

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

Changing communication styles

I was a little taken aback this week when I learnt that one of our clients' IT systems processes emails an HOUR!

As more and more of us move towards communicating using intranet, email, Internet and SMS, it is likely that the whole way business is done and relationships built, will change. Whereas in the past, business deals were reliant on post or even (in the not so distant past) fax, now even signed documents can be sent by email; and emails sent to mobiles.

Recent research has shown that in America 84% of all workers rely on email on a daily basis for their business communication. Furthermore, the number of emails sent increases by 50% annually, in most large organization in Kenya; the figures cannot be much different.

This means that the competencies required as a senior manager might well change. The obvious area that will be impacted on is IT skills. All managers, no matter their level, will be reliant on feeling very comfortable in front of their laptops. Gone are the days when a Managing Director would get his secretary to download his email, print it so that he could read it before dictating a response for her to email back! One of our newest and most popular assessment tools is the computer based "INBOX" exercise where candidates are given one and a half hours to read to, respond, delegate, prioritize emails in an Inbox. The exercise content is level function and can be industry specific so as not to remove candidates from their comfort zones, but their confidence to communicate this way will be tested, as well as other key management competencies.

The fact that many managers spend hours each day on email, though, has changed business relationships considerably. Often organizations do not even meet their clients anymore, communicating purely through phone calls or emails. Even internally, managers in large organizations are relying on intranet to communicate with subordinates, lateral contacts and supervisors. This development removes a personal touch. We have all heard the horror stories about organizations in the west alerting staff of lay-offs via SMS. Not meeting face to face allows organizations to pass on bad news easier (how can you argue over SMS?) but is it human?

Long-term it may mean companies focus on hiring different competencies or skills. Oral communication skills will not be as important as written communication skills for instance. Listening skills may become less important than how fast you can type! Interpersonal sensitivity, which is clearly shown when people are interacting directly, may also suffer, with the new way of communicating focusing more on speed and flexibility rather than being an 'old-fashioned' people's person.

We hope this means the whole world of business is becoming more efficient which is true in that speed is certainly faster, but meetings might be a better way for teams to reach quick consensus, and certainly loyalty in business still getting to know the individual concerned – as people- not just storing their email addresses on our computers!

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