

Electronic Communication: Creating a Policy

You are part of a three-person committee made up of the head of IT, the head of Human Resources and the head of Communication. You have been asked by the CEO to devise a policy for the use of email, instant messaging and the Web. The CEO has received complaints about the number of emails people receive, about their relevance, about the tone of some emails, about the time people are spending on the Web, and other issues. The CEO has asked you to meet and draft a policy that will cover these problems.

Specifically, you should address:

The employees' use of all-employee e-mails to find lost packages, lost personal items and the like.

Managers' use of all-employee e-mails to publicize the successful work of their groups.

Regional offices use of all-employee e-mails for matters specific to the region.

The home office use of all-employee e-mails for things specific to the home office location (e.g., Patriot's Day Holiday, which is only a holiday in Boston).

Employees' use of e-mails to solicit contributions to charitable causes.

Employees' use of the Web for non-business related activities.

(NOTE: The company has the capability to monitor employees and determine what Web sites each employee is visiting.)

Employees' ever growing files of e-mails, which require greater and greater storage capacity.

Complaints of sexual harassment via e-mail, mostly in the form of off-color humor and cartoons.

Employees' complaints of being "flamed" by other employees.

Managers' complaints that employees have been discovered using online gambling sites.

IT complaints that the number of all-employee e-mails puts a strain on the system.

Managers' complaints the employees are spending too much time doing instant messaging (they have doubts that all of it is business related).

Your policy must be written in the context of a company that values the good will of its employees, and which acknowledges the tremendous productivity gains electronic communication has brought. This policy should limit the range and extent of electronic communication, but retain all the benefits it has brought.

Procedure:

Form teams of three, with one person acting as head of IT, another as head of HR, and the other as head of Communication. Note that each of these people has an interest in certain aspects of the electronic mail capability.

IT—wants to cut down the volume, but demands it retains its right to use all-employee e-mail to send system messages (servers down, tutorials available, etc.)

HR—wants to make sure HR (and ONLY HR) notifies employees about benefits, holidays and volunteer opportunities/charitable works.

Communication—demands it retains its right to send memos directly from the CEO, and communications the CEO has approved of.

Be ready to have one spokesperson give an overview of the policy you have devised.

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15.279 Management Communication for Undergraduates
Fall 2012

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