

Study shows employees become angry when receiving after-hours email, texts

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People who receive electronic correspondence from work after hours become angry more often than not and that can interfere with their personal lives, a new study from a management researcher at The University of Texas at Arlington shows.

Marcus Butts, UT Arlington associate professor in the College of Business' Department of Management, is lead author on a study recently published in the *Academy of Management Journal*. William Becker, TCU assistant professor of management, and Wendy Boswell, management professor at Texas A&M University, joined Butts in the study titled, "Hot Buttons and Time Sinks: The Effects of Electronic Communication during Nonwork Time on Emotions and Work-Nonwork Conflict.

The researchers surveyed 341 working adults over a seven-day period to track their feelings when they opened a work email away from the office. The three authors used Facebook, Linked In and Twitter contacts to build their sample pool.

"People who were part of the study reported they became angry when they received a work email or text after they had gone home and that communication was negatively worded or required a lot of the person's time," Butts said. "Also, the people who tried to separate work from their personal life experienced more work-life interference. The after-hours emails really affected those workers' personal lives."

Overall, Butts said two major categories of workers were identified: the segmentors and the integrators.

He said the segmentors wanted to keep their personal and work lives separate. Not surprisingly, that was the category of participant who was most negatively impacted when facing after business hours communications.

Butts said the integrators were the participants who wanted to know what was going on at work when they received an email or text. They got angry as well when receiving communications but it didn't interfere with their personal lives.

Rachel Croson, dean of the College of Business, said Butts' study is important because [electronic communications](#) have become a fabric of everyone's life.

"Smartphones and the accompanying culture of 'always on' has made after-hours communication ubiquitous," Croson said. "But, like everything else in business, it can be done well or badly, and implementation is critical for success. This study informs leaders not just whether and when, but also how to communicate with employees."

Some of the recommendations the study makes include training for what to say and what not to say in an email or text, setting boundaries for when to send electronic correspondence, guidelines for proper communication style and topics best discussed face-to-face rather than electronically.

"This is the new world of work communication, and these recommendations might work in one department of a company but not in another area of the business," Butts said. "The key is to develop your own appropriate communications rhythm within your department."

Butts said one of the most surprising findings of the study was that people who received positive electronic communications after hours were happy. However, those "good vibes" weren't long lasting, Butts said.

Butts said his wife, Erin, initially got him interested in the subject of electronic communications from work after hours. She works for a company that at times uses after-hours emails and texts.

"I just saw how her after hours communications often impacted our personal life for better or worse, and thought maybe other people have similar experiences," Butts said.

More information: m.amj.aom.org/content/early/2014.0170.abstract

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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