



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

# Work-related email – employee's perspective

How should an email be written and what should be avoided in the email writing practices at work?

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## Table of contents

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>PURPOSE &amp; RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<i>Work-related email from computer mediated communication perspective</i> .....	6
<i>MRT – Media-Richness Theory and the email as a communication channel</i> .....	8
<i>Approaches chosen to study use of emails in organizational settings</i> .....	9
<i>Email as Communication Medium</i> .....	9
<i>Email interruptions in workplace</i> .....	10
<i>Research on the improvement of the email as the organizational communication channel</i> ....	10
<i>Email etiquette suggestions by M. Egan</i> .....	12
<i>Feedback in email communication</i> .....	13
<i>Main differences to be considered while comparing email to face-to-face communication channel</i> .....	13
<i>Concluding remarks and propositions</i> .....	14
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>16</b>
1. <i>Research design</i> .....	16
1.1. <i>Methods used for data collection</i> .....	17
1.2. <i>Motivation for the choice of research methods</i> .....	18
2. <i>Data collection</i> .....	18
2.1. <i>Interviews</i> .....	18
2.2. <i>Empirical examples</i> .....	19
2.3. <i>Data collected and the participants</i> .....	20
3. <i>Data analysis</i> .....	22
4. <i>Boundaries and limitations of the research</i> .....	23
5. <i>Validity &amp; Reliability</i> .....	24
6. <i>Ethical consideration and Anonymity</i> .....	24
<b>RESULTS</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<i>Part 1 – Background information section of the interviews</i> .....	25
<i>Part 2 – Emails at work: some general comments on use and efficiency</i> .....	25
<i>General character of the emails replying practices and timing of the emails</i> .....	26
<i>Part 3 – Views on email attributes</i> .....	29
<i>Positive attributes</i> .....	29
<i>Negative attributes</i> .....	31
<i>Part 4 – Concluding remarks on email as the communication channel</i> .....	31
<i>Part 5 – Analysis of practical examples</i> .....	33
<i>Negative emails</i> .....	33
<i>Additional examples of ineffective emails</i> .....	41
<i>In summary</i> .....	43
<i>Role-model i.e. positive emails</i> .....	44
<i>Examples of the role-model i.e. positive emails</i> .....	45
<i>In Summary</i> .....	53
<b>DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<i>Concluding Remarks</i> .....	58

<i>Suggestions for Future Research</i> .....	59
<b>REFERENCES:</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendix</b> .....	<b>63</b>

## ABSTRACT

Email is one of the most commonly used communication channels within the organizations today. It is widely used for communication between the different internal sections of the companies as well as externally that is why it carries an important role in the work-related communication practices.

The current paper examines email-writing practices at work in relation to the attitudes of the employees towards this communication channel. The main research questions are:

- What is the general view of the employees on the email communication channel at work and channels' effectiveness?
- What are considered to be the role-model practices in writing a work-related email if there are such?
- What elements or characteristics of the emails at work are perceived to be negative and should be avoided?

A combination of data collection methods (semi-structured interviews and a empirical examples) was used. The data collected comprises 20 interviews and 60 examples of emails. The data was analyzed using simple content analysis approach.

The main findings of the research show that email is considered to be an effective and fast information-sharing channel that allows keeping formal record of the communication and provides a great opportunity for sharing information between different locations and time zones, but is still considered to be not exactly same as face-to-face communication channel. The main characteristics that were found to be positive in email writing practices were politeness, consideration, factualness and general respectfulness. It was found to be negative when the email did not include all the information needed and had a negative/demanding tone or included too many emoticons, bad spelling and had an impersonal character.

The study conducted provides a good base for the future research when it comes to investigating more in detail the email writing practices at work.

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where information technology is flourishing and advanced electronic technologies are a part of our daily existence. Electronic mail (email) is one of the most commonly used technological communication channels and it plays a significant role in both private and working life. Emailing has an important role in the majority of the corporate occupations. Today, it is almost impossible not to use email communication channel in many workplaces. However, despite the importance and wide use of the channel there have not been many descriptive studies conducted on the actual employees satisfaction with the email as the communication channel at work. It can be said that it is not very common that organizations monitor how the channel is used i.e. how the emails are written and what kind of attitudes and opinions they can cause among employees.

## PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the thesis is to explore the attitudes that the employees of different companies have towards the email communication channel and the practices of writing emails. When looking at the employees' attitudes with regards to the effectiveness of the email communication channel, effectiveness was mainly defined as the ability to achieve the set objectives of the sender and ensure the desired outcome by providing a useful platform for communication at work. In addition, the paper analyzes both positive and negative elements in email formulations. The specific research questions are the following ones:

1. What is the general view of the employees on the email communication channel at work and channels' effectiveness?
2. What are considered to be the role-model practices in writing a work-related email if there are such?
3. What elements or characteristics of the emails at work are perceived to be negative should be avoided?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this section is to present and discuss the literature relevant for the thesis. The literature section is divided into several parts. First, the research on work-related email from computer-mediated perspective is presented. Next, the research on email from media-richness theory is presented, followed by the research previously conducted on: email interruptions, improvement approach “back to basics” and improvement of the email communication channel by means of reflection as well as email etiquette suggestions. Additionally the research on the feedback sharing and a comparison of the email channel to face-to-face communication channel is presented. The end section of the literature review presents the concluding remarks and proposals chosen for the thesis research.

It is important to relate the email communication analysis in the current paper to the computer mediated communication perspective in order to gain the understanding where the email as the communication channel is placed and how it is viewed from that perspective. In addition to computer mediated communication perspective the media richness theory is used in order to understand the information richness of the selected communication channel, main reason for that being creation of an opportunity to compare the information richness of the channel in order to ultimately have a base to understand the comments of the respondents participated in the interviews on how effective the email as a communication channel at work is considered to be. The overview of the research conducted is selected in order to give a description of which fields of the email communication have been chosen by the researchers to focus on previously. The presented studies on the improvement of the email communication approaches are considered to be valuable in order to later on relate the study results on role-model practices in writing a work-related email as well as on which characteristics of working emails should be avoided. However, from the research conducted, it can be noticed that there is not an extensive number of descriptive studies carried out that concern email communication at work. The majority of the studies carry more of a prescriptive character and focus on how the channel should be used.

### **Work-related email from computer mediated communication perspective**

The main focus of the conducted research is the email communication channel at work and its effects on the employees working with it. Computer mediated communication (CMC) is a

term that is used for all communication between individuals that is carried out through a set of networked computers. In general the term can be used for both synchronous and asynchronous communication i.e. communication between people happening in the same period of time or in different sequences depending on the fact of when one or another person receives the sent message. Email as the communication channel in the computer mediated communication is a part of asynchronous communication as it is not a channel that is generally transmitting messages within a short period of time or a sequence but is used as a channel transmitting messages during longer period of times and not depending on the synchronous conversation (e.g. online chat Instant Messaging (IM) vs. email). CMC is employed in different sectors and has a crucial importance in the organizational setting being one of the most widely used communication channels (Santra & Giri, 2009).

CMC can be compared to the general face-to-face or written communication but it can include different variations in the language, meanings and the lay-outs including sometimes the danger for a more relaxed attitude on the general rules used in writing or speaking (Santra & Giri, 2009)

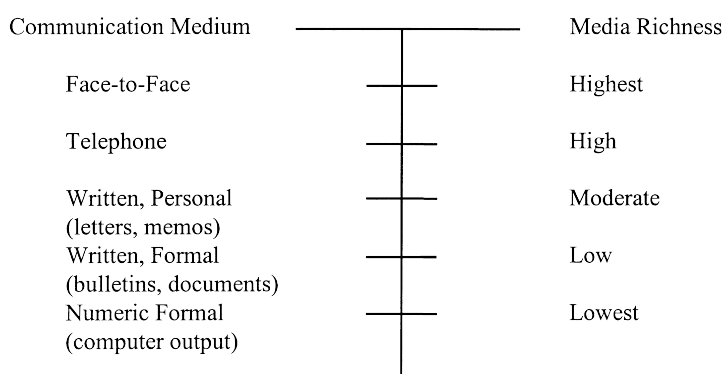
CMC in the office has brought dramatic changes into the information sharing, storing and the opportunities for the communication accessibility especially with the email channel. This allows the information exchange within the different time zones and different locations and also has the potential of decreasing the costs by having a mobility characteristic and time efficiency when used appropriately (Santra & Giri, 2009).

Email is the most widely used form of the CMC in organizations and it plays a central role when it comes to organizational communication, it is also claimed that it has the potential of reducing the organizational barriers and possibility of conveying the information that would have the potential of not being submitted. This means that the email communication channel at work can cause both positive and negative reactions by conveying different type of information. However it is important for the current research to keep in mind that the communication channel is asynchronous and when answering the research question Number 1 (*What is the general view of the employees on the Email communication channel at work and channels effectiveness?*) one should take into consideration that the optimal effectiveness of the channel may not be brought up in comparison to the other communication channels e.g. face-to-face (Santra & Giri, 2009).

## MRT – Media-Richness Theory and the email as a communication channel

Despite of a great improving effect of the CMC on the office communication it is still debatable whether the email, as a part of CMC, has the needed attributes and can replace the classical communication channels such as face-to-face and telephone communication. As according to the Media-Richness Theory (Suh,1999) the email communication channel does not have the same level of the informational richness in the communicative acts.

The main focus of the MRT is on the information richness and it claims that the information processing requirements have to be met by the mediums ability to transfer the information richness in order to improve the task performance and understanding of the task. (Suh 1999) It is believed that the communication media differs based on the fact of how well it can transmit the following characteristics: timely feedback, language variations, personal tailoring of the message according to circumstances and ability to convey the multiple cues. The medium that is capable of transmitting the most information, including the factors listed, is considered to be the richest and the most effective in message transmission. Based on the evaluation of the informational richness face-to-face channel is considered to be the richest medium as it includes the most of all possible variations of informational richness. The next channel is claimed to be telephone, third channel the written personal letters and memos, formal written documents and only fifth place is given to the computer output (including email) as it is considered to be the lowest on the media richness factors (Fig. 1 p.7) (Suh, 1999).



*Fig 1, Communication Media and Media Richness, (Suh, 1999)*

Even though according to the MRT theory the CMC medium email is a poorer way of communication, from the information richness perspective, it is still widely used in the organizations and improved extensively with different trainings and programs created that



focus on the information intensification and lessons on how to write effective emails (Suh 1999).

MRT is chosen in order to support the results of analysis while answering the research question Number 1 (*What is the general view of the employees on the email communication channel at work and channels effectiveness?*) in specific when looking at the email communication channels effectiveness at work i.e. whether the channel achieves the set objectives of the sender and ensures the desired outcome by providing a useful platform for communication at work. MRT creates a great base for the information richness analysis of the communication channel focusing mainly on comparison to the other channels such as for example face-to-face or telephone. Additionally it helps to explore whether employees perceive that the email communication channels information richness is sufficient in order to facilitate communication at work.

### **Approaches chosen to study use of emails in organizational settings**

There has been numerous research conducted on the email communication channel at work, following are some examples of the research that is found to be relevant for the current study and help the analysis and examination of the research questions Number 2 and Number 3.

#### **Email as Communication Medium**

According to Markus (1994) the electronic mail is an asynchronous communication medium that allows communication with numerous people in form of a written message on the computer, despite the fact of the lack of its informational richness it is considered to be very fast and that is why much more efficient in the organizational communication than the written documents. Based on the factor of the channels speed, according to Markus (1994), it is placed in-between telephone and non-electronic communication in the MRT. Markus (1994) also suggests that email channel is believed to be the most preferred managerial choice in the different companies based on the speed and efficiency factor (Markus 1994).

There have been numerous studies conducted on the email use at work or within the organizational context. In the majority of the studies selected and presented below quantitative methods are applied.

### *Email interruptions in workplace*

Jackson, Dawson & Wilson(2001) have conducted a study in Danwood Group on the interruptions caused by emails during the working day of the employees. The interruption was defined as a distraction that would stop the employee from completing the planned activity in order to react to the interruptions initiator. In the study carried out, 15 employees were monitored during 28 working days in order to see how long time does it take to recover from receiving an email and what were the factors that would possibly cause longer interval in interruption. The average estimated time to be spent for a reaction to a new incoming email was 2 and a half minutes and interruptions for checking the emails were as frequent as every 5 minutes (Jackson, Dawson & Wilson 2001). It was concluded by the researchers, that simply changing some practices in email use could reduce the time spent on email interruptions. The main factor pointed out was the email messages that were sent out to “all” in organization, as those were not always relevant for every single employee. The conclusion was that changing the practices in email could have saved a lot of time for the employees and skipping replying to “All” emails would prevent information overload. The suggestion proposed by the researchers was to create a training course on the use of e-mail channel and encourage the employees to create groups according to their work related tasks in order to minimize the emails sent to “all”. Another suggestion on the improvement of email channel use was to apply the software that would allow the employees to see the first three sentences of the email in order to determine if it is relevant and in order to estimate the urgency of needed reply (Jackson, Dawson & Wilson 2001).

### *Research on the improvement of the email as the organizational communication channel*

Some research conducted on the use of emails in organizations focuses on the improvement options of the email channel in general. A good example being the research of Jackson, Thomas & Edwards on approach for improving email communication. The main focus was chosen to be on the improvement of the channel in order to minimize the possibility of misinterpretations of received messages by using the so-called “back to basics” approach (Jackson, Burgess & Edwards 2006).

There have been numerous attempts to suggest approaches that would improve the communication channel. Jackson, Burgess & Edwards (2006) used so-called “back to basics” approach in order to identify the main problems that occur during the use of email in a workplace in order to improve the overall communication via email. The study carried out involved few stages: questionnaires about the general use of email (i.e. how many emails were received a day, how relevant were the emails received perceived and general view about the email communication in the organization), second stage of the study involved a specific training for the employees, both senders and receivers in order to improve the practice of email use and the final stage the analysis. Training carried out was mainly focusing on the points of whether the emails were necessary, well targeted, the subject line was effectively used, the message was got across, attachment were properly managed etc. After the training a remarkable improvements were noticed which included: significantly better use of the subject line, better written email messages, less time spent on reading the emails as they were clearer and more to the point. One of the conclusions of the research was that having an email training for the employees can save the organization a large amount as it will reduce the time spent on reading and interpreting the incoming emails (Jackson, Burgess & Edwards 2006).

Another study carried out by Vollmer & Gassner (2005) suggests an approach for improvements in email communication channel at work. The researchers focused their research on improving the email communication by means of reflection. Their concern was ill-composed messages within organizations and in order to improve the email communication they classified and determined the problems that occurred in the email communication. Claiming that previous research has been mainly focusing on the quantity improvements i.e. dealing with the information overload etc. the authors decided to focus on the quality improvement of emails i.e. the message composition. The main qualitative fields selected for improvement were: multiple emails with same information via different channels; hastily sent emails which were followed up with modifications; emails with no clear purpose; incomplete emails and emails with no clear interpretation of urgency or importance. Authors presented two reflection-based approaches in order to improve the formulation, structure and categorization of emails. The approaches were Mail-Check and Quasi. Mail-Check was based on the quality criteria idea where the outgoing emails were checked with the set quality criteria and the immediate feedback was given to the sender e.g. an error message explaining the possible shortcomings due to the length of the email or unspecified subject. The main idea of the Mail-Check is to point out the shortcomings and encourage the author to correct them

in order to improve the email communication. Quasi approach was based on the evaluation of the emails by the receivers where the anonymous feedback was collected and later sent to the author in a report in order to trigger self-regulating practice i.e. that the sender will improve the email communication with time after receiving the feedback, where Mail-Check was more of a controlling mechanism Quasi is more of a social regulation approach, which does not provide a direct solution but triggers the self-regulation processes. The conclusion of the research was that combination of the described approaches could dramatically improve the composition of the emails but would need to be tested in future research (Vollmer & Gassner 2005).

In addition to research on email interruptions, email improvement approaches there has been research conducted on the different attributes of the emails such as for example the importance of the greetings and closings in workplace email by Joan Waldvogel (2007) or the research on the information overload caused by the email communication channel by Soucek & Moser (2010). After reviewing the literature one can see that some areas of the email as a communication channel in the workplace have been examined and that there is still somewhat a lack of constant field of research within the email communication channel.

#### *Email etiquette suggestions by M. Egan*

In addition to the research described above a book by M. Egan (2004) has been found to be relative and useful in the current study. M. Egan (2004) suggests a simplified version of the email etiquette that can be used both in the private emailing practices as well as at work. He suggests to adapt some rules in the emailing practices such as: not ignoring an incoming email, deny that the email has been received, presume that receiver has seen the urgent email, writing too long emails or responding to the emails that did not presume a response, avoiding spelling and grammar checks and lacking tact in the emailing practices (M. Egan 2004).

M. Egan touches very important points in the subject of what to do while emailing and what should be avoided. He reinforces that the emails at work have to be tactful, include as little as possible of abbreviations and emoticons, spellchecked, not over punctuated and formatted accordingly including all the necessary components such as for example subject and salutation in order to have more personal approach (M. Egan 2004). Current publication has found to be relevant in answering research questions Number 2 and Number 3 as they mainly

focus on the emailing practices and emailing attributes that are perceived to be positive and should be included in the emails and the ones that are perceived to be negative and should be avoided.

### Feedback in email communication

According to the research conducted on the feedback exchange in the organizational setting it can be said that email is widely used as the feedback-sharing tool between the employer and the employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to Bakker & Demerouti (2007) feedback is crucial in organizational practices and is the key to personal development and can be the strongest motivational component. Delivering positive feedback by email seems to have same effect as delivering it by using the face-to-face channel, however the delivery of the negative feedback can cause some issues (Sproull & Sussman, 1999). From the receiver's perspective, negative feedback transmitted by the email can be perceived more negative as it was meant whereas from the sender's perspective it can be more honest and straightforward. Sproull & Sussman (1999) claim that the mediated environment of email communication has ability to decrease the psychological discomfort both from the receivers as from the senders perspective (Sproull & Sussman, 1999).

The feedback perspective can be interesting to observe while answering the research question Number 1 (*What is the general view of the employees on the email communication channel at work and its effectiveness?*) as it may affect the general views on the email attributes.

### Main differences to be considered while comparing email to face-to-face communication channel

When comparing the face-to-face communication channel to email, one would question which channel would be more beneficial while communicating at work. However, there is no direct answer to that, as it would depend on the certain situation. Based on the research conducted one can see both positives and negatives of the email communication channel lacking the visual cues that are present in the face to face communication channel. Sproull & Kiesler (1986) referred to the approach called cues-filtered out approach, which holds the position that email communication is less sociable, less effective and less understandable way of communication mainly because it is lacking the nonverbal cues that would enable to have more accurate information regarding the attitudes and emotions (Sproull & Kieler 1986).

However with time of the development of CMC the cues-filtered out approach has become less popular, mainly because the users of the email communication channel have gained more experience in expressing the nonverbal cues with help of formatting or emoticons used in emails.

Position that has gained more popularity refers to the fact that the users of email communication have adapted to the channel by enriching it with verbal cues and contextual stylistic cues allowing the more usual communication to happen. Walther (1992) introduced the above-described position in Social Information Processing theory, which claims that the lack of nonverbal cues in CMC restricts the ability of the user express information in more individual way (Walther 1992). Walther claims that when there is no possibility to include the nonverbal cues into the communication the users of email or other form of CMC would substitute with the verbal cues such as for example emoticons or different formatting settings (Walther 1992).

In the current thesis we mainly focus on the email communication at work, which is more of a formal setting to consider. It is important and interesting to find out whether employees see the email communication as more restrictive compared to face-to-face communication or whether the restrictiveness of including the nonverbal cues can be of a benefit in some specific situations e.g. conflicts, requests. The above-presented comparison of approaches when considering the email communication and the face-to-face communication is a great base for answering the research question Number 3 (*What elements or characteristics of the emails at work are perceived to be negative and should be avoided?*)

### **Concluding remarks and propositions**

Based on the literature review one can see that the research conducted on the email communication channel at work has a widely spread character. Based on the approach chosen for the current research the different previous research exercises are presented in order to create a link in-between the theoretical standpoints and empirical research.

An interesting observation being the fact that email is considered to be a “lean medium” from the beginning in the MRT theory (Sih,1999), but simultaneously considered to be a revolutionizing factor within the CMC approach (Santra & Giri: 2009), that observation is considered to be interesting while answering the research question Number 1 and analyzing the results of the evaluations of the respondents on the effectiveness of the email communication channel at work. On the other hand Markus (1994) claims that email is considerably more efficient communication channel than the written documents whereas other researcher focus on the results of the email interruptions in the organizations claiming that the training should be provided in order to reassure the efficiency in the email use at work (Jackson, Dawson, Wilson, 2001) or email channel improvement approaches are suggested by numerous researchers. In addition to the presented research M. Egan’s (2004) work on the email etiquette has been considered to be an additional helping factor in analysis of the research questions Number 2 and Number 3. The research on the feedback sharing by Sproull & Sussman (1999) and by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) provide a great base for answering the research question Number 1, but as well Number 2 and Number 3 as feedback sharing is widely used in email practices at work. When answering all three research questions it is of a great help to have the background research of Sproull & Kiesler (1986) on cues-filtered out approach and contrast of Walther’s (1992) Social Information Processing theory in order to find out what exactly employees tend to refer to – whether one or the other approach can be said is pre-dominant in the opinions of the employees.

Based on the previous research conducted and the theoretical framework the following propositions are developed in order to conclude the literature review and create a base for the current paper:

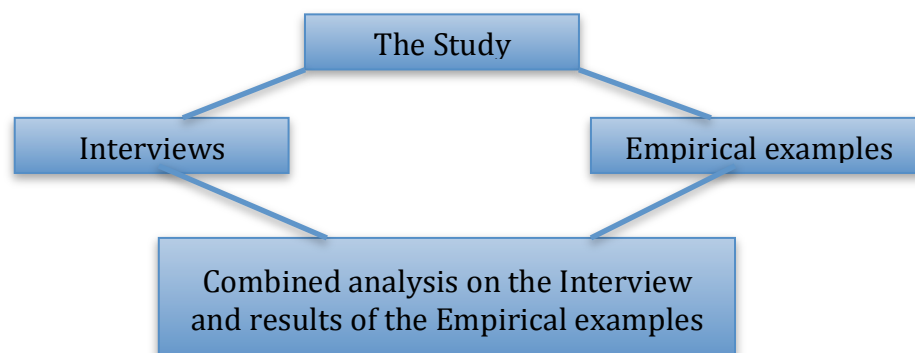
1. Email is a widely used communication channel in a workplace that is why its’ effects on the employees i.e. the emotions and feelings that the email channel evokes/provokes and general functioning is important to analyze in order to be able to evaluate it as a communication channel in comparison to other channels (e.g. face-to-face etc.)
2. It is clear that email communication does cause some interruptions in the employees’ working day, but it is somewhat unclear why and what kind of emotions and thoughts it evokes in employees in general when evaluated as the communication channel.

3. The factor of information overload caused by emails has been observed, but are there any other factors that would cause stress or dissatisfaction with the emails received at work e.g. elements of the emails that are considered to have negative effect.
4. The emailing practices are recommended and emailing etiquette suggested, but it is not clear whether in practice the same meanings are shared on what should be included in emails and what should be avoided.
5. The email channel can accommodate the feedback sharing, but it is not always clear what effects it can create among the employees and how it is perceived.
6. Email at work is widely used, but compared to the face-to-face communication channel it lacks the nonverbal cues. It is obvious that in some cases the nonverbal cues are replaced by the verbal ones - such as formatting or emoticons. Main point of interest remains whether the lack of nonverbal cues contributes to the email communication at work.

## METHODOLOGY

Below, the methodological choice used in the current study is presented. First the research design is described, followed by the presentation of methods for data collection and data analysis. Next, limitations of the current research and validity and reliability are discussed.

### 1. Research design



The first part of the research is focusing on the email use in general and general perceptions of the employees about the email as a communication channel. The first part of the research is



focusing on answering the research question Number 1 mainly, but giving some examples on the expectations of the characteristics of emailing practices and by that touching on the research questions Number 2 and Number 3.

The second part of the research would be a discussion based on the “empirical examples” where the participants will be asked to select 3 emails (2 examples of the poor emails and 1 of the role-model email). The main focus of the second part is to examine closer the elements of the emails that are seen to be negative and find out in contrast what is believed to be example of excellent email communication and answer the research questions Number 2 and Number 3 by providing the practical examples of the role-model practices in email writing and the negative elements of the email writing practices at work that should be avoided.

The data was collected through the interviews and practical empirical examples presented by the respondents. Twenty (20) interviews have been carried out. The respondents chose the place of the interviews (e.g. at home, at a café etc.). The interviews were carried after working hours in order to ensure a more relaxed atmosphere. The interviews were audio recorded. The interviews included open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions. They could add their additional comments if needed. Twenty-nine questions were planned for each interview, and the interview time was approximately 30 – 40 minutes. For questions, see appendix.

### **1.1. Methods used for data collection**

The data for the current research was collated through qualitative methods: interviews and empirical examples. Interviews were carried out with employees from different cultural backgrounds and different companies. The interviews were of qualitative nature and semi structured in order to capture as much information as possible. Interviews were carried out in English but the respondents were allowed to reply in Swedish if they felt it was easier.

In addition to interviews the empirical examples were used where participants were asked to present emails in order to discuss together with the interviewer why the specific examples were chosen.

## 1.2. Motivation for the choice of research methods

The qualitative method was chosen based on the fact that its strength is in its ability to study phenomena, which are simply unavailable, elsewhere i.e. not possible to capture with quantitative methods. According to Silverman (2010) the qualitative method can be used on the naturally occurring data in order to find the sequences in which participants meanings can be used and establish the character of some phenomenon. In addition the researcher is able to have a closer look on to how a bigger established group (in current study an organization) is constructed by the different participants, which is referred to as contextual sensitivity. Naturalism approach suggested by Silvermann (2010) was found to be very beneficial in the current research as it focuses on the concepts of meanings through interviewing techniques – *“A reluctance to impose meaning and a preference to ‘get out and observe the field’”*(Silverman 2010, p 44-59).

In addition to qualitative method a partly quantitative approach is going to be used in the empirical examples section, as the numerous examples of the emails presented by the participants allow making some generalizations. As mentioned before, combined method techniques were used in the current study: face-to-face interviews were complimented by the practical empirical examples part. The main idea behind the choice of the combined techniques was to merge the abstract and general views collected in the interviews with the practical examples selected by the respondents in the empirical examples part in order to create the complementing analysis where both the abstract and the practical are united and by that as much as possible data is collected and later analyzed in order to produce more informative and in-deep research.

## 2. Data collection

### 2.1. Interviews

According to Silverman (2004) qualitative interviewing is useful, especially when trying to find out the respondents attitudes and values which would normally not be as reflected in the quantitative questionnaire, mainly because of lacking opportunity for observing the reaction of the respondents. Open-ended questions are considered to be the best choice when the goal is to gain as much as possible of respondents views, interpretations of events and experiences.

(Yin 2003) Qualitative interviews provide the depth and complexity that is not possible to achieve through the quantitative questionnaires (Silvermann 2004).

The interview questions were grouped into several sections based on the nature of the questions asked:

- Background information part (q. 1 - 5; 7 - 11) the main goal of the section was to warm up the respondent and gather a general information.
- Discussion on use of email at work in general and its efficiency (q. 6; 12 - 22) the main goal of this section was to gather a general overview of the attitudes towards the email as a communication channel at work.
- Views on e-mail attributes and the email communication channel (q. 23 - 31) the main goal of this section is a more in-deep discussion on what characteristics of the email communication are perceived to be positive and which characteristics are perceived to be negative and should rather be avoided.

The interviews provided general views of the respondents on the work related email and enabled them to share the abstract thoughts about it. The interview part of the research aims to give answers to all research questions mentioned earlier, focusing on the answering research question Number 1 mainly but even touching on the research questions Number 2 and Number 3.

## **2.2. Empirical examples**

The main goal of the empirical examples part is to discuss and analyze together with the participants the actual examples of email communication in order to find out which characteristics of emails are seen as positive vs. negative by the participants.

The participants were asked to select 3 emails (2 examples of the poor emails and 1 being he positive email) from their work-related correspondence. The emails were anonymised and printed out by the respondents. The examples were a great help in order to analyze the possible similarities and differences with the initial abstract information on opinions presented in the interview first part.

Together with the respondents the researcher discussed the elements of the emails that are seen to be negative and positive. The empirical examples section was composed of 9 questions.

There were investigative questions designed in order to stimulate the respondents' narrative and probe/interrogate in order to find out more in detail about elements of the emails selected. There was no estimated time for this part and it was mainly dependent on how much the respondents chose to elaborate on the emails selected.

### **2.3. Data collected and the participants**

Twenty (20) interviews have been carried out. The respondents chose the place of the interviews (e.g. at home, in the office after work, in the restaurant etc.). The interviews were carried after working hours in order to ensure a more relaxed atmosphere. The interviews were audio recorded and included open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions. The respondents could add their additional comments if needed. Twenty-nine (29) questions were planned for each interview, and the interview time was approximately 30 – 40 minutes. For questions, see appendix.

The interviews (20) were transcribed. During the interview process some notes were made and later combined with analysis of transcriptions. Twenty (20) emails considered by the participants as positive and 40 as negative; total of 60 examples were collected.

In order to ensure the reliability of the information gained through the data collection the interviewees were selected on 2 criteria:

- Being a frequent email user
- Have been working in the organization for the minimum of 6 months

The companies were selected randomly as well as the roles of the respondents the only factor considered was that respondent had to be a frequent email user at work.

The participants were recruited from three international organizations based in Sweden. Two of the companies were of a larger size (more than 1000 employees) and one company of a

medium large size (150 employees). The names of the companies are not going to be mentioned for data protection reasons.

Eleven (11) out of 20 respondents work in large company and 9 in the medium large one. All the companies are actively using the email as an office communication channel. The age-range of the participants was between 22-47 years, which was directly proportionate to the age demographics in the office. The majority of the respondents had a university educational level, whereas 7 of the respondents were high school graduates. Time spent in the organizations was varying from 6 months to 25 years. Linguistic and cultural backgrounds varied: the majority were Swedes (14); however there were 2 Norwegians, 1 Finnish, 1 Polish, 1 Russian and 1 English respondent. All of the respondents spoke both English and Swedish.

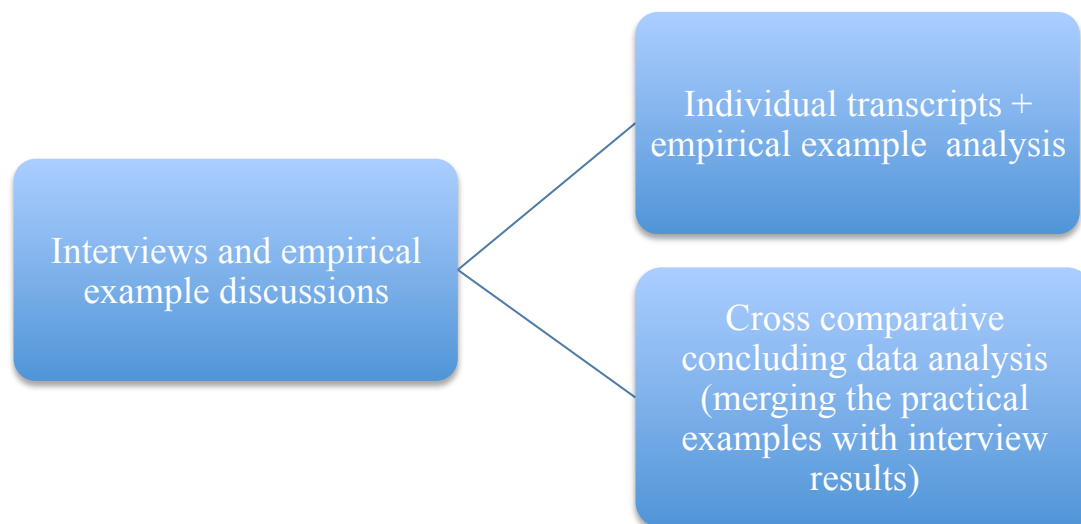
Following table represents the background of the respondents participated in the research:

Table 1.

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Educational Level</i>	<i>Role in the company</i>	<i>Years in the current role</i>
Resp.1	30	F	University	Project Assistant	1,5 years
Resp.2	23	F	High School	Receptionist	4 years
Resp.3	27	F	University	Project Manager	2 years
Resp.4	30	F	University	Regulatory affairs associate	7 months
Resp.5	25	F	University	Qualitative Researcher, Moderator	9 months
Resp.6	27	F	University	Project Assistant	7 months
Resp.7	31	F	University	Incentives responsible	4 years
Resp.8	35	F	University	Qualitative Researcher, Moderator	2,5 years
Resp.9	37	M	University	Transport Manager	3 years
Resp.10	47	F	High School	Secretary	25 years
Resp.11	24	M	High School	Process Manager	6 months
Resp.12	35	M	University	Logician	2,5 years
Resp.13	29	M	University	Senior Transport Planner	8 months

Resp.14	47	F	University	Customs Responsible	6 months
Resp.15	26	F	High School	Transport Planner	1,5 years
Resp.16	36	M	University	Regional Distribution Coordinator	1,5 years
Resp.17	36	M	University	Inbound Distribution	1 year
Resp.18	36	F	High School	Regional Distribution Coordinator	1 year
Resp.19	22	M	High School	Transport Planner	2 years
Resp.20	27	F	University	Project Assistant	9 months

### 3. Data analysis



Simple content analysis was used for analysis of interviews. Each interview was audio recorded and the practical examples that respondents brought with them were discussed in the course of the interview. The recordings were transcribed and every transcript analyzed, as well as every practical email example. In addition of the individually analyzed cases all of the transcripts were compared, as well as email examples and all this was analyzed together in order to create more in-deep analysis of the data collected and possibly find the common generalizations made by respondents. Similarities and differences as well as specific examples of the cases were then presented in a cross-comparative concluding data analysis.

Both analysis of interviews and practical examples (emails) was merged in order to get a more complete overview of the data collected. The analysis of interviews was carried out in

order of the interview questions, merging the answers from all the respondents and noticing the similarities or differences in responses. The analysis of practical email examples was divided into analysis of the positive email examples and negative email examples. The main focus was on identifying and analyzing the common traits in the responses of the participants and in addition noticing the specific comments that did not reoccur.

#### **4. Boundaries and limitations of the research**

Current study has been conducted with the choice of respondents from three different companies and one of the aims of the study was to find out whether there are “universal” opinions about the email writing practices at work in general. One of the limitations of this study can be the organizational structure effect on to the respondent’s interview and empirical example selections. Organizational nature of the company can define the email practices within the organization.

Another limitation can be the fact that the respondents have been chosen from different nationalities and not everything could have been captured in the interviews as the interviews were conducted in English, which was not the mother tongue to the majority of the participants.

The average age range of the respondents that participated in the research was 31,5 years, which was exact representation of the age demographics of the staff working in the companies where the interviews were conducted. Which in its turn means that the findings of the research are mainly relevant for that specific age range. This can be considered as a potential limitation as there is a chance for the research findings to have been different in case the age of the respondents was higher or lower.

Subjectivism in answers should be also considered in addition to the fact that not all the emails selected could have been chosen in a neutral state i.e. there is no clear proof that the respondent was selecting the email example objectively.

Additional limitation can be considered the number of participants, as it is not sufficient for creating a more in-depth research. In addition, the limited number of respondents makes it more difficult to make greater generalization of the results.

However, despite the possible bias and subjectivity in the answers, the research conducted has been aimed to reduce the subjectivity to the minimum by using the cross-case data analysis in order to dilute the predominance of one or other cases.

## **5. Validity & Reliability**

Relatively limited availability of the previous research conducted in the field of email use at work, especially from the receivers prospective creates a great opportunity for the research conducted and helps it to remain relatively non-biased. The interviews and empirical examples used for this research are aimed to be analyzed from the objective point of view and the reliability of the interview results can be considered relatively high as the respondents were kept anonymous and the questions asked were non-personal as well as non subjective. The number of the participants can be considered as a limitation to the validity and the reliability of the research as more numerous participants would create more room for comparison and possible generalizations.

## **6. Ethical consideration and Anonymity**

In order to provide the anonymity for the respondents the pseudonyms were used in the interviews as well as the companies were not named. The interviews were carried out in a way that would not bias respondent's answers and would not include any identifiable factors that would make the respondents known. In order to reduce the risk of biased responses the participants were reminded several times to think more general and reassured that there is no right or wrong answers as well as the interview answers should be based on their own opinions and that the data collected will be used strictly anonymously.

## **RESULTS**

The purpose of this section of the paper is to introduce the results. The current section is going to be divided in 5 parts according to the structure of the interviews and the empirical examples. The first four parts present the results of analysis of the interviews and the fifth part presents the results of analysis of email examples.



## **Part 1 – Background information section of the interviews**

Background information part (q. 1 - 5; 7 - 11) - the main goal of the section was to warm up the respondent and gather the general information.

All of the respondents were frequent email users and used the email communication channel both at work and privately. The majority of participants use email communicating with coworkers in the same office, management and colleagues overseas and with clients of the companies. Email was least used for communicating with colleagues placed in the same department physically sitting close to the respondent; instead of email channel the face-to-face channel is used.

All of the respondents used Outlook, as a software package, on the computer in order to check their emails, only two respondents commented that sometimes they use smartphones, but that was only in order to check their private emails. The reported time spent on working with emails varied from 30% of the working day up to 80% (mean time being 55%). One respondent was receiving more than 60 work related emails per day where the rest of the respondents divided into three groups: the largest group claimed to be receiving 20-40 emails per day, second largest 40-60 and the third group received 10-20 emails per day. None of the participants was receiving less than 10 work related emails per day.

## **Part 2 – Emails at work: some general comments on use and efficiency**

The second section of the interview focuses on emails at work starting with the questions on the opinions of respondents on the communication channel in general and ending with the more specific questions about the character of the emails received.

The wide majority of the respondents found the email communication channel at work as being sufficiently effective (i.e. the channel achieves the set objectives of the sender and ensures the desired outcome by providing a useful platform for communication at work) and convenient.

Some of the comments included the following:

*Positive comments:*

- Good channel as you have it written down, black and white
- Allows one to go back and double check
- Very good to keep track of what you say
- Fast and efficient channel of communication
- Good to combine with a phone call
- Eases the communication among different cultures (e.g. linguistic accents)
- Helps to keep the distance (i.e. does not require one to speak to people)
- Makes communication possible between the different time zones

*Negative comments:*

- Can be misinterpreted, as all write and read differently
- Can be insufficient on the information part

The main observation here on the general view about the email as the communication channel can be concluded as mainly positive but including some negative comments. Respondents did point out the positives of the channel and mentioned some negatives but there was no one who completely claimed that the channel was inefficient and that some other communication channel was preferred instead. The suggestions were rather to combine the email as the communication channel with some other e.g. telephone or face-to-face.

**General character of the emails replying practices and timing of the emails**

The general character of emails received at work was predominantly requests, but also information sharing. A number of respondents could not specify the general character of the email received but commented that the incoming emails included all types of information, guidelines and issue solving queries. It was also mentioned that there is a lot of one-way communication i.e. just the general informative emails, which did not require a specific answer.

The practices of replying to emails brought up the organizational differences from company to company (as previously stated, respondents were recruited from the 3 different organizations). One company had a policy of replying to all the emails that one received,

especially when it was from clients. The other two companies had the general guideline of replying only to the emails that were directed to the specific person or when an answer was specifically requested. The emails that were not replied to in all of the companies included the information emails that had the respondent as a “CC” i.e. copied into the email for information purposes, also the emails where the sender warned that there is no reply needed (chain emails with a message “do not reply to this message”). One respondent brought forward the idea that if the sender is within the same office location and the email in question needs further discussion then the respondent would prefer speaking to the sender face-to-face.

A specific question on whether there would be any factors in an email that would trigger a person not to respond brought up quite a few interesting factors. Mainly the respondents’ opinion referred to the fact that all the emails, despite the tone, formatting and language use do get answered, but some delays may occur mainly due to need for searching additional information or in some cases time pressure. Some of the respondents specified that a rudely written email can be best left unanswered but in the majority of cases there will be another communication channel used instead or to supplement this e.g. telephone conversation or a face-to-face meeting (see examples below: Example 1 and Example 2)

Example 1:

**Respondent:** *‘If I get the same question every day then I answer the first days when get question the same time or if the mail is to me and is rude mail cc to someone else I don’t reply because I don’t want to get into a email fight.*

Example 2:

**Respondent:** *‘I don’t skip any mails due to language or bad language I answer them best I can if its rude I answer them can be very important to answer a mail with rude language.*

Prioritizing of the emails in terms of which ones should be answered first did not create any dramatic differences in responses. Majority of the respondents referred to the flagging system – i.e. incoming emails, which are flagged or have the exclamation mark added to them in the importance ranking were the ones that were answered first. Some of the respondents commented on the fact that emails from the more senior people in the company are also generally prioritized as well as the urgent matters. After the most urgent emails are dealt with the majority of the respondents preferred to answer to emails from the earliest incoming ones

to the most recent. In addition some comments were added that the easier and faster it is to answer to an email the more chance it has to be taken first. One of the respondents highlighted the matter of the time difference (see Example 1 below):

Example 1:

**Interviewer:** *How do you prioritize incoming emails (which ones should be answered first etc)?*

**Respondent:** *Basically if it's urgent, that they need something from me before they close their office in Asia then I might reply right away."*

Replying practices among the respondents varied notably, it was mentioned that the speed of replying and whether the email is answered at once depends greatly on the content or request in the specific email and possibly the sender. The time used for replying to an email was stated to be from 30 seconds up to a few days depending on the nature of an email. All of the respondents that stated that an email can take a longer time to reply to than few minutes confirmed that they would definitely give some kind of a reply to the sender straight away and then later complement the information in additional email. Every respondent stressed the importance of replying to an email even though it is not always the complete answer to the questions asked. Majority of the interviewed respondents mentioned that they try to get back to the sender as soon as possible (mostly within the same day).

Based on the respondents' answers, the email that would take longest to answer was described to have following characteristics:

- A lot of information that requires careful reading through
- An email that includes few people i.e. responding is carefully thought through
- Requires more information before replying i.e. some additional research
- Poor formulation of the text, that the message is unclear
- Includes double checking with a third party before getting back to the sender
- Complex situation where email only is not enough – change of the communication channel to for example telephone or face-to-face

Generally all of the respondents had the tendency of saving the emails. Only 4 people out of 20 participants mentioned that they do tend to delete some of the emails but mainly after the

issue is resolved or there is general information that does not directly concern them. It is in general seen to be very important to keep track of what was said and written about specific issues in order to be able to get back to it later in time and check.

On the timing part majority of respondents did not find that there might be some pressure created by the emails depending on what time of the day the email is received. On the other hand few of the respondents commented that they could feel pressurized sometimes when the sender starts phoning up and double-checking whether the email was received and when they can expect an answer, which was not generally connected to some specific timing of the day.

### **Part 3 – Views on email attributes**

The main focus of this part of the interview was to find out what are the attributes that are considered to be important in an email and what is the respondent's understanding of how a perfectly written email should look like.

#### **Positive attributes**

The following overview presents the points that were mentioned as the components of the perfectly written email in the interviews.

Subject:

- Should start with 3 short words on subject of the specific email, question or action
- Should be informative about the issue of the email
- Should state the topic of the email

Greetings:

- Hi, Hello or Dear – desirable greetings in the beginning of the email

Introduction:

- Should include the history of the case
- Summary of the issue or actions taken that leads you in into the email
- Can include some explanations on why the email is written

Language and politeness:

- Should be polite, but not too polite

- Spelling is important (spell checks should be used)
- Not too many typographical symbols (smileys)
- Not too many exclamation/question marks
- Clearly written text, straight to the point
- Clearly understandable language with no room for interpretations
- In case of few receivers involved should be easy to understand who is responsible for what and whether answer is required.

#### Font and formatting:

- Arial, Helvetica, Calibri and Times New Roman
- Size 10 or 12
- Clear paragraphs, not text all in one paragraph
- Clear punctuation and use of spacing
- Capitalizing and classical sentences, not too many abbreviations
- Bullet points good to use in case of few important statements
- Highlighting of the most important facts possible

#### Length:

- Not more than half of the A4
- Optimal 10 lines, not more
- In case of longer explanations required better to use an attachment than fit it into an email

#### Signature and closing:

- Best regards/Kind regards + Name of the sender
- Thank you (in case of requests)
- Signature should include senders full name and contact details, for the external emails position or title can be included

#### The main positive attributes of the emails received at work o were:

- Clarity
- Quick replies and information sharing
- Gratefulness
- Font and layout are usually fine
- Politeness and the manner of writing
- Information summarized in a few lines

Majority of the respondent's answers overlapped. It was an interesting observation that everyone mentioned the fact of formality and information content of the emails, as well as the greetings, subject line importance and the optimal length being not more than a half of A4 page.

The context and message was rated as the most important attribute of the work related email. The second most important attribute was considered politeness and followed by the layout and format.

### Negative attributes

The main negative attributes of the emails received at work were pointed out to be following:

- Incomplete sentences including typographical symbols (smileys/emoticons)
- Too many repetitions in emails
- Too short and too direct
- Unclear problem statements and a lot of people included in the email (CC's)
- Impolite demands at work and guidelines from the management (not always good to have in email, better have a meeting)
- Bad spelling and grammar
- Insufficient information and blurry meanings
- Rudeness, too neutral and too impersonal

### Part 4 – Concluding remarks on email as the communication channel

*‘Interviewer: In general, if you had to give the email as an internal communication channel a rating on the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being completely inefficient, 5 being highly efficient) what would it be? Why?’*

The average rating of the email as an internal communication channel was estimated to be 4. The explanations on the ratings were that the email is an effective communication channel but not as effective as face-to-face. In order to clarify for the respondents, the effectiveness was defined as the ability of the email as the communication channel to achieve the set objectives of the sender and ensure the desired outcome by providing a useful platform for

communication at work. Email was generally considered to be one of the quickest and most efficient methods in addition to the fact that it had an opportunity for keeping the record of the information received.

Some of the respondents pointed out that there are quite a few restrictions to emails, as the information transmitted has to be shortened and concluded which would mean that some details could be missed. Interesting comments were made by some of the respondents such as that email is effective as it does not interrupt as much as a telephone call or an urgent meeting.

Generally the email was considered to be very important communication tool and very efficient to combine with the other communication channels such as face-to-face or telephone:

*“**Respondent:** I think the tool is very important for me it’s very good to if someone is on the phone then it can be good if they write it in a mail you can always go back and see have I done something I’m not done with this one it is a record. I would say it is 5 most important absolutely. “*

*“**Respondent:** 5 – Because nowadays in the companies is the most important tool, of course you have a telephone conferences, but email is still most important tool to communicate; especially if it is an international company and you have to communicate with people/colleagues outside the office.”*

*“**Respondent:** It would be a 3 – because sometimes it is really efficient, especially if the person you communicate with is really fast at answering. If you need a quick reply then it is not always efficient because you would not know when the person you sent the email to would have time to see your email and reply to it.”*

The main negatives of the email as an internal communication channel were concluded to be the following:

- Due to numerous emails received today it can be difficult make the distinction between which emails are important and which ones are less important
- There is no opportunity to reject unwanted information as an email comes anyway
- Great chance for spam with unnecessary information



- Missing out on live contact and interaction with colleagues
- A lot of room for misinterpretation
- Communication can become impersonal
- Not always as fast as desired to be

The main positives of the email as an internal communication channel were concluded to be the following:

- Possible to reach a lot of people at the same time with identical information
- Eases the communication between different time zones and different countries
- Fast
- Formal record
- Gives one time to think through the answer
- Does not distract as much as other channels as there is an opportunity to look it up in detail later or postpone detail reading

## Part 5 – Analysis of practical examples

In this section we will examine and investigate emails, which have fallen short of the recipients’ requirements or aspirations and later the emails that have been selected as role model emails. Also examine the nature of these responses that fall short of recipients’ expectations, evaluate the responses in respect to the theories and models, and understand the parallels and where the theories are validated. We will examine the reasons for these differences and make conclusions and communicate the salient observations.

### Negative emails

Negative emails were selected by respondents based on the various reasons and after looking at these emails one can classify the negative examples selected by responses based on comments of those into primary reasons for the negative comments looking at all responses see the table below:

Poor formatting	Rude or offensive	Insufficient information	Unnecessary information	Not understandable	Too much information
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lay out	language				redundancy
14	25	15	10	10	8

One can notice that in many cases some of the recipients receive mails that they deem as poor or bad from the same sender, i.e. a number of the receivers commented on mails from the same author although the mails were on different subjects.

This highlights that the sender has adopted a specific email communication style, which as it has been seen over a long period of time must be generally seen as acceptable by the organization and then become a part of the organizational culture. One can also summarize that this style although negatively perceived by recipients can be effective and accepted style or else the sender would have modified it much earlier. However there is also a chance that the negatively perceived style has not been considered as effective and accepted but rather ignored and chosen not to react to without informing the sender or the organization.

The following are extracts from the mails chosen by the participants:

Example 1.

Nothing to add, I want to see if the shipments was successful or not. If not, then why not!?

Comment and why chosen: Demanding and rude style, exclamation mark at the end.

Example 2.

XXXX  
I want all details location, what happend and has all X/// been effected? How was the security?  
and what is the action plan? I want this now!

Comment and why chosen: Demanding and rude.

Example 3.

We have done this already....several times!  
  
8 pallet truck with taillift available  
Additional cost per 350:- sek

Comment and why chosen: Demanding and rude no polite words.

Example 4.

Why is the Total OTD not included in all figures?! I want the reasons to why the total OTD is not according to set targets (perception from market region is that overall performance is bad).

Also when can I get the full report and information communicated towards market region on this specific issue?

Comment and why chosen: Sited as Rude.

Example 5.

Hej  
stopp bra med hög ambitionsnivå men det gäller också o inse vilka roller o ansvar vi har. Trade compliance sköter detta och ska guida oss. TM är en operativ funktion som tar fram rapporter som ska rapporteras till berörda. Detta gäller fortfarande till något annat aviseras.

Translation:

“Hi,

*Stop, good with a high ambition level but it is also about realizing which roles and responsibilities we have. Trade compliance takes care of that and should guide us. TM is an operative function that extracts the reports that are reported to respectively. This applies currently until something different will be announced.”*

Comment and why chosen: Disrespectful and demeaning of the TM function, badly spelt text.

Example 6.

Hej.  
Förn. Eftern! ..men stäm av med L8 innan du gör ngt annat så det är synkat!

Translation:

“Hi.

*First name Surname! ... but agree with L8 before you do smth so that is synced!”*

Comment and why chosen: Cited as rude

Example 7.

Panalpina ska börja planera sjö via MY.  
end of story!

Jag hoppas vi nästa gång inom bolaget vet vad vi pratar om!

Translation:

*"Panalpina will start panning see via MY. end of story! I hope that we next time within the company know what we are talking about!"*

Comment and why chosen: Sarcastic and rude to the receiver, use of impolite language.

Example 8.

Hej.

Haft en diskussion med ~~Förn~~. ~~Eftern~~. och detta **gäller endast dual use produkter!**  
Nedan handlar om solpaneler så det är ok att hanteras via MY!

Translation: *"Hi. Had a discussion with First name Surname and this is only applicable for dual use products! Below is about the solar panels and that is ok to be handled via MY!"*

Comment and why chosen: Sited as rude because no clarification and directions added as well as the use of the exclamation marks makes the email sound very demanding and bold.

Example 9.

Hej

Vi behöver en action plan från PA asap! Skit i möte.  
Trevlig helg

Translation: *"Hi We need an action plan from PA asap! Shit in meeting. Nice weekend."*

Comment and why chosen: Swearing and rudeness.

Example 10.

I have checked the timesheets compared to the visma stämpla for period 9<sup>th</sup> April until 13<sup>th</sup> April and I noticed that you are 0,5 hour(s) short in your timesheets.

Please correct it TODAY and let me know when you have done so.

Comment and why chosen: Rude and demanding, capitalized words.

There is also a correlation between the mail and the emotions and response of the reader, Whilst the sender can distance themselves potentially from the emotion and distance themselves from the reader when writing a mail that is rude and offensive, conversely the

reader seems not immune to the tone and is not distant from the message or the person who sent it.

Clear evidence of correlation between the mail and the emotions and response of the reader is seen by the evidence of the participants responses in the following instances, here it is interesting to note that there is a correlation between the reader describing the mail as rude and that it seemed to evoke a negative and emotionally adverse feeling in themselves (Examples 1 - 9):

Example 1:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Style and attitude.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *Angry and unhappy. Also little bit too direct there has been some sort of bad manners and too direct, there is a need for manners etiquette this is missing in this mail.*

Example 2:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *It was a feeling I got that - fix this I don't give a damn how you do this, just do it.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *Anxious, absolutely and angry, and disrespected.*

Example 3:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *This mail the language is not good.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *This is unnecessary feel disappointed.*

Example 4:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Because it is... I don't think it is a proper email it's like a person spoke to me in person and looked down on me and on the purpose of my previous mail to them. This bad mail is a reply on what I have written before.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *It made me feel like I'm not taken seriously; frustrated is how I feel, since I wanted some kind of action from the person.*

Example 5:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *I was blamed for not achieving the bookings, since it was not my mistake it was quite sad to get this kind of email – blaming and negative email, felt that I was in high school.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *I felt very angry, I knew it was not my mistake, and also other colleagues were CC'd which made me sad.*

Example 6:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *This is not so bad, but I find this sentence sound very rude.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *I would think it is rude.*

Example 7:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Because it was rude; bosses were CC'd so it seemed as an unnecessary attack.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *Really irritated and attacked, I probably did not answer to it for quite some time.*

Example 8:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Well she made herself superior to me, she positioned me underneath her like: don't do this, thank you!*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *I felt a bit sad and offended.*

Example 9:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *I selected it mainly because of the tone. I do not like the tone and the content. I would have written it completely differently.*

Interviewer: *How does it make you feel?*

Respondent: *I'm quite sure that I had nothing to do with this email, so I just ignored it.*

Common sentiments from the email can be seen by looking at the primary words used by readers to describe their sentiment toward these emails. The responses drew strong adjectives and many of these adjectives being chosen by numerous readers to describe the feelings they had for their respective emails:

- Sad
- Angry
- Disappointed
- Irritated
- Offended
- Attacked
- Rude
- Disrespected

From the adjectives above we can see that the nature of the communication medium i.e. email lends itself well to facilitate these “disinhibiting” potentials for the author of emails.

The consequence of which for the receiver is not at all disinhibiting as readers are engaged and receptive to not only emotionally charged emails, but equally interestingly sensitivity seems to be possibly highlighted as the lack of proper greeting or even the proper ending

seems to evoke a negative response from reader. One could conclude that readers of the emails have a greater sensory awareness for email communication than for potential other mediums.

This is potentially a very negative combination, in that the sending a mail affords the sender a sense of distance and insensitivity in respect to what they are going to write and how they are going to write it. Whilst readers are potentially even more receptive to the emails and are to an even greater extent intimately and emotionally connected with the mails they read on the screen. This can clearly be seen by the emotionally charged words to describe the feelings when receiving a rude mail.

We also can notice from interview question 24 asked: *How influential is each of these factors in the work related mail?* - where respondents were asked to grade the importance of the factors presented that the choices included:

- *Context*
- *Message*
- *Format*
- *Layout*
- *Politeness*
- *Other*

Overall politeness scored as the most important attribute for an email. When examining the effectiveness of email understanding, the consequence of a rude or negative email shows that readers certainly notice these emails and are quick to classify them as rude.

It is hard to judge the real effectiveness of an email and the full consequences of a rude or bad email, because for this survey we have only the comments made by the respondents to rely on.

Many comments that were made during the interviews can help us to gain some insight about the effectiveness of emails. Firstly the reader was clearly placed in a situation of emotional stress, words such as unhappiness, irritated, angry all allude to this. Secondly many comments were mentioned such as:

- *I ignored it*
- *I did not respond*



- *It confused me*

Thirdly, with such evocative responses noted, the potential exists that the receiver could well reciprocate with an email reply in a style with a similar tone, possibly even stronger tone than the one they received and send that response back to the sender, likewise the potential to include (CC) more people to the mail also exists.

Negative emails have the potential, to make the receiver unhappy, along with causing a deliberate lack of activity or response from receiver can also evoke a retaliatory response by the receiver who then targets the sender.

All the above activities are significantly counterproductive in contrast to the original intension of the sender, who seems to strongly demand or wish for an action or activity to take place as a result of their mail.

Most emails from the samples taken here seem to relate to a request or action of sorts there is a correlation in respect to emails that are considered to be negative or bad that the effectiveness of this response or action is somewhat limited. We have found that emails, which are rude or impolite, have the strongest reaction and are likely to evoke a negative response in both reader's perception and consequent actions.

#### *Additional examples of ineffective emails*

Other emails that also prove to be ineffective are the ones, which the reader finds hard to understand - a good example raised being the one below Example 1. These were the documented comments that confirmed the inability of the reader to understand the email. The use of too much jargon and acronyms all compounded this. This was the best example of this type of mail:

Example 1.

Before replying any more to who is responsible for what, please look internally in ~~XXXX~~ or who is actually responsible for the WH that is taking care of your cargo! I could with 100 % assurance say that it is not PA and we are not responsible for the out loading or the coordination with the WH. I don't know where you have got this info but you have to investigate more closer before you assume this things, PA responsibility starts when the cargo is loaded on the truck and not before.

The trucking companies are assembling trucks for each assignment, this assignments are to be calculated and sent to a driver to p/u cargo at a specific point and time during a specific time range/frame. Often the truckers have more assignments than just p/u for one place and therefore if the time range/frame is extended the truck must leave to make time for the next assignment.

As responsible for all markets I can for sure say that RMED been given better window to call off the shipments than the other markets and higher attention than the rest of the markets. And I'm stunned after all time and effort spent from PA that we still have so many problems with this market and a DOQ

The table below is based on a maximum score for each category of answers; it was interesting to note that politeness scored 87%. The context and the message were deemed as most important as those components were considered to be the key to the existence of the email and its clarity of interpretation.

Interesting to note that the format and layout and any other factor scored relatively lower than politeness, it seems from this that this criteria is valued higher by respondents than the technical aspects of the email, which is interesting observation.

How influential is each of these factors in the work-related email?

Attribute	Rate 1 to 5 (1 being completely uninfluential, 5 being highly influential)
Context and message	95%
Politeness	87%
Layout	71%
Format	65%
Other	30%

### *In summary*

When examining the feedback from respondents to this part of the survey, we find that politeness is one of the primary categories defined by readers of highest importance on email.

We can also observe it is the area from which the largest number of complains of readers were presented for our research. An additional interesting factor is that from our survey this sentiment is universal from across all the different disciplines, workplaces and different and diverse companies who took part in the survey.

The technical considerations of the email are important but not as emotive, and do not have as much consequence on the communication, as the politeness of the mail does.

We can also observe that the lack of politeness seems to have the highest likelihood of the email being ineffective from the standpoint of a less motivated reader, or deliberate actions of the receiver who in turn seems driven to lessen the activity surrounding the response to the request.

Inappropriately worded or confusing emails will result in a longer resolution time due to mail follow up or cause some error inactivity, yet impolite emails would have the most damaging effect both on reader and activity.

One can say that email also affords the sender the distance to be less respectful when communicating. This is possibly one of the contributing reasons to the high number of emails that are perceived as impolite.

For email communication to be as constructive as possible, based on our analysis, we can summarize the primary requirements as follows:

- Sender should not behave in a way that is disinhibiting when communicating
- Receivers are most sensitive to the manners and politeness of an email
- Poor manners and politeness has the biggest impact in the effectiveness of the email

### Role-model i.e. positive emails

The research included the investigation into gathering and understanding information relating to positive emails. For this exercise respondents were asked to select mails that they would describe as positive or well written and very good for the purpose they were intended.

Subjects of the survey produced many examples of these. What is positive in one recipient's thoughts may not be positive in another - this is a factor to be considered with all surveys of this nature.

*How influential is each of these factors in the work-related email?*

Attribute	Rate 1 to 5 (1 being completely unimportant, 5 being highly influential)
Context and message	95%
Politeness	87%
Layout	71%
Format	65%
Other	30%

From the above table we see that the context and message is cited as important and is one of the criteria that contributes toward the reader describing a mail as positive, likewise politeness scores highly as well. We will investigate the aspects of the context and message to try and understand the key drivers for this being an area that attracted such a high focus of importance for a positive mail. Other criteria such as format and layout whilst important did not score as highly as the other criteria therefore we will focus on what are the drivers and components of context and message.

### Examples of the role-model i.e. positive emails

The following are some extracts from the mails chosen by the participants:

Example 1:

Hej fina JAG!

Kan du vidarebefordra mina mail till KOLLEGA när inte jag är här (ons + tors, hon är inte här på fredag). Vad var det man tryckte på telefonen för att få samtal vidarebefordrade?

Tack,  
XXX

Translation:

*“Hi pretty ME!*

*Could you forward my mails to COLLEAGUE when I am not here (Wed + Thu, she is not here on Friday). What was it that one has to push on the telephone in order to forward the telephone calls?*

*Thank you, XXX”*

Example 2:

Hej ~~Colina~~ *name*

Hur är det?

Jag stänger XX- projektet just nu och jag såg att alla valde olika ersättningssystem.

Först, skulle du kunna kolla med G.S och U.H vilka ersättningar de skulle vilja få ?

Sen, skulle du kunna kontakta de andra och få följande information:

- P.A: Personnummer, komplett adress, bankkontonummer samt clearing nummer och bank namn.
- B.S: Hon kan skicka hennes faktura till Helena på följande adress: accounts@XX.com och kopiera mig i mejlet.  
När hon skickar fakturan måste det stå projekt numret på den: **00000000**. Betalningen sker inom 30 dagar. Resten av uppgifterna borde hon veta/kunna (Org. Nummer, F-skattesedel num.).

Tack på förhand för hjälpen med detta.

Om du har frågor är du såklart välkommen!

Translation:

*“Hi name, how is it going? I am closing XXX-project now and I saw that all chose different incentive systems. Firstly, could you check with G.S and U.H, which incentives they would*

like to receive? Then, could you contact the other ones in order to get the following information:

- *P.A: Person number, complete address, bank account number, clearing number and bank name.*
- *B.S: She can send her invoice to Helena on the following address: [accounts@XX.com](mailto:accounts@XX.com) and copy me in into the email. When she sends the invoice it should be specified with the project number: 0000000. The payment happens within 30 days. The rest of details she should know (org. number, F-skattesedel number.).*

*Thank you in advance for your help with this.*

*If you have questions you are of course welcome!”*

### Example 3:

Hi everyone !

I just spoke to XXX who moderated the two focus groups in XXX yesterday, and I am pleased to confirm that all 10 respondents showed up and that both the groups went really well.

The client is very happy with the quality of the respondents and the outcome of these groups, and I would like to congratulate and to thank you all for your involvement and your hard work on this project.

Even though the odds were not favorable when we launched recruitment, the main goal was achieved thanks to your hard labour.

We will now send the respondents a “thank you-email” and we will send some more information about the incentives.

Thank you all again for your help and your cooperation, it has been a pleasure to work with you on this project.

### Example 4:

Hi XXX,

No need to recruit another leadership interview!

Thank you so much for all your great work on this project. It has been a pleasure to work with you and your team.

Let’s have a chat tomorrow about finalizing everything.

Thank you!

Example 5:

Dear all,

As you may have experienced our conference rooms are highly coveted and sometimes it is difficult to find a suitable room. For this reason we should all pull together in the booking and use of these rooms.

When you would like to book a room – please always quote the **number of participants** and also if there will be **external** guests involved. This will help us to book optimally from the start and minimize the need of moving your bookings back and forth.

We fully understand that you sometimes wish to use a bigger room than needed but for the sake of convenience, however the result of this may be that your colleagues will not find a room for their meeting.

If you have wishes for a bigger room for other reasons, please let us know and we will do our best to meet your request as far as possible.

Always try to book one of our 27 group rooms first when it's for an internal meeting for 2-8 people. These can be booked easily via Outlook, please follow the link below for more information.

Thank you for helping us help you!

Best regards,  
XXX

Example 6:

Hi everyone!

I would like to have a very short meeting with all of you to discuss the issue of administration time. As XXX wrote in an email last week, many hours have been put on administration which is a problem as the hours are not covered by a specific project.

Since we are so many people, I suggest we split up in 2 groups:

- **All recruiters / interviewers – meeting at 11:15**
- **All PMs plus qual researchers (XXX, XXX, XXX) – meeting at 11:45**

Both meetings are in the conference room.

Please let me know if you cannot make it!

Thanks!

XXX

Example 7:

Dear XXX,

Thanks for your order. You'll receive the codes within 2 working days.

Best regards,  
XXX

Example 8:

Hi everyone,

Maria has told me that the term digestionshälsa is often not understood and it might be that you experience the same thing.  
Maria and Elsa came up with an alternative, so please start using **matsmältningsproblem** instead of digestionshälsa in the invitation and when you call.

Please, let me know how it goes with this new subject. I hope it will be better.

With kind regards,

From the examples provided (Example 1-8) one can see that there is a correlation when it comes to the format of the emails – all of the provided examples have the greeting and end with a “thank you” or “kind regards”. Additionally one can notice that the context and message is clear in addition to a generally polite tone. Following examples (Example 1-13) represent some of the clarifications given by respondents on why the email was selected and presented as a positive email:

Example 1:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *This mail has start in subject info- its clearly in the subject area; contents nice; start its short and telling that you are not going to act or react - this is your information. Professional ending.*

Interviewer: *What do you think is the most POSITIVE about it?*

Respondent: *Introduction and a little bit background, what was wrong with case.*

Example 2:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Good structure and factual.*

Interviewer: *What do you think is the most POSITIVE about it?*

*Good structure clear and bullet points.*

Example 3:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*



Respondent: *It's very clear.*

Interviewer: *Does this email have any positives sides?*

Respondent: *Its italic, I can easily see what are her words and what words are from the document.*

Example 4:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *This is a factual and good mail that sprang out of a conversation its written is factual language, well structured and good flow closer quote and quotation clear what is quoted. Adds value.*

Interviewer: *What do you think is the most POSITIVE about it?*

Respondent: *Its very factual, it brings a piece of information that was in the phone conversation that the sender brings and clarifies.*

Example 5:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *I chose this one because the person giving this one to me has put out a very good explanation: for the first of all you do like this, for the second of all you do like this, for the third. Why? So this is a very good explanation, we have a good background I know exactly who I should turn to so this person has also ended this with - take care. I feel I have this persons support from the beginning.*

Example 6:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Good email and tells what it is about has an attachment that tells deeper what kind of thing it is.*

Example 7:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Its factual, a summary and easy to understand and everyone knows what to do it's a summary of a mail.*

Interviewer: *What do you think is the most POSITIVE about it?*

Respondent: *It does not leave many question marks - everyone knows what to do.*

Example 8:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *Because this email is polite, has a good structure, good info and the issue and action is presented.*

Interviewer: *What do you think is the most POSITIVE about it?*

Respondent: *The information available for me to act.*

Example 9:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *It's an email from the project manager and I think he writes the best emails ever, first of all, it is a thank you letter after we finished the project and he told us about the results and that the client is happy, and thanked us for the work. Email was sent to all of the recruiters who worked on the project. It was really nice and polite. It's just nice to get appreciation.*

Example 10:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *I think that it is a very informative email and very nicely and politely written.*

Example 11:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *This was a letter or an email that was sent out after a completion of a project, it is an email about how it went and also the appreciation of the work on the project that everyone had done and also some information on how everyone should proceed.*

Example 12:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *It's ok, it's a reply to my email - there is the introduction there, there is the information, very very polite and with all contact details, I received a short message with all the information that I need in a very good way.*

Example 13:

Interviewer: *Why did you select this email?*

Respondent: *I like this one because it starts with the greeting and this person who is writing that email knows that its directed to a lot of people and it says - I'd like to have a very short meeting to discuss something. So this person is trying to get ahead and trying to prevent further problems, the person is discussing a problem, but in such a way that she is being accommodative, since we are so many, we are going to split up in two groups. It is very clear who is going to be in which group and it is very good and approachable I think it is direct and clear but still nice and polite.*

When analyzing the verbal feedback from the emails we look at the reason the positive email was chosen and then looked at the reason why the respondent said the email was positive.

This is to try and get a reason why the reader has described the mail as positive and to ascertain more information as what is understood by the email needing to have good message and context for it to be classified as a positive or good email fit for purpose intended.

By analyzing the transcripts the salient words that describe and convey emotions about the needs for the mail are underlined and then classified into a number of simple groups looking at: structure, factual, politeness, layout, and other factors such as spelling etc. Every time a trigger word pertaining to a component in this category the word or phrase was highlighted and classified and then counted to give an understanding of the sentiment the readers/respondents wanted to convey.

Below is a list of these key words drawn from the text:

- Accommodative P
- Politely written P
- Starts with the greeting P
- The information that I need in a very good way F.
- Very very polite P
- How everyone should proceed F
- Very informative F
- It's just nice to get P
- Really nice and polite P
- Thank you P
- Available for me to act F

- Polite has a good structure P, F
- Every one knows what to do. F
- Its factual F
- Tells more F
- Support P
- Good explanation S
- Very factual F
- Well structured S
- A factual F
- Easy see L
- Clear S
- Good structure S
- Structure and factual S, F
- Introduction S
- Professional ending P
- Short L
- Clearly S

The table below is one that totals the sentiment into categories as described earlier.

*Table 1.*

Structure	Factual	Politeness	Layout	Other
5	11	10	2	0

From *Table 1* we can observe that the main criteria to be identified is that a mail should be factual, in that it should have the information relevant for the work and be based on core issues relating to the subject. It seems facts are the most important criteria readers are looking for to act on an email. The style and tone of how written was nearly as important with Politeness been described many times as the reason a mail is seen as positive. This politeness included greetings endings and kind words of appreciation and support to the reader.

So whilst facts are important it seems that the facts need to come with what readers feel is a politeness i.e. greeting etc. It seems that a purely factual email without anything that the

reader defines as a trigger of politeness would result in the email not being considered as positive.

What is very noticeable is that there is very little reference in the communications about spelling, grammar, punctuation, images or attachments, icons. Additionally structural issues such as layout and the structure of the mail itself scored low in acknowledgement by the reader as an important factor in classifying a positive mail.

This may be as a result of the increase in communication where texting in Skype, chat sites, sms, Facebook etc. all require very little in the way of structure and punctuation and spelling in order to be effective. Again, like we see in the drivers for negative emails there are many crossovers from other electronic communication forms to email, many characteristics that are copied both positive and negative.

### *In Summary*

For a reader to classify an email as positive it should contain the relevant facts that the user or respondent can work on. It should also be polite with a greeting a proper ending and a thank you.

The email should show kindness and respect to the reader and come across in a way that does not antagonize, barking orders and instructions in just purely a factual way like one would communicate with a computer is not acceptable for the respondents of this survey.

It is also interesting that the results are fairly conclusive and there seems no variation between work groups and the different companies etc. surveyed. There is again a universal result, essentially a mail should be polite and factual should it wish to be seen as positive.

## DISCUSSION

The data gathered for this research has been for the purpose of objective observation. The design of the questions were constructed to elicit an as objective as possible response and encourage the participant to have the opportunity to be broad and open in their responses in order to ensure that an optimal sentiment was gathered from the topic.

The result of this has been a significant response in the amount and nature of data for analysis. The first stage in the analysis has been to as fairly as possible group and cut the data into segments that help group and clarify the responses. The first level of analysis being to classify the responses into areas where favorable and positive feedback has been highlighted about the email medium and the second group has been to classify those responses which have highlighted where the respondent has felt that the email communication has fell short of their requirements or aspirations in respect to the readers understanding of the purpose of the mail.

We also are aware that different management styles and cultures within organizations and even within work teams can skew the data and will all have an impact; likewise different roles can have different requirements from email. For example one work group or section may rely on email as an operational tool to communicate factual booking information to instigate a process or activity. Other sections may rely on mails for providing work instructions or as a medium to primarily gather information.

This I feel is useful background information and important to be aware of when understanding and discussing the results and findings.

Jackson, Burgess & Edwards (2006) used so-called “back to basics” approach in order to identify the main problems of whether the:

- Emails were necessary
- Well targeted
- The subject line was effectively used
- The message got across
- Attachment were properly managed

(Jackson, Burgess & Edwards 2006)

When examining Vollmer and Gassner (2005) research that targeted the following areas for improvement: 1) Emails with no clear purpose, 2) Incomplete emails, 3) Emails with no clear interpretation of urgency or importance (Vollmer & Gassner 2005) we can confirm that the potential problematic factors presented by Jackson, Burgess and Edwards (2006) and Vollmer and Gassner (2005) appeared to be valid when examining the email communication channel use at work.

Feedback received from the respondents showed that the content of the emails and the style of the communication used in respect to manners, clarity and politeness is of significant importance when evaluating the channels effectiveness.

Additionally, from the data gathered we can see strong evidence to support the previously presented research and findings and can match these observations clearly with the data gathered in this current research - comments such as:

- *“No introduction, no structure, abbreviated words, no proper ending”*
- *“Bad layout”*
- *“Bad formatting of email and structure”*
- *“Confused and dizzy”*
- *“Unnecessary and can be confusing because they are sending info that is stated in SAP duplicate email”.*
- *“This mail is very unclear”.*
- *“More information needed and explanation here as well”.*

Interesting to note that in contrast to the comments presented, generally, the format and layout and any other factor scored relatively lower than politeness, it seems from this that this criteria is valued higher by respondents than the technical aspects of the email, which is interesting observation. This observation confirms that the respondents as the active email users are able to replace the missing non-verbal cues with the verbal ones, as Walther (1992) claimed, and still understand the meaning of the social aspect of the email i.e. the politeness or rudeness of it (Walther 1992).

An observation from the emails and findings, not covered extensively in a lot of the research examined here, is the very prevalent scenario regarding emails that are perceived as negative

or not constructive due to the attitude and rudeness by the inferred manner which has been conveyed in the email.

It was a surprise finding the extent to which the potential of the email in the course of normal everyday work place communication to antagonize the reader and create a negative feeling.

This may be due to the nature of the email, being an impersonal one-way communication. Which during the composition of writing is not subject to any interjection or censure from the other party, unlike face-to-face dialogue where the listener can quickly check one sentence word or phrase, this is not possible in the email. Likewise the absence of face-to-face interaction enables the communicator to be more candid with emotion and feeling.

Additionally when a person communicating does not have visual contact with the other party and has no direct physical or emotional contact there is less need of potential consciousness in writing.

A factor described as dissociation by psychologist John Suler (1996) who states a sentiment that follows the following thought:

*“When people have the opportunity to separate their actions from their real world (i.e. in cyber world) and identity, they feel less vulnerable about opening up. Whatever they say or do can't be directly linked to the rest of their lives. They don't have to own their behavior by acknowledging it within the full context of who they "really" are. When acting out hostile feelings, the person doesn't have to take responsibility for those actions. In fact, people might even convince themselves that those behaviors "aren't met at all” (Suler 1996).*

One can't be physically seen on the electronic communication mediums, typically – therefore, the need to concern oneself with appearance and tone of voice is dramatically lowered and at times absent (Suler 1996).

Kali Munro (2002), an online psychotherapist, aptly describes it, the person may be participating in an "emotional hit and run" (Munro 2002).

It was a surprise during the research to learn of the extent of this problem within email, whilst it is a recognized issue in other electronic mediums such as online gaming and anonyms chat



sites, the prevalence and extent to which it exhibited itself in email was very notable and significant. It was from the feedback and survey the largest of all complaints and a disproportionately larger number of these issues were raised by the target group surveyed (Munro 2002).

Although the survey did not include any research into the voice or face to face communication to counter and act as a comparative bench mark to assess the impact/significance of this issue on this one communication (Suler 1996).

*“In email, communication is asynchronous. People don't interact with each other in real time. Others may take minutes, hours, days, or even months to reply to something you say. Not having to deal with someone's immediate reaction can be disinhibiting”* - John Suler (Suler 1996).

The above is another standpoint that can contribute to this behavior. From the research conducted the overwhelming greatest reason for what participants considered bad emails was manners and etiquette and rudeness, the use of punctuation to add strength to the email and the lack of any polite introduction or appropriate ending.

After looking through the responses received both on positive and negative emails we can notice that respondents did not comment on the lack of nonverbal cues. Additionally we can see that verbal ones in addition to formatting successfully replaced the nonverbal cues. Quite a few respondents pointed out that the emails had a rude character, which is very interesting as the character was defined by just reading the email and looking at the formatting style. Majority of the respondents was aware of the so-called emailing “code” i.e. that the capitalized bold letters represent demands or raised voice etc. It is very interesting observation as the literature examined previously supports this findings (Walther 1992).

Additionally we could notice that the feedback sharing via email at work is a very common procedure. In the case of positive feedback respondents felt happy with having it transferred via email however we could see that the negative feedback transmitted via email caused quite a few negative reactions and comments. The previously presented research is supported in the results as we can see the correlation with the feedback shared via email compared to the feedback shared via face-to-face channel, it is obviously clear that in some cases email can be

successfully used as a feedback transmitter and in some cases it should be combined with other channels as face to face (Sproull & Sussman, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

### Concluding Remarks

The main aim of the current paper has been to examine the email channel used within peoples work place and concerned formal, work-related email, in order to gain clearer perspective on the following questions:

- What is the general view of the employees on the Email communication channel at work and channels effectiveness?
- What are considered to be the role-model practices in writing a work-related email if there are such?
- What elements or characteristics of the emails at work are perceived to be negative should be avoided?

The general view of the employees on the email as the communication channel at work and its effectiveness (i.e. the ability to achieve the set objectives of the sender and ensure the desired outcome by providing a useful platform for communication at work) resulted in the conclusive remarks such as being a very effective communication channel but not exactly same as face-to-face, considered to be the quickest and the most efficient method of the information sharing that allows to keep the formal record on what has been said and done. In addition to that it was pointed out that email provides a great chance to share information in-between numerous people simultaneously despite of their location or time zone.

Despite some opportunities for misinterpretation it was generally considered to be a high information sharing channel which allows us to confirm the relation to the Media Richness Theory which was evaluated by Markus based on the factor of the channels speed and efficiency it can nowadays be placed in-between the telephone and non-electronic communication in the MRT factors. (Markus 1994)

The role-model practices in writing a work-related email can be concluded as following:

- Email should be factual
- Polite
- Have proper opening and closing
- Neatness in format and not too long text
- Should include the contact details of the sender
- Generally respectful attitude and gratefulness is desired

The characteristics and the attributes, which are perceived to be negative and should be avoided in the work related emails, can be concluded as follows:

- Rudeness and demands
- Too many emoticons, capitalizing and exclamation marks
- Incomplete information
- Unclear problem statements
- Too many recipients included in one email
- Bad spelling
- Impersonality

To conclude, taking into consideration all the results concluded from the data-collection this study has laid the foundation for the future research and development of the work-related email guidelines and practices which could be used in the organizations in order to ease the communication and make it even more efficient.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The future research suggestions based on this study can be proposed to be focusing more in detail on the email writing practices. The area of interest chosen in the current study was quite broad which provides a positive platform for more detailed studies e.g. linguistic aspects of the email writing as per say.

In addition the more in-depth research can be conducted within one specific organization in order to compare the different sections of it e.g. an international organization where the

different offices are located in the different countries and evaluate the results on respondents from different cultures and from different backgrounds.

The opportunity also exists to extend the scope of surveys and have a much larger data set. Future research focusing on the cross cultural and national communication by email provides a great opportunity to gain a valid understanding of the email writing practices and explore the possibilities for improvements.

It is precieved that the amount of research and investigation into this channel is still relatively immature compared to studies in other areas. The greater the understanding of communication, the greater the ability to improve relations between people of different cultures and backgrounds, facilitate the resolution of political conflicts and enhance our humanity as a species to ensure that we can realize the full potentials of each other and encourage our development and progress.

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## Appendix

### Questions of the interview

#### Introduction:

*Today we are going to talk about the work emails and their impact on your working day. We will start with the section about you and your general use of email. Then we will move on to discussion about emails in general and your perception about email communication. In the end section we will discuss the specific examples of the emails that you have selected.*

*To begin with I would like to ask you to select a pseudonym that we are going to use during the discussion in order to keep the anonymity.*

1. What is your:

Age .....

Gender.....

Education level.....

2. What is your role in the company?

3. How long have you been in your current role?

4. Are you a frequent email user?

5. Do you use the email communication channel both at work and privately?

6. What is your general view on email as the communication channel at work?

7. Whom do you mostly communicate with using the email channel?

8. Whom do you communicate least with using the email channel?

9. What percentage of the working day (i.e. 8h on average) do you spent on working with emails?

10. Where/how do you mostly check your work emails? (Outlook on PC, Smartphone etc.)

11. On average, how many work related emails do you get per day?

< 10	<input type="checkbox"/>
10-20	<input type="checkbox"/>
20-40	<input type="checkbox"/>
40-60	<input type="checkbox"/>
> 60	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. What is the character of the emails received (i.e. guidelines, requests etc.)?
13. Do you reply to emails you receive?
14. Which emails do you reply to?
15. Which emails you choose not to reply to?
16. Do you usually reply at once or take some time before replying?
17. How do you prioritize incoming emails (which ones should be answered first etc.)?
18. Is there anything in specific that triggers you not to reply to an email (e.g. formulation, language, style, format etc.)?
19. How long does it on average take you to replay to an email (counting in the time you spent on reading it)? How many minutes?
20. Can you think about an email that took you longest to answer? What kind of character did it have?
21. Do you generally save or delete the incoming emails?
22. What do you feel about the timing of the emails? Do you ever feel that there is a pressure created depending on the time of the day the email is received?

*Now we are going to focus on the email's attributes:*

23. How would a perfectly written email look like? What attributes would it have to include? (Context, message, manner of writing, formatting etc.)?

*Probing on following elements:*

*Subject*

*Greetings*

*Introduction*

*Presentation of the issue*

*Length*

*Signature*

*Attachment*

*Font/Formatting*



24. How influential is each of these factors in the work-related email?

Attribute	Rate 1 to 5 (1 being completely uninfluential, 5 being highly influential)
Context and message	
Format	
Layout	
Politeness	
Other (specify).....	

25. What are the main negative attributes of the emails received at work?  
*Please describe in general the negative attributes of the emails you receive at work.*

26. What are the main positive attributes of the emails received at work?  
*Please describe in general the positive attributes of the emails you receive at work.*

27. In general, if you had to give the email as an internal communication channel a rating on the scale from 1 to 5 (1 being completely inefficient, 5 being highly efficient) what would it be? Why?

28. What would you say are the main negatives of the email as an internal communication channel?

29. What would you say are the main positives of the email as an internal communication channel?

*Now we are going to move on to discussion about the emails that you brought with you:*

Empirical examples discussion part:

*(Discussion on the selected emails, one by one)  
 I would like to ask you to focus on the email that you selected:*

1. Why did you select this email?
2. How does it make you feel?
3. What do you think is the most negative about it?
4. Does this email have any positive sides?
5. How do you feel about the use of formatting in this email (punctuation, font, ev. Emoticons etc.)?

6. Do you feel that the information received here is valuable?
7. Do you feel that this email has transmitted the factual information or do you think it is blurred by emotions?
8. What are your thoughts about the length of this email?
9. What would you have changed in this specific email in order to improve it?

\*In addition question depending on the story flow of the respondent, regarding the context, formatting etc.