# Email communication at work
A guide for organisations

Email is part of most people's lives. Since its creation in the 1970s, its growth has been unprecedented, facilitating quick and easy communication between individuals across borders and time zones, for both business and personal use. But despite its widespread usage and popularity as a communication tool, for some individuals and employers, it can be a source of major frustration, anxiety and lost productivity.

In order to understand more about how email both facilitates and negatively impacts the employee experience, we conducted a study into email usage at work amongst UK employees. From this research, we have identified a number of tangible actions that you can take within your organisation to help improve your employees' experience of email.

Read our full research report, You've got mail!, at **www.futureworkcentre.com**

> Develop a clear picture of what is actually going on in your organisation when it comes to email. Quantify your email challenge in terms of email volume, intra-team and department communication by email, duplication of effort and of course employees' perceptions of email. This will give you some contextual data in order to make some changes and potential improvements. You can also use this information to see if actual email behaviour runs contrary to what you believe your values and organisational culture support.

> Consider how you introduce email to new employees and how explicit you are about your organisation's norms on email use. Do you simply provide employees with an email account or do you set out your expectations and provide them with clear guidance on how email should be used? Ambiguity around email norms contributes to email pressure and perceived increases in workload – both potentially contributing to stress and productivity impairment.

> Consider the introduction of formal training or briefings in the use of email, for both new and existing employees. This could be based around your values and aspirations concerning (for example) work-life balance, productivity, communication and respect. At a minimum, being clearer about what you expect from email communication as an organisation can help reduce ambiguity, increase civility and potentially even reduce the volume of emails sent.
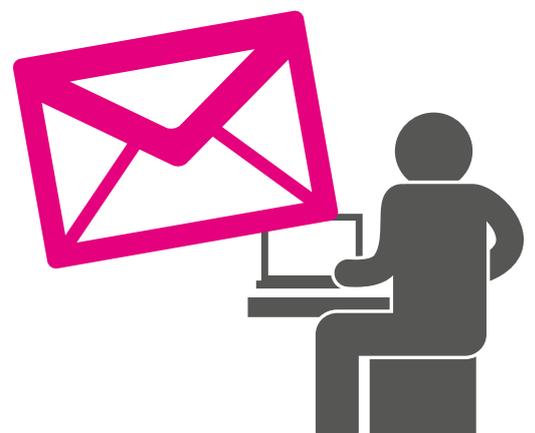
> Remember – **email is one communication channel, amongst others**. Consider how else you can facilitate communication using other tools, such as instant messaging, forums, teleconference or face-to-face meetings, and make sure you match the medium to the message. For example, giving feedback on a team member's end-of-year performance review should be managed via a face-to-face meeting, whereas checking to see if a colleague is going to the Christmas party can be done via instant messaging.

> **Check your role models**. Are your senior leaders role-modelling good email behaviour? Are they sending late night and weekend emails? Are they using inappropriately harsh language or using email as their only communication tool? Are they simply spending too long dealing with their email in the first place? It will be more difficult to instil good email practices if employees don't have positive senior role models. Start at the top and lead by example.

> **If you're tempted to introduce an email process for everyone, consider if you're introducing an inflexible rule or one-size-fits-all process that isn't helpful**. Our research shows that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to email, so be mindful of the following factors: what problem you believe you are trying to solve; why you believe it's a problem in the first place; how your process or regulation might impact a diverse group of employees, including those we have discussed above. Consider how you can get employee input before you launch new email processes.
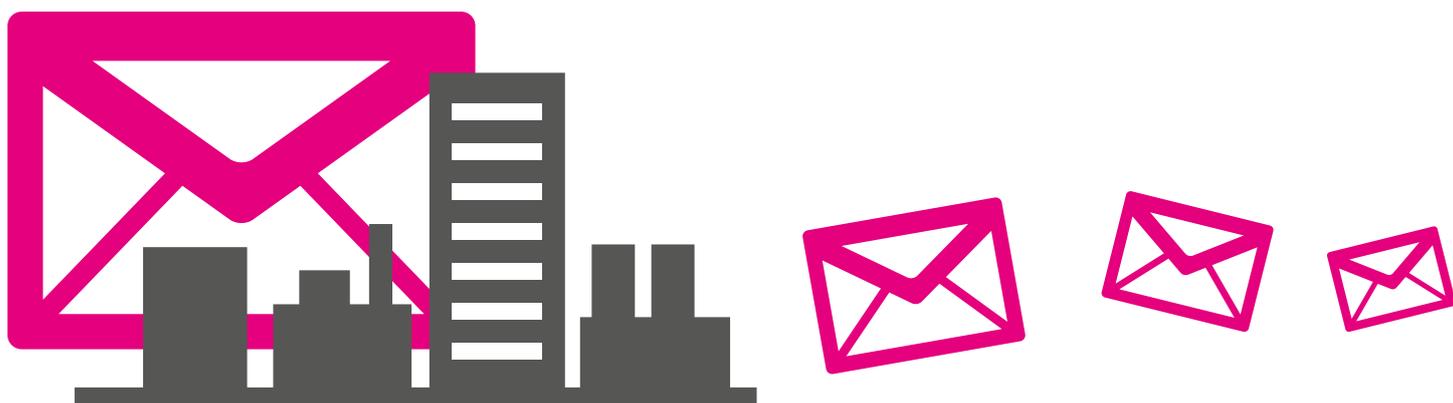
Get in touch

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