

Addressing Email Complexities

By

Adopting Reliable Email Practices

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Assumptions

- Any email you create or receive in the conduct of your role for the organisation you work for, is potentially the business evidence (record) of that organisation.
- It is expected that your organisation will have system/s in which it directs you too capture those emails (business evidence/records).
- All know how to construct an email which is clear and concise, with very little chance of miscommunications occurring.
- That you all know **NOT** to create unnecessary emails that clog up people's inboxes.



Email Complexities

- Emails may have attachments or no attachments. If there is an attachment is the attachment or the email carrier, or both the business evidence of the organisation?
- Emails may have threads, strings or chains. A thread, string or chain, relates to the email message that started the thread plus any responses received to that message and possibly whether that message was forwarded to other addressees. Consider at what point in the thread you should capture the email into the organisation's system/s.
- An email thread may begin life about one subject but rapidly change to another topic without any notification made by the email sender.
- Emails therefore have the potential to be multiple conversations, about multiple subjects, with multiple senders/addressees.

Continued....



Email Complexities - Continued...

- Emails have electronic audit trails
- Emails can be forensically traced by ICT professionals and are therefore available for eDiscovery, even if you think they have been deleted.
- It is also very easy to accidentally delete an email
- Emails do sometimes get lost in the 'ether' due to network or internet failures which are outside of our control.



Adopting Reliable Email Practices

By adopting reliable email practices you will be able to:

- support your organisation to carry out its business operations
- reduce risks to the organisation, and
- protect yourself and the organisation.



The first reliable email practice that we must adopt is to immediately identify what is and what is not the business evidence of the organisation. You must be able to look at an email you receive or send and instantly know whether it is something that you need to capture into the organisation's system for recordkeeping or not.

Protect yourself and the organisation you are working for

- Consider whether :

- It is something clearly of value to the organisation and its business operations
- Poses an identified risk to the organisation
- Provides approval for an action
- Provides advice or gives direction
- Relates to something which needs a decision of further action

However, you also need to instantly know which emails do not need to be treated as the business evidence of the organisation, examples below:

- For information only and reference purposes
- Trivial emails, like room bookings et cetera
- Copies of information already captured in your organisation's system/s
- General notices to staff, and
- Personal or social messages
- So called junk/spam emails
- Or even something that could be business evidence but is of little or no value to the organisation and also will pose no risk to you or the organisation if you do not capture it into the required system/s?

Adopting Reliable Email Practices

Using Email Functionality

- Creating rules – **do so with caution**
- naming folders
- conflicting rules
- losing emails



Another email practice, relates to using the functionality available in email systems. Within Outlook you can do the following:

- You can sort and filter each piece of metadata/columns within outlook, ie by date, email address, subject, whether there is attachment et cetera.
- You can set up rules and to have pre identified emails go directly to a folder automatically.
- Rules can also be set up at the organisation wide level using some sort of standard naming terminology by which to title folders. Consider that what I call 'Spade' you call 'Shovel' and some one else may call 'Digging Implement' which is the term you will use.
- Rules can also be set up with files/folders which link directly with a system (such as an EDRMS or similar) , those folders can be set up at the organisational wide level or the individual level. Do not underestimate the complexities with setting up in/outboxes to link with systems. This can be fraught with pitfalls as well as benefits.

Consider that your email in/outboxes relate to you as the individual and when you leave the organisation, they are only available to very few people, therefore if you have not used some sort of standard naming terminology or the rules are not linked with a system then these emails can be lost for all time.

In addition, sometimes setting up conflicting rules can result in emails appearing to disappear and if you cannot remember how you have set up the email rules then that is where the conflicts occur.

Adopting Reliable Email Practices

Email Subject Lines, consider:

- language
- context, and
- finding emails in the future



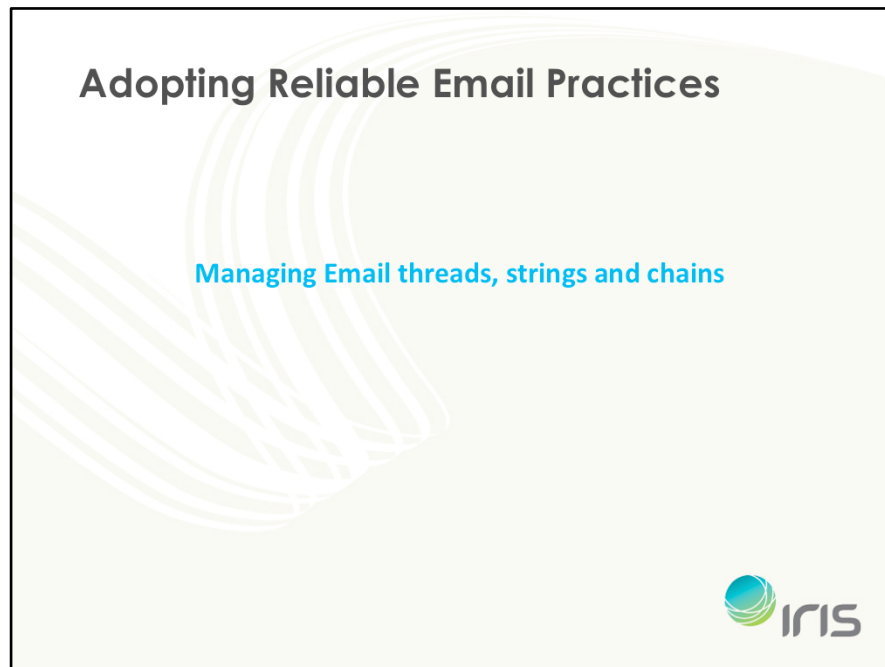
This next practice relates to Subject Lines. A subject line is really an Aide to Memory if used correctly.

Is it an **un**important email only required or useful for a short period of time or is it something that you or the organisation may need to look for in the future?

You need to consider the risks of the email not being available to you or the organisation in the future. However, consider that many emails do not fall into that category and also establishing a good subject line will help you discern that.

Please see **Handout 2** which is a table showing emails received by me in 2010 and then those received in 2022. I will talk through that table and highlight the problems.

Another point to consider, removing Re or FW when saving any email to a system. Leaving the Re and FW in at the subject line restricts any sorting and filtering you are able to do in a system, all you get is a long list all starting with Re or FW.



Create a brand-new email with a brand-new subject line when changing the subject/topic of an email.

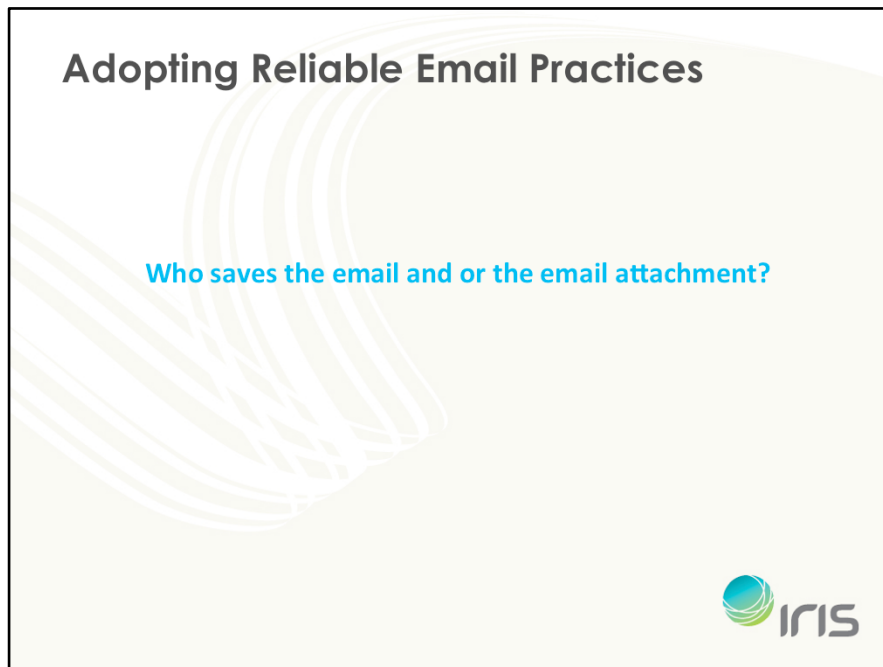
You can then make reference in the body of the email that you are changing the topic and why. The subject line is rarely big enough to put both topics within it.

This makes it easier for you to correctly save the email now and find it in the future, but more importantly it helps to inform everyone that you are changing the subject and why. Yes, you may receive two emails relating to two different threads now, but you will be able to clearly discover the subject of each email.

At what point do you save an email thread?

You try to save it at the end of the thread, when a conclusion has been arrived or a decision made, or the item has ceased to be topical.

This is linked with the previous slide about protecting you and the organisation and is very much a judgement call you will need to make.



The practice is, that if you are the initiator of the email then you should be the one who saves it, that is whether it is being sent internally or externally to the organisation.

If an external email is being received by multiple addressees within an organisation, and it is not immediately clear who should be capturing it into the recordkeeping system, then you will need to negotiate that between the various addressees (probably via an email).

Capturing emails, emails with attachments and attachments only. Sometimes:

- emails with no attachment may be the business evidence of the organisation.
- an email may only be a carrier of the attachment and if that is the case then it is the attached letter/correspondence that is the business evidence, not the email carrier.
- the email and the attachment may both constitute business evidence as per what we discussed previously. In which case both must be captured.

Remember that if you reply to an email, the attachment is automatically removed. So seeing Re in the subject line potentially means that you have lost the attachment. If you forward an email the attachment remains.

Assets and Business Operations

Every Business Process within any organisation **ALWAYS** uses each of the following assets:

- Financial Resources
- Human Resources, and
- Information and Records Resources

Following the organisation's rules helps us to use each asset correctly.



Many of you may not know the basic information and records management rules of your organisation.

- You may be unaware of what constitutes the business evidence of the organisation
- You may be unaware of what your obligations are to capture that information and where to capture it
- You may be unaware that any rules actually exist and where to find them.

Information and Records are an asset of the organisation and we all need to be as familiar with the rules around managing our records as we are for Finance and HR.

Adopting Reliable Email Practices

Questions or Comments Gratefully Received

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