

Media Release



NOVOTEL SYDNEY MANLY PACIFIC

25-28 JUNE 2009

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Unprofessional emails causing workplace stress

Poor quality emails are causing almost as much stress in the workplace as the number received, a psychological study has revealed.

According to the study of 218 staff from the University of Queensland, respondents found interpreting ambiguous emails can be just as stressful as receiving large volumes of messages.

“Complex and emotionally-driven emails may complicate the message and allow room for misinterpretation,” said study author and provisional psychologist, Rowena Brown. Ms Brown will present her PhD findings at the Australian Psychological Society’s (APS) 8th Industrial & Organisational Psychology (IOP) Conference at the Novotel Sydney Manly Pacific from 25 to 28 June.

“Our study found poorly crafted and complex emails can contribute to work-related stress, such as feeling overloaded as well as impacting on job satisfaction and working relationships.”

“Employees reported that poorly written emails can also create confusion and disagreements over work-related activities and responsibilities. Feeling stressed, overwhelmed and emotionally exhausted are other common strains caused by emails.”

“Interestingly, the study found that large numbers of emails also increased job satisfaction. This may suggest that receiving workplace emails enables users to feel connected and important within their work environment.”

“Email is a double-edged sword. We know that email can help employees to feel engaged with and connected to their work colleagues, however the impact of a poor quality email, combined with the expectation to respond immediately, can create unnecessary stress,” she said.

“Our research raises important issues for employers, who have a responsibility to train their staff in appropriate email etiquette,” said Ms Brown.

Tips to improve email etiquette and efficiency in the workplace:

1. Keep language professional and concise.
2. Provide a clear outline of the expected response.
3. Ensure, where possible, a timeframe for action or response is included.
4. When constructing emails be mindful of how the message could be interpreted by the receiver.
5. Consider if whether there is a better way to communicate (e.g. face-to-face) especially if work tasks are highly complex.

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About the study: Ms Brown surveyed 218 employees from the University of Queensland. On average participants sent and received 30 emails per day, in addition to spam mail. Future research will examine how emails contribute to conflict in the workplace.

About the IOP Conference: The eighth biennial IOP Conference will explore contemporary issues in workplace psychology such as employee engagement, work/life balance and the impacts of new media. Keynote speakers include: *Professors Beryl Hesketh, Deniz Ones, Eduardo Salas, Sabine Sonnentag, Phillip Taylor and Robert Wood.*

Ms Brown is available for interview during the week of the conference. Please contact Elaine Grant on: 0412 683 068 or Ellise McLoughlan on 0428 445 097.

