

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

AND MORE MAIL ...

AND MORE MAIL ...

AND MORE MAIL ...

AND MORE MAIL ...



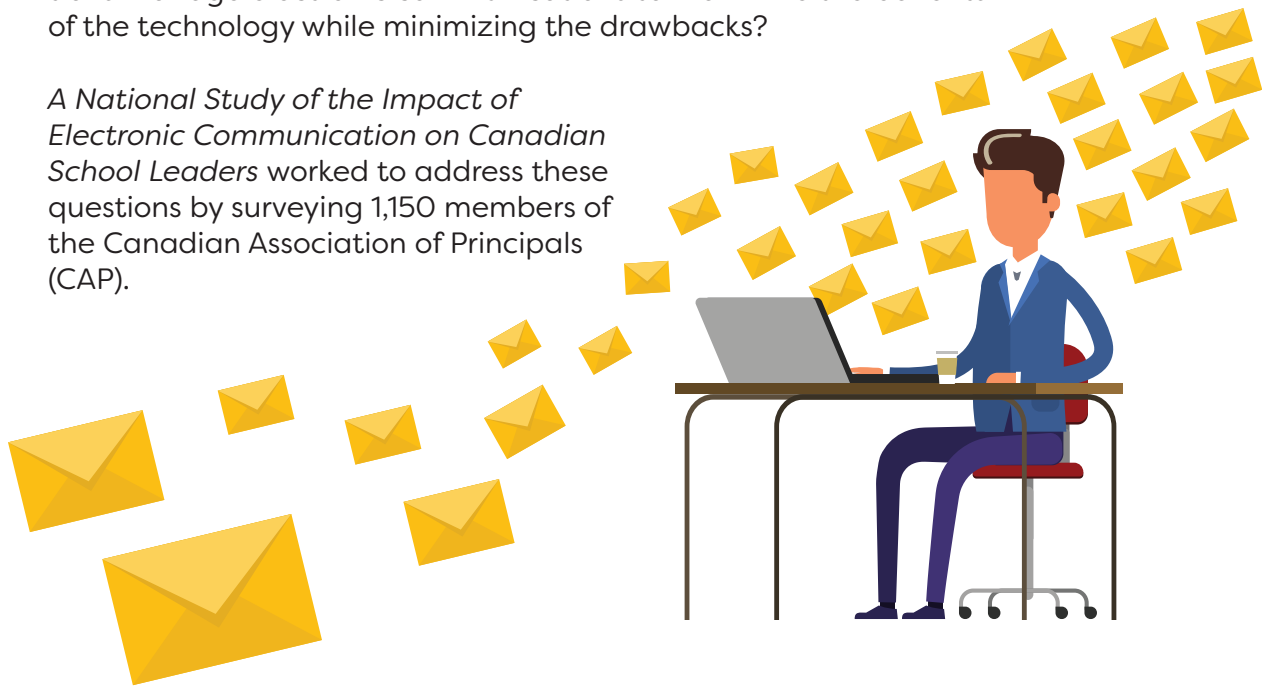
A National Study of the Impact of Electronic
Communication on Canadian School Leaders

How is the growth in electronic communications, such as e-mail, affecting the **work lives** of Canadian principals?

Some see e-mail as a work tool that can help them balance work and family, while others see it as a taskmaster that never sleeps.

But which is true? What is the link between the *volume* of e-mail and the *types* of e-mail a person processes per day and employee and organizational well-being? How can employees and organizations manage electronic communications to maximize the benefits of the technology while minimizing the drawbacks?

A National Study of the Impact of Electronic Communication on Canadian School Leaders worked to address these questions by surveying 1,150 members of the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP).

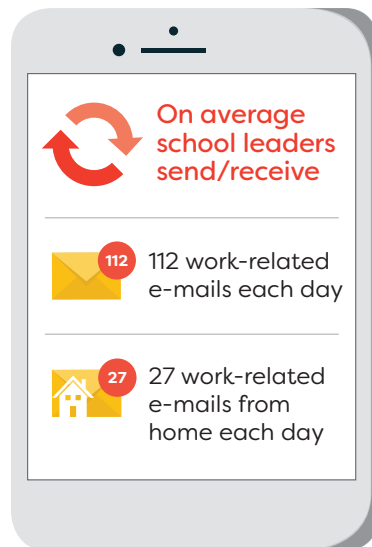


School leaders are part of a global phenomenon reflecting the growing expectation of being available **any time, anywhere, any place**, all amplified by use of electronic communications.

- *Hours* spent in e-mail per week is a stronger predictor of e-mail overload than the *number* of messages sent and received per week.
- Principals who spend 20 hours or more per week processing e-mails will likely experience high levels of e-mail overload.

“In 2015, the number of e-mails sent and received per day total over 205 billion. This figure is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 3% over the next four years, reaching over 246 billion by the end of 2019.”

(www.radicati.com)



In their 61-hour workweek, a typical Canadian school leader spends **17 hours** processing e-mail.



Inbox



Drafts



Sent



Trash



Junk



Reply



Meeting



11.2 hours at school

5.8 hours at home



0

4.25

8.5

12.75

17hrs

E-mail overload is a symptom of deeper cultural and technological shifts globally affecting the organizational life of schools, and is associated with work-role overload and work-related stress for Canadian school leaders.



92.5%

of respondents report high or moderate levels of **e-mail overload**



86%

of respondents report high or moderate levels of **work-role overload**



86.5%

of respondents report high or moderate levels of **job stress**



E-mail overload is a specific type of information overload—“a condition in which the volume of information exceeds a person’s capacity to process it.”¹

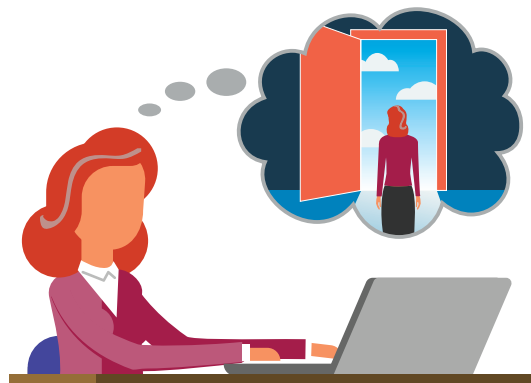
¹ Thomas, G F, C L King, B Baroni, L Cook, M Keitelman, S Miller and A Wardle. 2006. “Reconceptualizing E-Mail Overload.” *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 20, no 3: 252–287.

E-mail overload has **real implications** for school leaders, affecting their well-being and their ability to do their jobs.



ROLE OVERLOAD

- Higher levels of role overload have been found to be positively associated with negative consequences to the employee (declines in employee well-being) and the organization's effectiveness.
- The most important predictors of role overload were e-mail overload and role conflict.



TURNOVER INTENT + ABSENTEEISM

- Intent to turnover is fairly high for Canadian principals, with more than 20 per cent of the respondents indicating that they consider leaving their current school system or jurisdiction at least once per week.
- Absenteeism due to emotional and mental fatigue and ill health is common among school leaders.



By alleviating e-mail overload, school systems can begin to minimize role overload. This can lead to improved employee wellness, which may reduce stress, intent to turnover and absenteeism.

Taming the Tiger

With school leaders already facing heavy work demands, effective management of work-related e-mail is crucial for creating optimal conditions of work.

This is important to the school district's effectiveness, but it is even more essential with respect to fostering a positive school environment—school leaders transmit organizational culture.

But how can e-mail overload be managed?



AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

- **Manage** expectations (of self, colleagues, parents, the organization)
- Use the “Four Ds”:
 - Ditch** (if not important)
 - Deal** (in two minutes or less)
 - Delegate**
 - Decide** (to file until later if it needs more attention)



AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL



- **Reduce** the volume of e-mail that principals have to process in a given week through the use of appropriate policies, training and enforcement
- **Support** changes at the personal level by shifting the organizational culture



School and system cultures are nested within the broader social milieu shaping the ecology of e-mail use; consequently, change will require strong leadership and commitment from all levels of the organization. Managing expectations and norms at the individual and organizational levels is key.

This research initiative was undertaken by Linda Duxbury and André Lanctôt (both of Carleton University) in collaboration with the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Canadian Association of Principals. It is part of a larger study examining the critical influences shaping the work lives of school leaders.

The full report, *A National Study of the Impact of Electronic Communication on Canadian School Leaders*, is available on the ATA website at www.teachers.ab.ca. Click on **Publications> Education Research**. Ordering information for print copies is available under **Publications>Other Publications**.



The Alberta
Teachers' Association



Canadian Association
of Principals
association canadienne des directeurs d'école