

Emails and texts in lieu of conversation could negatively affect performance on higher-level job tasks

April 5 2022, by Cynthia Corzo



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Is your day a nonstop cycle of email, instant messaging and other text-based communication? New research from FIU Business shows that if

you're looking to stay sharp throughout the day, you might want to take your fingers off the keyboard for a bit.

The research finds that excessive use of text-based [communication](#)—including [email](#) and [instant messaging](#)—for complex tasks, such as negotiating, [decision-making](#) or [problem-solving](#), can lower a person's interest and performance in work started after the conversation is finished.

"Negotiating or working together to solve a problem is more difficult over email or instant messenger than working in person because text-based communication limits visual, vocal and [nonverbal cues](#)," said Ravi Gajendran, the FIU Business associate professor of global leadership and management who conducted the research. "The absence of these cues means that text-based communication takes longer and requires more thought to arrive at a shared understanding. You have to think about what you're writing, to make sure it's not misinterpreted."

In the study, published in the March 2022 issue of *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, researchers conducted tests looking at the relationships between the communication type—electronic versus in-person—on motivation maintenance and performance on complex reasoning tasks, such as negotiating and coordinating.

In another test, pairs of participants had to interact via text or in-person to guide the other on putting a series of pictures in the correct order. After that, they had to read a media story and identify any errors that needed fixing. Those who used text-based communication missed more errors than participants who communicated in person, a 19% reduction in complex reasoning task performance relative to the average in-person communicator.

Another test measured motivation after participants spent 20 minutes on

a task that required pairs to communicate to assemble tangram puzzles and then answer six questions from the Cognitive Reflection Test. Text-based communicators chose the incorrect response more often on the post-study test than face-to-face participants, indicating lower motivation maintenance.

Gajendran explained that the tasks that can be affected by the overuse of email or instant messaging tools aren't routine processes; they require thinking and leading. These can include writing a report, solving a problem, creative thinking and exercising leadership.

"We want to make people better prepared and to keep in mind that using email for these is taxing. Knowing this, you can plan for a break, take a walk before starting a more challenging task," he added. "Top management can know the costs and determine what's better or worse."

More information: Ravi S. Gajendran et al, Hidden costs of text-based electronic communication on complex reasoning tasks: Motivation maintenance and impaired downstream performance, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2022.104130](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2022.104130)

Provided by Florida International University

Citation: Emails and texts in lieu of conversation could negatively affect performance on higher-level job tasks (2022, April 5) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-04-emails-texts-lieu-conversation-negatively.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.