

## **The Role of Internal Public Relations Tools Used in Enhancing Employee Relations at Kenya's National Assembly**

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### **Abstract**

*This study was conducted to analyze the role of internal public relations tools on employee relations at the Kenya National Assembly. This study adopted a descriptive survey using a quantitative methods approach which targeted communication and research officers in the National Assembly. The objectives of the study were: To investigate the value of internal employee social networks on employee relations, to determine the benefits of internal employee surveys system on employee relations, to establish the role of internal newsletters on employees and to analyse the benefits of internal employee events on employee relations at the Kenya National Assembly. Questionnaires were used to provide answers to the research questions. The study population comprised 173 participants and a sample of 78 was studied. The study findings indicated that internal employee social networks significantly influence employee relations, internal employee survey systems are important in improving employee relations, internal newsletters are an important tool for maintaining and improving employee relations and internal employee events are important in fostering strong relationships among staff members of the Kenya National Assembly. The study recommends that organizations should explore the various internal networks used for employee relations that are useful in enhancing employee relations initiatives and that organizations should embrace employee surveys as part of their management approach. Further research is needed on the various types of surveys used for employee relations and their influence on internal communication in organizations.*

**Key words:** Internal public relations, Employee relations, Kenya's National Assembly

## **Background**

The role of internal public relations tools in enhancing employee relations in National Assemblies is an important one locally and globally. It is also evident that the dynamics of employee relations in public institutions such as National Assemblies are complex, multifaceted and ever-evolving (Ewing, 2019). This is due to the presence of many different stakeholders, such as members of parliament, government officials, members of the public, and of course the employees themselves. It is therefore imperative that effective internal public relations strategies are implemented in order to ensure the successful management of employee relations within the National Assembly.

The Kenya National Assembly is charged with the responsibility of representing the people of Kenya in matters of legislation and governance. This role has seen the institution become heavily reliant on effective internal public relations tools in order to enhance employee relations. In order to achieve this, it is essential that a comprehensive internal public relations strategy is developed in order to ensure the successful management of employee relations. This strategy should be developed in line with the unique cultural context of the National Assembly and should reflect the values, objectives and goals of the Assembly. It is also important that the internal public relations strategy encompasses a range of tools that can be used to enhance employee relations (Ewing, 2019). Examples of such tools include employee surveys, focus groups, employee forums, newsletters and other communication channels. Employees are the major valuable assets of an organization in which without them, it is hard to realize its basic objectives (Dupe, 2015). To get more from employees, a conducive working environment which satisfies the needs of individual employees is required.

The Public Relations department of the organization is tasked with ensuring that employee relations are conducted effectively (Dupe, 2015). It is the department that mainly focuses on the relations of employees in the National Assembly. Repper and Grunig (1992) stated that “public relations makes organizations more effective by building long-term relationships with strategic constituencies” and more specifically, by “developing relations with stakeholders in the internal or external environment that constrain or enhance the ability of an organization to accomplish its mission” (p.117-118). Internal public relations tools used by the National Assembly include newsletters, internal employee surveys, social networks and employee events. These tools are tailored towards providing employees with an understanding of the National Assembly’s activities and objectives.

This study therefore attempted to advance the understanding of the tools of Public Relations used in employee relations the National Assembly of Kenya. The objectives of the research were to investigate what role internal public relations tools play in enhancing employee relations at

Kenya's National Assembly. In particular, the research examined the effectiveness of internal public relations tools such as corporate newsletters, internal communications and staff engagement activities in fostering better communication between employees and management, and ultimately improving employee relations at the National Assembly.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Employee relations are a key aspect in any management of organizations whether public or corporate. It is through a good employee relations management system that employees are adequately informed about the organization and get a chance to safely express themselves whenever they feel like (Gates, 1995). A healthy employee relationship ensures that individuals take up their roles seriously and feel motivated enough to report to work as expected. Human satisfaction at the work place is based upon a solid foundation of good and healthy relationships at work among employees of all spheres and cadres. With the inception and operationalization of the Parliamentary Service Commission where the autonomy of Parliament was empowered to manage the affairs of the National Assembly without any influence from the executive such as to provide services and facilitate members to ensure efficient and effective functioning of parliament, supervise office holders including the recruitment of their own personnel, determine their terms of services which included salaries and other benefits ( PSC Strategic Plan, 2012), thus making parliament an attractive employer in the whole country by the year 2003. In 2003, almost every person yearned to be employed by the National assembly and those who were lucky were able to be absorbed in the institution thus enjoying the benefits and salaries offered within parliament among other related benefits and of course the privilege of working in the National Assembly. Surprisingly, since 2019, due to unknown reasons, the departure of staff from the National Assembly has been alarming and of great concern to the administration and to other stakeholders. By such loses of much needed manpower, the erosion of the gains made during the parliamentary reforms and independence of the institution, there are dangers expected ahead if this trend is not checked. The main purpose of this study therefore was to investigate the role of internal public relations tools used in parliament in enhancing employee relations among employees in Kenya's National Assembly.

## **Literature Review**

### **Internal public relations**

Public relations is a management technique that employs various means of communication to find similar viewpoints or interests of distinct groups and fosters the establishment of partnerships and amicable relationships among workers, clients, and the general public (Gimaliev et. al, 2020). Onabajo (2005) further informs that the actual goal of public relations is to build a well-deserved reputation, which may include providing exceptional customer service, demonstrating social responsibility to the workforce, the local community, and the environment, and successfully communicating with the public. There are certain social networks shared among

employees for the fulfillment of personal interests, such as social occasions like employee's special days or welfare support issues. These routes are frequently less limited, more convenient, face to face, and more dependable. Office WhatsApp groups and social media are examples that are currently in use in some organizations as well as in the National Assembly for internal communication purposes (Onabanjo, 2005).

### **Internal public relations tools**

Internal public relations tools are communication strategies used by organizations to maintain relationships with their employees and other stakeholders. They can be effective in building morale, establishing trust, and creating a positive work environment. There are however various tools and strategies available in the public relations department's armory for planning, coordinating, motivating, and influencing an organization's internal environment in reaction to external change or mobilization of a workforce (Gimaliev et. al, 2020).

### **Internal Employee Social networks**

Employee social networks are becoming increasingly popular as a tool for internal public relations. Employee social networks can be invaluable tools for internal public relations. By providing a platform for communication, recognition, resources, and feedback, these networks can help organizations foster a culture of engagement and collaboration, while also providing a way to quickly and accurately disseminate information. It was observed in the study by Men, Neil and Ewing (2020) that the ability to quickly and easily communicate with employees across an organization has made these networks invaluable for keeping everyone informed and involved. The study mainly explored the influence of social media on employee engagement as a function of Public Relations in organizations. The use of internal communication channels, in particular, internal social media contributes to employee engagement has remained under explored (Men, Neil, & Ewing, 2020) and as such this study sought to explore the connection between the use of social network and employee relations (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003).

### **Internal Employee Surveys System**

Scheuren (2004) advances that the world is no longer in an industrial society but an information society. As a result, our "society" needs a timely and accurate flow of information on preferences, wants, and behavior. Surveys are heavily relied upon in response to the government's, businesses, and social organizations' crucial need for information. The term "survey" is most commonly used to describe a process of obtaining information from a sample of people. Information is gathered using standardized protocols, such that each participant is asked the same questions in roughly the same way (Scheuren, 2004).

Employees may express themselves freely and offer valuable feedback when anonymous internal surveys are conducted on a regular basis. Once the findings are in, they may be used to discover deficiencies, initiate change management procedures, or, thankfully, confirm that staff are happy

with their current situation. As a public service institution, the national assembly is supposed to be abreast with the needs and wants of its employees as its first publics. Being privy and sensitive to the needs and wants of its employees permeates to the wellbeing of the general publics. Onabajo (2005) informs that appraisals can also aid in determining the best communication methods for a company.

### **Internal Newsletters on Employee Relations**

Ifijeh et al. (2015) define a newsletter as essentially a piece of content that is created and distributed on a regular basis by a group of persons, a body, or an organization that offers specific information for audience viewing. Newsletters act as official feedback conduits between the company and its stakeholders. They are an inexpensive way to communicate with employees, create connections with consumers, advertise new items, and obtain new markets (Lunenburg, 2010). Employee newsletters function as a link between employers and employees in a company. They are used to notify and update personnel about current events, activities, accomplishments, and goals of the organization (Ifijeh et al., 2015). At the national assembly newsletters may prove an important tool in the notification of a change in employees, regime, order of business and hierarchical order. Newsletters enable internal communications teams to include a range of assets and updates, making it one of the most often used internal communication platforms. The newsletter can be used to highlight staff successes or team project success. Newsletters may now be sent via email or workplace intranet boards on both desktop and mobile devices thanks to advances in technology.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by two theories, the excellence theory and Gruinig and Hunt's two-way symmetrical model of public relations developed in 1984 by Gruinig and a team of researchers. According to this model, communication between an organization and its publics should be two-way and symmetrical. This means that the organization should take into account the public's opinions and views when formulating its message and should also be open to feedback from the public. This model is also based on the idea that public relations is an ongoing process and should be planned and evaluated carefully (Grunig, 2013). This is a general theory of public relations that "specifies how public relations makes organizations more effective, how it is organized and managed when it contributes most to organizational effectiveness, the conditions in organizations and their environments that make organizations more effective, and how the monetary value of public relations can be determined". The Excellence Theory is an approach to management that focuses on creating and sustaining high levels of performance in all areas of an organization (Haddud, 2016). The theory is based on ten core tenets that emphasize the importance of collaboration, innovation, customer satisfaction, and continuous improvement (Leat, 2008). This theory was relevant to this study because the study focused on investigating the role of internal public relations tools used in enhancing employee relations at Kenya's National Assembly. The study will be focused on studying the strategic role of tools used in

Public relations activities by the national assembly and how that influences employee relations among the various departments in the national assembly.

### **Research Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey study design. The descriptive study is one that seeks to describe and interpret a certain phenomenon (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The study set out to describe the role of internal public relations tools used in parliament in enhancing employee relations among staff in Kenya's National Assembly. The survey consisted of staff selected from the various departments within the National assembly. Generalizations were made based on the findings from the samples. The population of the study included 113 employees of the National Assembly spread in the various departments. Stratified sampling was used to select the departments to be the subjects in the study. Proportionate and simple random samplings were used to select employees in the various departments in the National assembly. The heads of department were selected purposively based on the role in ensuring employee motivation in the respective departments. To collect the quantitative data, communication officers and the research officers at various levels filled in the questionnaires. The questionnaires addressed the key variables that the study was concerned with as per the study objectives. The data was analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics.

### **Presentation of Findings**

#### **The Value of Internal Employee Social Networks On the Employee Relations Among Staff Of The Kenya National Assembly**

The study sought to find out the social network type that the respondents used. This was to determine the validity of the information provided by the respondents because if the respondent does not use any of the social networks they may not be able to provide credible information to the study. The results are presented in table below. From the data, it was reported that 69.2% use Facebook, 94.3% reported to use whatsapp and 57.7 % said they use Twitter as social media sites. This indicates that the respondents each use social networks to a significant percentage that makes them viable respondents to the study. The particular social networks of interest to the study are those used by the National Assembly in engaging with the publics and the employees are internal publics. It was reported that the employees have whatsapp groups for each department used for employee communications on various matters.

#### **Value of Internal Employee Social Networks to employee relations**

The study also sought to find out the extent to which respondents agreed with social networks influence on employee relations at the Kenya National Assembly. The researcher used the likert scale to record the responses. The results are presented in the table below.

**Table: Value of Internal Employee Social Network**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Internal employee social networks help in fostering better communication among the staff at the Kenya National Assembly	3.58	1.31640
Internal employee social networks are effective in increasing teamwork among the staff	4.32	0.51640
Internal employee social networks have an impact on the morale and productivity of the staff	3.90	0.08233
Internal employee social networks are useful in creating a better working environment	4.48	0.48795
Internal employee social networks have an impact on the employee relations among the staff of the Kenya National Assembly	3.70	1.0734
Internal employee social networks have a positive impact on the employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly	3.52	0.99043
Internal employee social networks are helpful in increasing employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly.	4.22	0.56061

**Source: Author (2023)**

The study found out that internal employee social network has great impact on increasing teamwork among the staff, better working environment and increasing employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly. This is supported by the calculated mean of 4.32, 4.48 and 4.22 respectively.

**Benefits of Internal Employee Surveys System on communication among staff in the Kenya National Assembly**

The findings indicated that 19.2% strongly agreed that the employee surveys helped in fostering their communication with colleagues, 53.8% reported that they agreed that internal survey system on employee welfare aided in communication among staff in the National assembly, 23.1% reported that they were neutral on the benefits of the surveys in employee communication, 1.9% disagreed with the role that employee surveys played in improving communication while 1.9% strongly disagreed with the role of internal employee welfare surveys in improving communication among staff of the National assembly. This information is represented below:

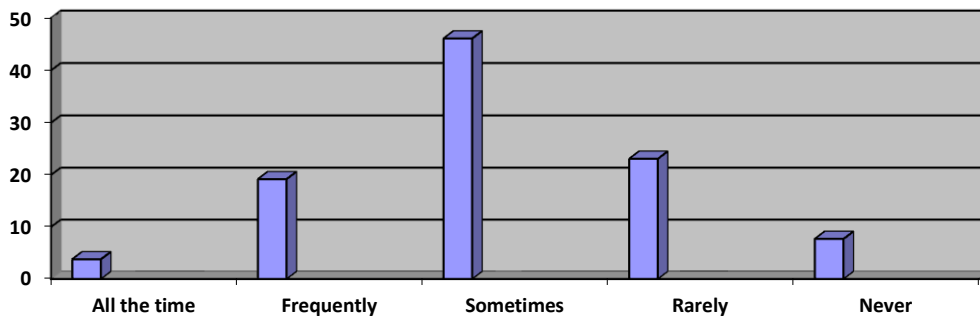
### **Internal Employee Surveys System on creating a more positive work environment in the Kenya National Assembly**

The study also sought to investigate responses on the benefits of Internal Employee Surveys System on creating a more positive work environment in the Kenya National Assembly. From the data collected, it was reported that 0% strongly agreed, 42.3% agreed, 46.2% were neutral, 11.5% reported to disagree and 0% strongly disagreed. This data is represented below

### **The Role Of Internal Newsletters On Employee Relations Among Staff Of The Kenya National Assembly.**

The researcher sought to establish the role of internal newsletters which are produced weekly on covering issues that influence employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly. Internal news letters are an important tool for maintaining and improving employee relations. By providing employees with timely and relevant information, newsletters can help to foster a sense of community and connection. They can also help to ensure that employees understand the company’s goals and objectives and are kept informed of company news and developments. By regularly communicating with employees, news letters can create an environment of trust and mutual respect, which in turn can lead to improved employee morale and increased productivity. The findings are captured in the responses below. The results are presented in Figure 4.13.

#### **Frequency of reading the internal newsletter**



**Source: Author (2023)**

It was reported that 3.8% read the newsletters all the time, 19.2% read it frequently, 46.1% read it sometimes, 23.1% reported to read is rarely and 4% have never read the internal newsletter. This data is represented below above.

#### **Respondents Content of Interest**

The staff newsletter has various areas that are addressed in the weekly content. The content cuts across plenary issues, committees of the national assembly issues, clique and clicks and finally



question time section. The researcher sought find out the content that the respondent were most interested in the internal newsletter. This was to establish the role of internal newsletters on employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly. The results are presented in table 4.13.

**Table 4.5: Respondents Content of Interest**

CONTENT AREAS OF THE NEWSLETTER	Extremely important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Low importance	Not at all important	TOTAL
	%	%	%	%	%	%
PLENARY	69.2%	26.9%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
COMMITTEES' ROUND-UP	69.2%	26.9%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
CLIQUE AND CLICKS	19.2%	23.1%	30.8%	19.1%	7.7%	100%
QUESTION TIME	23.1%	50%	19.2%	7.7%	0.0%	100%

**Source: Author (2023)**

**The extent to which the internal newsletter content enhances employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly.**

The respondents also indicated the extent to which they agreed with given statements. This was to establish the role of internal newsletters on employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly. The results are presented in table 4.14

### Role of Internal Newsletters on Employee Relations among Staff of the Kenya National Assembly

statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	TOTAL
	%	%	%	%	%	%
The content of the internal newsletters is useful with regard to the welfare needs of the employees in the National Assembly	3.8%	50.0%	23.1%	19.2%	1.9%	<b>100</b>
The content of the internal newsletters is relevant to employees communication needs within the National Assembly	21.2%	65.4%	1.9%	11.3%	0.0%	<b>100</b>
Internal newsletters are a good way of communicating important welfare messages to employees	19.2%	61.5%	5.8%	9.6%	3.8%	<b>100</b>
Internal newsletters are effective tools for communicating welfare needs of employees in the National assembly	15.4%	80.8%	0%	3.8%	0%	<b>100</b>

Source: Author (2023)

### How internal newsletters have improved employee relations within the National Assembly of Kenya

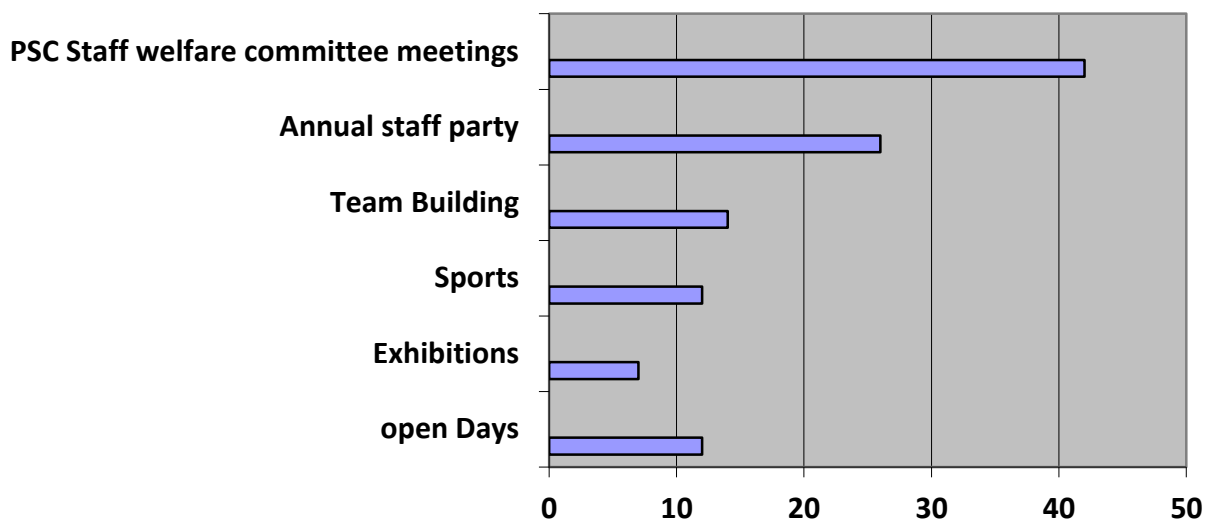
Internal newsletters have been used to communicate important news and updates to employees by the management of the National Assembly. The newsletters have provided a platform for employees to share ideas and experiences, and to gain a better understanding of the organization’s activities on a weekly basis.

From the study, it was observed that none of the employees strongly agreed that internal newsletters are beneficial in employee relations, 3.8% reported that they agree on the importance of the internal newsletters on employee relations while 51.9% reported to be neutral on the role of the internal newsletter in enhancing employee relations within the assembly, 34.6% reported that they disagree that staff newsletters play a role in enhancing employee relations and finally 9.6 percent reported that they total disagree that internal staff newsletters have helped improve the employee relations in the National assembly.

## **The Benefits of Internal Employee Events On Employee Relations Among Staff Of The Kenya National Assembly.**

### **Typology of Events Attended by employees of the National Assembly**

The researcher the sought to know what events the respondents attend that are hosted by the Kenya National Assembly.



**Source: Author (2023)**

The PSC Staff Welfare Committee Meetings are the most attended by 100% of the employees, followed by the Annual staff party 50.0% attendance, Team Building and recreations was attended by 26.9%, Sports was attended by 23.1%, Exhibitions were attended by 13.4% of the employees while Open days were attended by 23.1% of employees in the study.

### **Internal employee events are effective for improving the effectiveness of employee relations**

The study also sought to find out if events are effective for improvement of employee relations in the national assembly. The findings collected indicate that none strongly agree, 23.1% agree, 53.8% were neutral on the benefits, while 23.1 of the surveyed employees disagree that events can help to create a sense of community and belonging among staff of the National Assembly and none strongly disagreed. Internal employee events are an effective way to improve employee relations. They create a sense of camaraderie and help build relationships between employees. Internal events can also provide an opportunity for employees to learn more about one another, which can help create a more positive work environment.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

In this study, it was noted that internal public relations uses employee social networks as one of its tools in the organization. It was observed in the study by Men, Neil and Ewing (2020) that the

ability to quickly and easily communicate with employees across an organization has made these networks invaluable for keeping everyone informed and involved. The study sought to explore the connection between the use of social networks and employee relations in the national assembly of Kenya. The study found out that the most commonly used social network type was WhatsApp followed by Facebook then twitter. The three social networks were used by the National Assembly in engaging with the employees at various levels and on various matters. It was reported that the employees have WhatsApp groups for each department used for employee communications on various matters. The majority of the respondents used the social networks most of the time to communicate. Through interrogating how often the respondents use the social networks for engagement, the researcher gained insight into the amount of time the respondents used on social networks within the National assembly and how that impacted employee relations.

The study by Nguru& Ibrahim (2018), which focused on how Public Relations influences employee performance in Nigeria and the main focus was on empirical review of studies in the area. The study concludes that Public Relations has a role in enhancing employee job satisfaction and productivity. This is similar to the current study whereby the findings indicate that internal employee social networks significantly influenced employee relations in the National Assembly.

Study findings also showed that Internal employee social networks are useful in creating a better working environment. This is in line with the study by Nguru& Ibrahim (2018). Strong linkages between units enhance information sharing and the transmission of complicated knowledge (Kilduff & Tsai 2003) and this was observed in the current study where Internal employee social networks have a positive impact on the employee relations among staff of the Kenya National Assembly as analysed in the data. Therefore, internal employee social networks play a significant role in employee relations at the National Assembly.

It was noted earlier by Scheuren (2004) that the world is no longer in an industrial society but an information society. As a result, "society" needs timely and accurate flow of information on preferences, wants, and behavior. Surveys are heavily relied upon in response to the organizations' crucial need for information. Data on the benefits of an internal employee surveys system was important in understanding the role of internal public relations tools in improving employee relations in the Kenya National Assembly. The findings indicate that majority of the respondents agree that employee surveys helped in communication among staff of the national assembly. The data on the benefits of an internal employee surveys system is important because it helped portray the level of agreement from employees on the importance of internal employee survey systems in supporting staff and improving employee relations.

Majority of the respondents believed that the surveys are helpful in identifying areas where improvements can be made to boost collaboration and teamwork among employees in the National assembly. This finding is relevant because the data can be used to develop new strategies for improving collaboration and teamwork among employees. Additionally, the data

can be used to measure the effectiveness of existing strategies and to identify areas where additional resources may be necessary. Data on employee surveys benefits can be used by the organizations to help understand employees and improve their overall productivity and morale.

From the findings, it was observed that internal employee surveys are an important tool to measure the effectiveness of collaboration and teamwork among staff. This is in line with the study by Nguru& Ibrahim (2018).

As for the Benefits of Internal Employee Surveys System on resolving conflicts in the workplace, majority of the respondents disagreed that the internal surveys helped resolve conflicts among the employees. Internal employee surveys are an invaluable tool for resolving conflicts in the workplace. By providing employees with an opportunity to express their feelings about working conditions, job satisfaction, and other issues, employers can better understand the needs and concerns of their workforce (Kilduff & Tsai 2003). However from this study, the internal surveys were reported as not useful in helping resolve conflict by the staff of the National Assembly. The supervisors need to see the relevance of data collected from employee surveys can be helpful to help them identify problems that need to be addressed in order to improve the working environment. Internal employee surveys are an essential part of any organization. They allow the organization to gain valuable insights into the employee's attitudes, opinions, and overall workplace satisfaction. These surveys if well used can offer invaluable information that will help organizations make decisions that are beneficial to the organization and its employees.

The other aspect that the research sought from the respondents was the benefits of Internal Employee Surveys System on improved overall level of job satisfaction among staff in the Kenya National Assembly. Majority agreed that the internal surveys are a good avenue for improving employee's level of job satisfaction. The data showed that In the Kenya National Assembly, most respondents said that employee surveys help to improve the overall level of job satisfaction among staff, and promote a positive working culture. By providing a platform for employees to express their opinions and concerns, internal employee surveys can be an effective tool to improve the overall level of job satisfaction in the Kenya National Assembly.

Internal news letters are an important tool for maintaining and improving employee relations (Kilduff & Tsai 2003). By providing employees with timely and relevant information, newsletters can help to foster a sense of community and connection. They can also help to ensure that employees understand the company's goals and objectives and are kept informed of company news and developments. By regularly communicating with employees, news letters can create an environment of trust and mutual respect, which in turn can lead to improved employee morale and increased productivity. However in this study findings, majority of the respondents do not read the newsletters weekly and further studies need to be carried out to ascertain why.

Internal employee events are important in fostering strong relationships among staff members of the Kenya National Assembly. The most attended event was The PSC Staff Welfare Committee Meetings followed by the Annual staff party then, Team Building and recreations, followed by Sports then, Exhibitions while the Open days were least attended. The events all take place once a year except for the PSC staff welfare committee meetings that happen bi-monthly. Internal employee events are an effective way to improve employee relations. They create a sense of camaraderie and help build relationships between employees. Internal events can also provide an opportunity for employees to learn more about one another, which can help create a more positive work environment.

## **Conclusions**

It can therefore be concluded that, internal employee social networks significantly influenced employee relations in the National Assembly. This is shown by the findings in the study. Most respondents agreed strongly that Internal employee social networks help in fostering better communication among the staff at the Kenya National Assembly. They also agreed that the internal employee social networks were effective in increasing teamwork among the staff. The study also concludes that internal employee surveys systems are important in understanding the role of internal public relations tools in improving employee relations in the Kenya National Assembly. Majority of the respondents agree that employee surveys helped in communication among staff of the national assembly. Surveys are helpful in identifying areas where improvements can be made to boost collaboration and teamwork among employees in the National assembly. Internal news letters are an important tool for maintaining and improving employee relations. The newsletters provide employees with timely and relevant information. The staff newsletters have various areas that are addressed in the weekly content. The content cuts across plenary issues, committees of the national assembly issues, clique and clicks and finally question time section. Therefore, the internal newsletter is a vital tool for employee relations in the national assembly. Finally, internal employee events are important in fostering strong relationships among staff members of the Kenya National Assembly. Employees are able to interact and relate both formally and informally during events hence it increases employee relations. They create a sense of camaraderie and help build relationships between employees. Internal events can also provide an opportunity for employees to learn more about one another, which can help create a more positive work environment.

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