

# HR PRACTICAL INFORMATION

## Best Practices for Email

Speed of exchanges and decision-making, freedom from spatial and temporal barriers, traceability and follow-up of messages, information dissemination, etc. E-mail has rapidly emerged as today's most widely used business tool and is probably the largest contributor to change in the way we work.

Sadly, however, misuse of e-mail can have harmful consequences: stress, overwork, pressure, interruption, depersonalization of the relationship .... All these consequences merit reflection on best practices to be applied concerning the use of e-mail within the institution.

### **THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECTION**

The right to disconnection which recently came into force under the Labor Act (see our Newsletter of January 2017) was born of the observation that digital technology leads to a quasi-permanent connection for employees and particularly managers, implying constant availability and eliminating the traditional perception of workplace and working hours.

Nowadays, managers and co-workers are permanently connected, and not replying to this or that e-mail is tantamount to taking the risk of not being involved in the discussion or in the decision. These time-consuming new technologies often imply an overload of work, resulting in mental and physical fatigue and heavy stress due to too much information to be processed.

In the space of only a few years, the basic rules of courtesy have also broken down. Mobile phones give us license to solicit people at any time and demand an almost immediate return.

In practice, labor law does not lay down any standards. It does not, for example, require disconnection of mail servers at 10:00 pm, but it imposes new obligations on companies, particularly self-regulation.

More and more companies are implementing codes of conduct such as no sending of emails during the weekend or after a certain hour during the week.

## TOO MANY E-MAILS KILL E-MAILS!

The steady increase in the volume of e-mails has logically led to an equivalent increase in the time spent processing them, taking up significant proportions of total work time.

Employees receive an average of 88 e-mails per day, and send 34 (Radicati, March 2015). Managers estimate that they spend over 5 hours a day processing their messages (Adobe study, August 2015).

The volume of messages has a perverse effect on employees. 43% of French employees are interrupted at least every 10 minutes, and 31% admit that this distracts them from their work (Créfac).

Already in 2010, 72% of Americans regularly consulted their professional e-mails outside of working hours (Xobni).

## BEST PRACTICES FOR THE USE OF E-MAIL

### *Is e-mail always the best way to communicate?*

E-mail is perfectly appropriate to communicate or solicit information, to send requests or notifications quickly, to confirm an agreement, to avoid disturbing someone, to leave a written trace which can act as a legal proof. However, it must be handled with caution when transmitting "emotionally charged" information (redefinition, admonition ...). In this case, a face-to-face meeting is preferable.

### *Give an explicit subject to your message*

Avoid generic subjects such as "Information" or "Urgent" but use keywords that reflect the content of the message. Be wary also of subjects which correspond to a previous exchange, reused by simply pressing the "transfer" or "answer" buttons.

Change the title of the e-mail as soon as its content changes.

### *Write a brief and open text*

Your message must be clear and concise. Each line must be useful. To do this, ask yourself: Is this essential? What do I really mean?

As a general rule, do not exceed one screen. Be neutral, factual and explicit. For ease of reading, highlight the key elements in bold.

Only deal with one topic per e-mail. If you want to deal with two separate topics, write

When you initiate a long e-mail, summarize the content before going into detail. In this case, it is also preferable to change the title. For example: Subject Y: Situation on 10 March 2017.

Make clear what you want from the recipient, specifying the deadline and constraints if you have any.

Be courteous, and if you use humor or irony flag it with a smiley symbol :-)

***Define the recipient(s) and the person(s) copied on the message.***

The "to" is the primary recipient of the message. As a general rule, put only one correspondent.

The person in copy ("cc") receives the message for information; no action is expected from him/her.

Hidden copies ("bcc") allow a person to be copied without the other recipients of the message being informed.

Use hidden copies with caution. Do not forget that the recipient can transfer them or "reply to all".

***Transferring a message***

If it is very long, summarize an exchange of e-mails transferred to avoid having too many pages to be read by your interlocutors.

Pay attention to the confidentiality of the information contained in transferred messages. Messages at the bottom of the exchange may not be relevant to the person to whom you are forwarding the e-mail.

***Replying to a message***

Consider the response time. Avoid sending an urgent e-mail on Friday night at 10:00 pm.

If you do not have the information required, indicate that you do not have the information but you plan to have it for a given date or that you need to contact a given person.

If you are not the person concerned, do not ignore the message but direct your correspondent to the right person or tell them that you are not the right person.

If your e-mail follows an exchange, reply leaving the previous exchanges in order to remind the recipient of the context. When you are copied on an e-mail, only respond if you have real added value to bring.

### ***Reply to all***

Do not overuse "Reply to all" just to say "Thank you" or "I will not be able to attend the meeting". Answer only the sender.

### ***Re-read your message before sending***

If your message is understandable at first reading, it is more likely to be dealt with quickly.

Allow yourself time for reflection even if your recipient asks you for an immediate response. Do not forget that a message formalizes a commitment which you, your colleagues or the institution are obliged to respect.

### ***Consulting and processing e-mails***

Define periods during which you will process your messages, three to five per day seems to be a good compromise. To help you, you can disable e-mail alerts.

Perform an action for each e-mail viewed. A good for example is "4D": Do, Delete, Defer, Delegate.

Use automatic filing rules to help you process your e-mails, e.g, make directories with e-mails sent directly, in a copy, coming from your supervisor, or thematic files...

## **THE 12 KEY POINTS TO RETAIN FOR EASY USE OF EMAIL**

### **Facilitating processing of emails for the recipients**

1. To facilitate processing of e-mails by the recipients, keep in mind:  
Recipient = for action, Cc = for information, Reply to all = not systematic
2. Facilitate reading of your e-mails: explicit title, short and clear message, synthesis of long emails retransmitted.
3. Be precise, concise (wording, degree of urgency, reasonable response time).
4. Make moderate use of color, highlighting, punctuation, abbreviations...

**Remember that an e-mail is useful in the following cases:**

5. Rapid transmission of information to multiple recipients
6. Sending an attachment
7. Retention of data or document

**Be aware that an e-mail is transmitted to the addressees concerned**

8. Limit the number of recipients and the number of copies
9. Use general mailing lists wisely
10. Except in special cases, make sure to reply only to the sender of the initial mail and not to the entire copy mailing list.

**Send your e-mail during working periods and working hours**

11. Whenever possible, send your message during the working hours of the recipients

**Tell your interlocuteurs when you are absent**

12. Make systematic use of automatic messaging to inform your correspondents when you are not available, and indicate the name of a person who can respond or refer the question in your absence

Do you have questions, suggestions, comments? Do not hesitate to contact Human Resources.