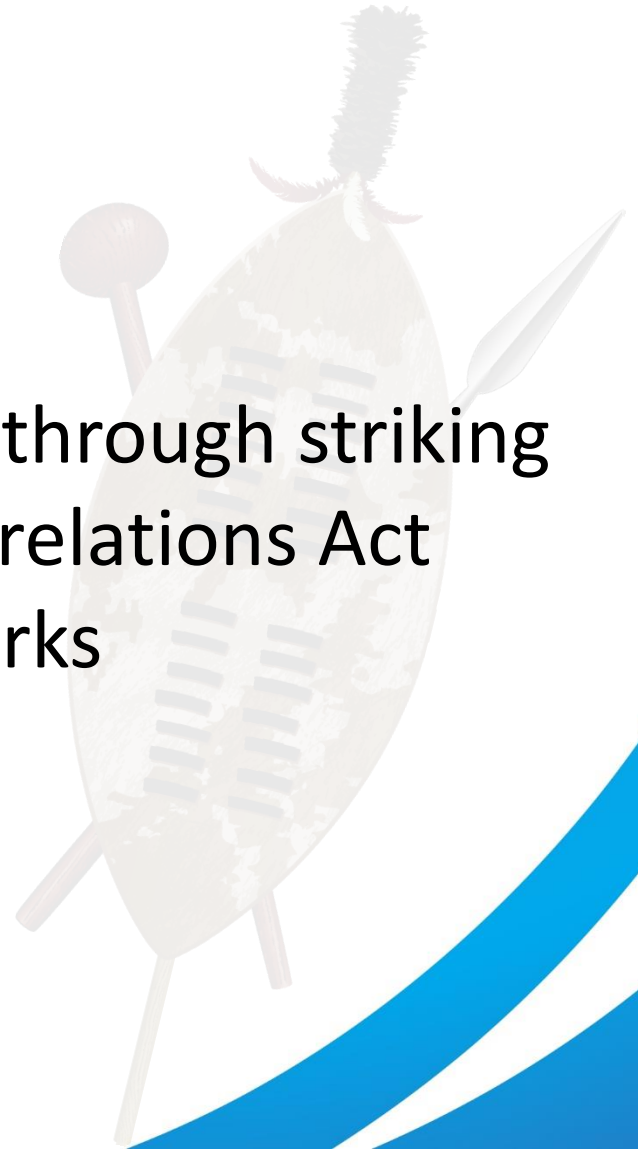


## **The balancing factor in the public sector trade unions and employers**

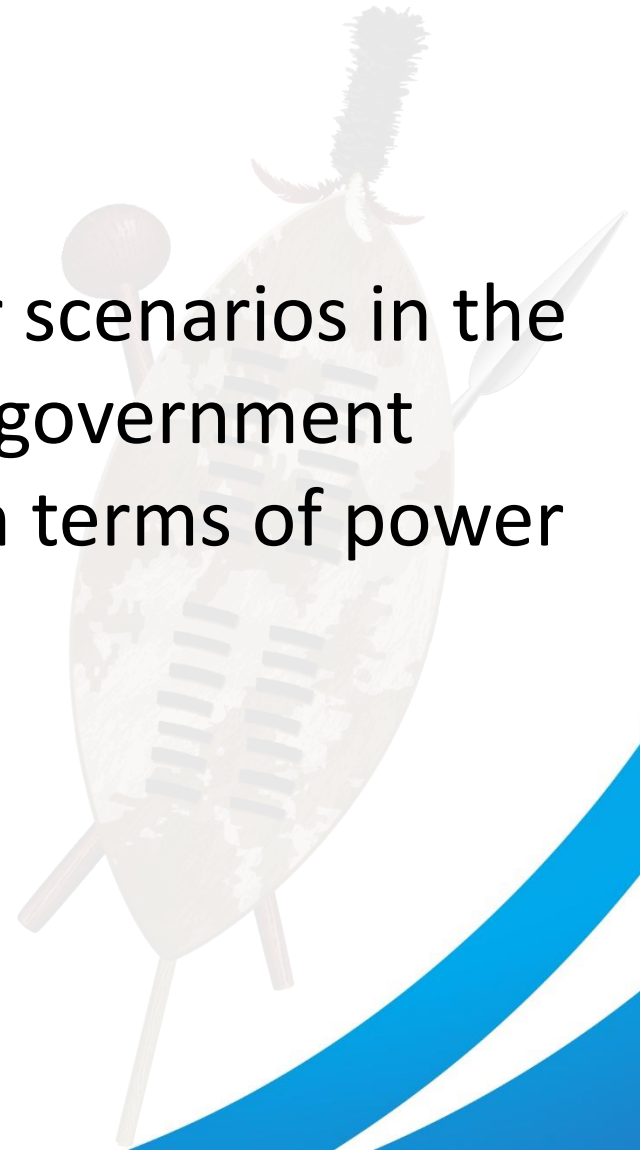
- Given the foregoing challenges caused by an influential public sector union to its relationship with government,
- there is a need to come up with a balancing act in terms of power and its usage in the relationship

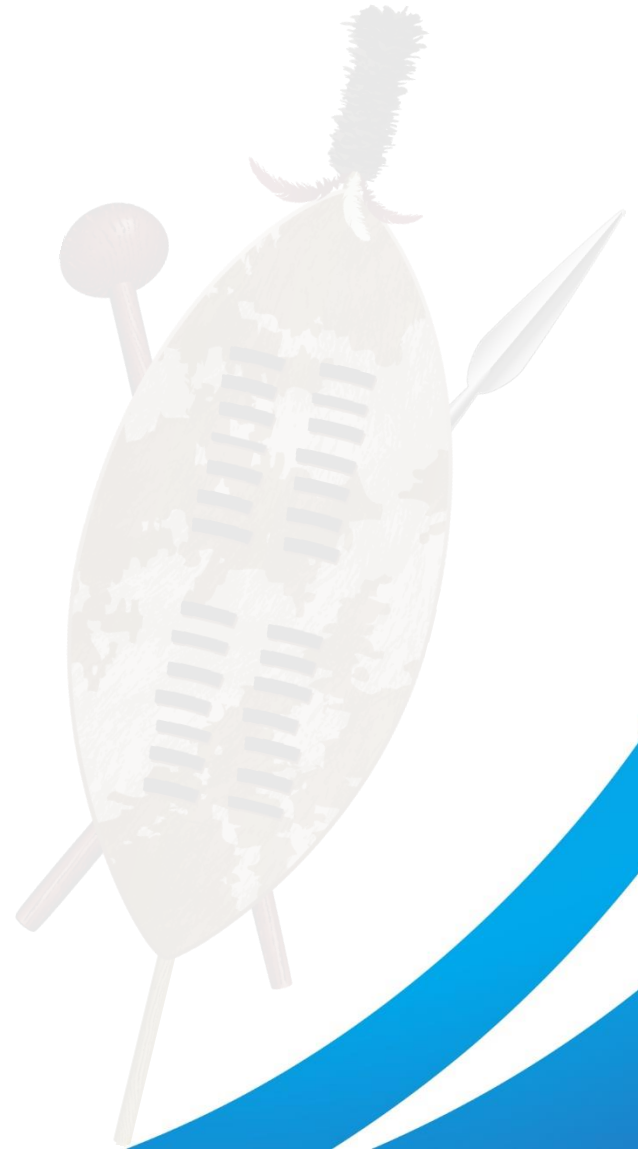


- And this can only be achieved through striking a balance through the Labour relations Act and other regulatory frameworks

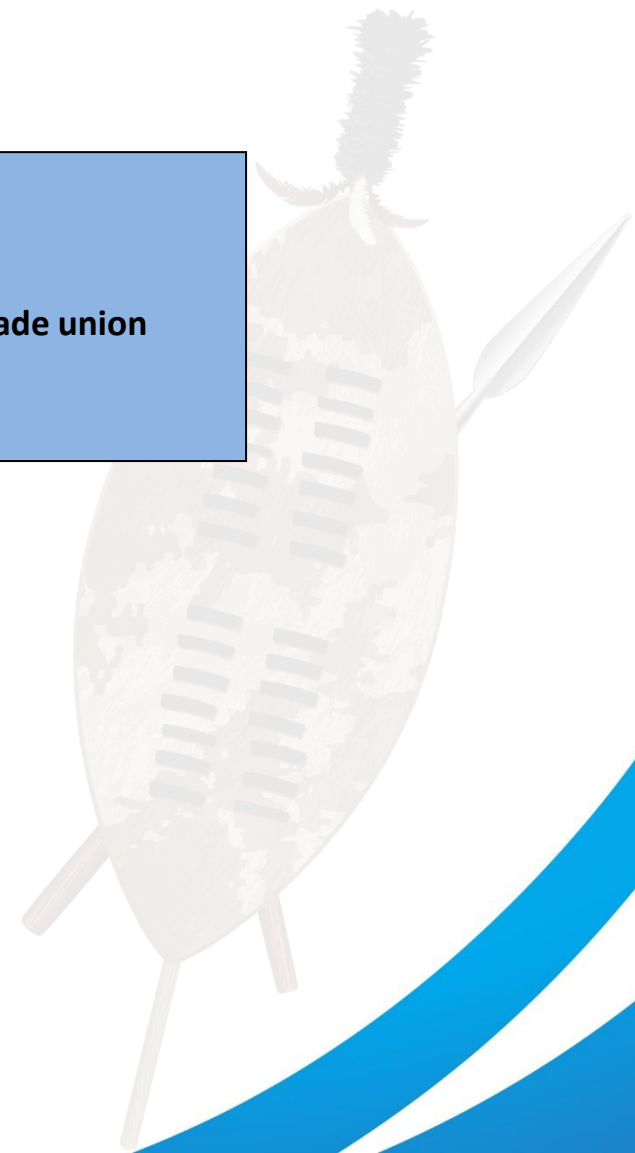
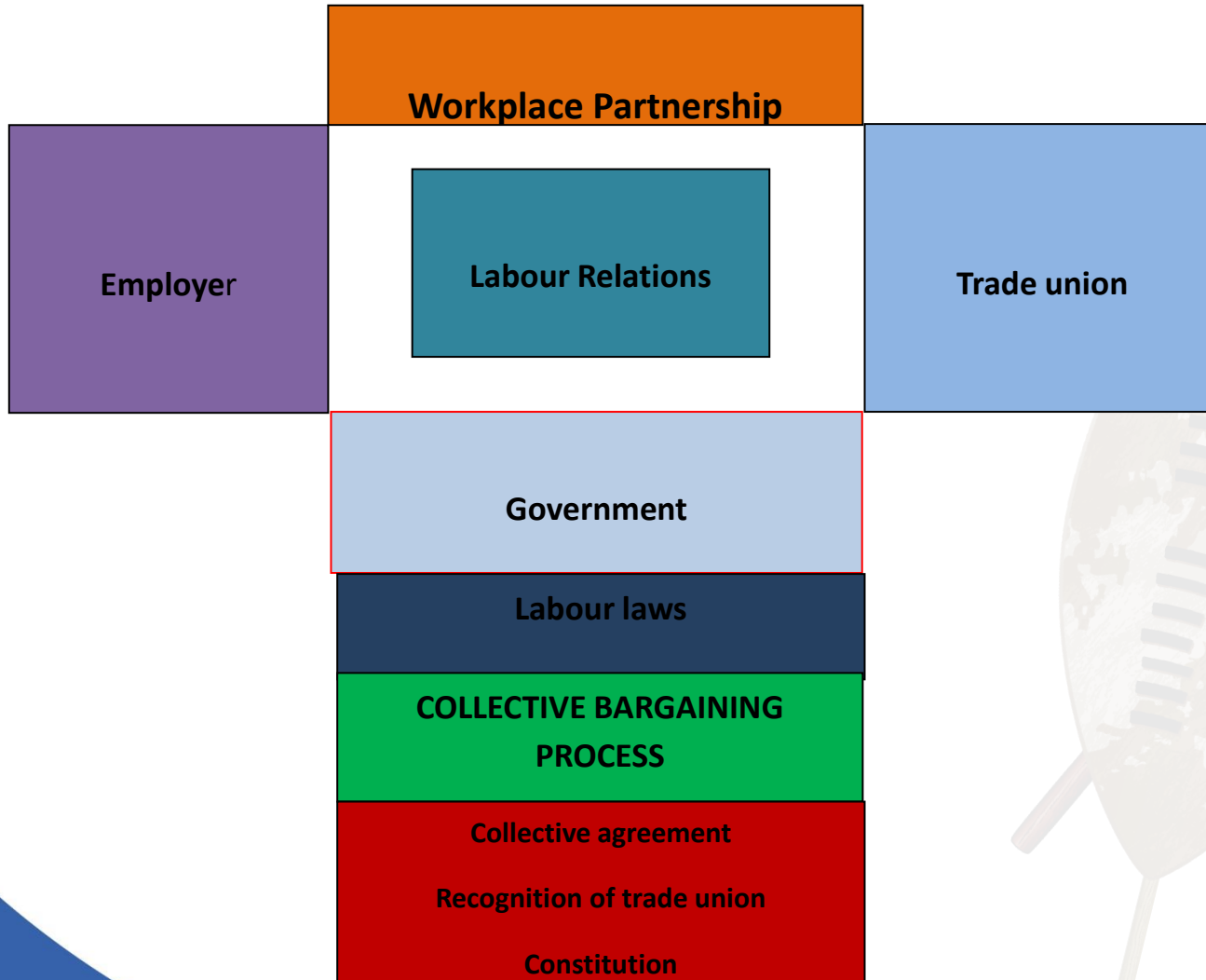


- Figure 1 below illustrates four scenarios in the public sector trade union and government with A and B been the same in terms of power usage in the relationship.



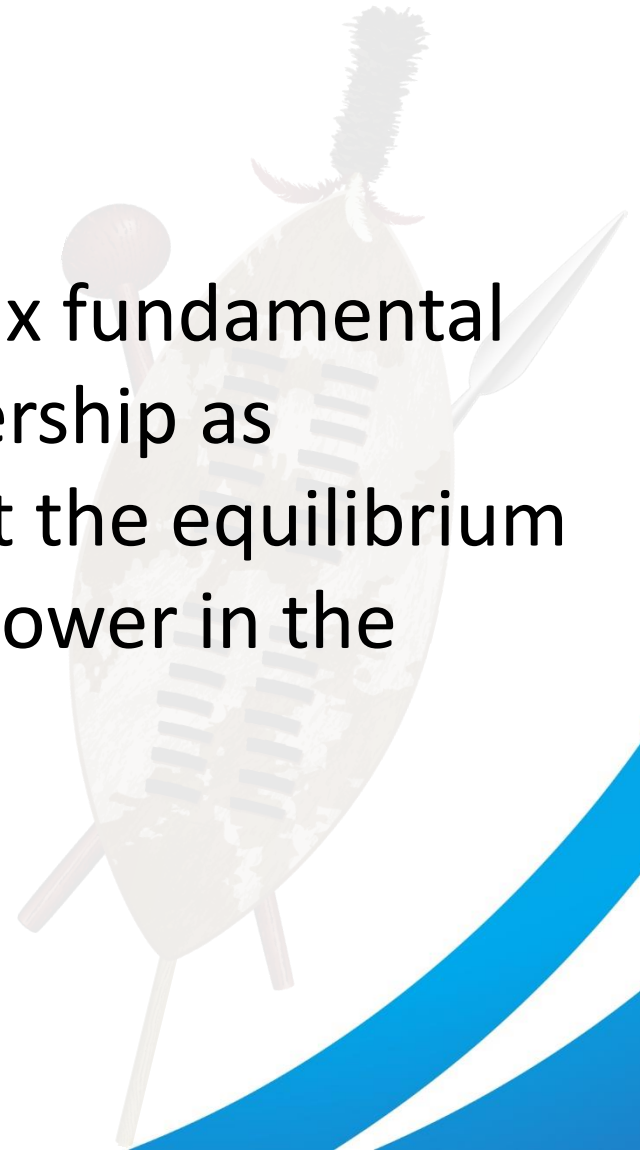


**Figure 1: A WORKPLACE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK**





- the author recommends the six fundamental principles of workplace partnership as strategies that can bring about the equilibrium to the issue of influence and power in the labour relations.



- These principles include the following:
- First, there should be shared commitment to the business goals of the public organisation.
- Second, there should be an acknowledgement that they might be quite legitimate differences of interest and priorities between the employers.
- Third, measures to increase labour flexibility should not be at the cost of increased employee insecurity, which should be protected by investing in transferable skills.

- Fourth, partner arrangements must improve opportunities for personal development of employees.
- Fifth, it must be based on open and well informed consultation, and
- Finally, effective partnership should seek to add value by raising the level of employee motivation

# Conclusion

- The unique relationship between the government and trade unions calls for special approach to dealing with issues of mutual interest.

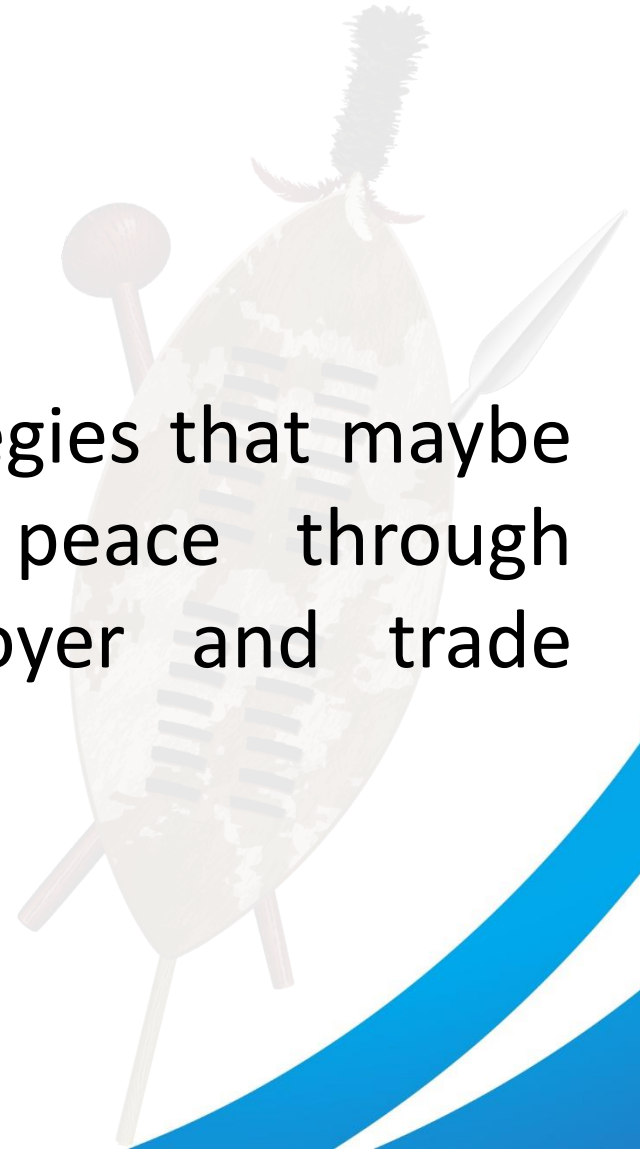


- The world over labour peace is a fundamental tool to economic and political stability.
- Instability in the world of work normally spells over and affects the well-being of people including the sympathetic public.



- Similarly, too much power or influential trade union will hijack the collective bargaining process and the consequences of that may have far reaching implications to: the economy, political, foreign direct investment and other forms of instability to a country.

- This paper provided six strategies that maybe used to promote labour peace through partnership between employer and trade union.





- The essence of equitable treatment in the relationship is premised on the constitution, recognition of trade unions, collective agreement, and well-crafted labour laws in general,
- Parties must trust each other because.....

- ***FOR “TRUST COMES ON FOOT AND LEAVES ON HORSE-BACK”***

