

Sjöqvist Eva (2005). *Email in an organizational context – implications for when to use and not to use email*, (lic.thesis, in Swedish), Stockholm University/KTH Technical Institute.

## **Abstract**

Because of its ubiquity and ease-of-use, e-mail is now used for intra- and inter-organizational communication by all types of businesses and not-for-profits. Although there are many problems with e-mail, such as spam, viruses, and information overload, e-mail is taken for granted. In spite of the fact that a whole new generation of collaborative tools is now available, users still rely mainly on e-mail for day-to-day communication (Heide, 2002). In fact, people working together choose e-mail as a tool more than 9 times out of 10 (Levitt & Mahovald, 2002). It is therefore more vital than ever to address problems e-mail may cause in the workplace.

The e-mail system as a tool for communication has a lot of advantages, but some of these advantages may turn into disadvantages in specific situations. The simplicity and rapidity of using e-mail, for example, may constitute too low an obstacle; messages may be sent that ought to be distributed through another medium or that should not be sent at all.

The purposes of this study were to identify the role of e-mail from an intra-organizational perspective and try to find out when e-mail is inappropriate to use. The goal was to give some recommendations to consider when using e-mail as a working tool. This paper proceeds from computer-mediated communication (Sroull & Kiesler, 1995), through communication theory (Burgoon et al, 1994), to how emotions are communicated in e-mail (Burleson & Planalp, 2000), culminating finally in a case study. The basic research question was, what role does e-mail play in intra-organizational communication and when is it inappropriate to use e-mail?

To sum up the results, it is inappropriate to use e-mail when critical issues such as a person's integrity or continued employment are concerned. To be able to understand this, it is important to have a feeling or knowledge about how people in general are likely to react to a given e-mail message, and specifically, how it will affect the employees in a particular organization. To gain this understanding, the processes of feedback and feedforward are important. An internal discussion of ethical issues may develop a common understanding about the limitations of e-mail. Having this knowledge makes it easier for managers to form appropriate strategies for communicating specific types of information.