

Technology Tipping Point: How to Prevent Electronic Communication from Inhibiting Employees' Productivity and Communication

Categories : [EMPLOYER HOT TOPICS](#)

Date : March 7, 2011

From cloud computing to texting, voicemail to social media, technology has vastly improved our business communications – right?

Maybe, maybe not. Electronic communication is certainly intended to yield tangible benefits (such as cost savings, shortened response times and simultaneous connection to multiple parties). However, a lack of coordination and failure to critically examine how technology is applied may actually *inhibit* your employees' communication and productivity.

Here are two of the biggest culprits:

E-mail, texting and instant messaging. Designed to improve communication by facilitating quick response, these tools frequently interrupt, and can often overwhelm, workers with an avalanche of indigestible messages that are too long, too frequent or just plain irrelevant. Furthermore, in an attempt to be brief, senders and recipients may exclude necessary information or clarification. The result is a string of e-mails, IMs or texts that can take five or ten minutes to complete, when an actual conversation would have only taken two.

Social media. A recent [Talent Management article](#) cited a 2009 survey of 1,460 office workers, in which respondents reported spending 40 minutes per week during work on sites like Twitter, Facebook and MySpace for personal reasons. Admittedly, social media are valuable tools for recruiting, branding and developing client relationships. But any way you slice it, 40 minutes x (insert your number of employees) = huge productivity losses for your organization.

Snelling is mainly not proposing a ban on these technologies – used properly, they’re an indispensable part of how we do business today. Instead, I’d like to suggest a few simple steps you can take to ensure your communications contribute to productivity, efficiency and performance:

Start at the top. Take a step back and look at your communications “big picture.” Ask yourself: What are my company’s critical success factors? What types of communication will drive this success? Then, determine the most appropriate vehicles to share various types of information by considering:

- The purpose of information sharing;
- What you want employees to do with information (e.g., read it, share it, act on it) when they receive it;
- Who needs the information;
- The most expedient way to provide the information;
- Time constraints (i.e., how quickly the information needs to be shared);
- Whether or not a simple phone or in-person conversation would be the best way to communicate.

Balance the need for engagement with the need for productivity. Companies that encourage employees to e-mail, as opposed to speak with, the person in the next cubicle run the risk of developing a culture of disconnection. Talk to your staff. Find out how they communicate best with one another (i.e., when it’s best to talk face-to-face; when e-mail or IM works better). Create guidelines that strike the right balance between human and electronic communication for your organization.

Train employees on the communications tools you use. Most employers provide employees with a basic overview of the technology they use. To improve productivity, take basic training one step further. For example, if they regularly send e-mails to the same groups of people, spend a few minutes teaching employees how to create key contact groups. This simple process makes sending e-mails to multiple recipients much more efficient and ensures nobody is left out-of-the-loop.

Develop a clear social media policy. By anticipating the risks of employees’ social media use and crafting an appropriate policy, you can make it clear to employees what is acceptable and what is not. Beyond limiting productivity losses due to personal use, a written policy will also protect your organization from legal exposure.

Remember the power of personal connection. No matter how much technology your business uses, interpersonal skills remain essential. Use face-to-face communication when it makes sense to strengthen a sense of belonging, encourage creativity and encourage participants to be “in the moment” with their full attention.

At [Snelling Staffing Services](http://www.snelling.com), we strive to balance state-of-the-art technology with a personal approach to communicate effectively with clients, internal employees and candidates alike. How does your company use electronic communication effectively? Please leave your comments below.