



# EAWOP CONGRESS

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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### Paper 3

#### **Exploring the costs of co-workers email incivility on employees' wellbeing and personal life: A two-sample study**

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**Research goals :** This research aimed to explore whether co-worker email incivility would be directly and indirectly (via techno-distress invasion) related to work-to-private life conflict and emotional exhaustion among affected employees. By pursuing this objective, this research contributes to the existing literature on cyber-incivility and technostress.

**Theoretical background :** Email represents a crucial and ubiquitous form of communication in the workplace (McCarthy et al., 2019). Evidence showed that employees spent up to 28% of their working week addressing e-mail-related issues and 6.3 hours per day communicating via email (Aljawarneh et al., 2020). This is expected to increase due to the ever-increasing adoption of remote working arrangements following the COVID-19 pandemic. While the use of email represents a faster and more effective way to communicate in the workplace, it can be a “double-edged sword” as it may pave the way to email incivility (i.e., behaviours that violate workplace norms of mutual respect exhibited in email-mediated interactions; Lim & Teo, 2009). Although the literature on this topic is still in its infancy, there is evidence that email incivility can trigger negative emotions (Zhou et al., 2022) and sleep problems (Yuan et al., 2020). Email incivility can also be associated with negative job-related outcomes, such as greater employees' distress at work and at home (Park et al., 2018), and work withdrawal (Park & Haun, 2018). Given the increased use of email for job-related communications and the costs associated with email incivility, further scientific knowledge on this topic is essential to effectively counteract its potentially harmful effects.

**Design :** Two studies were conducted with 199 Italian (Study 1) and 330 English (Study 2) workers. Research participants completed online questionnaires that measured prior experiences of email incivility from co-workers, techno-distress invasion, work-to-private life conflict, emotional exhaustion, average weekly working hours, and socio-demographic variables.

**Results :** In both studies, employees who reported co-worker email incivility were more likely to experience work-to-private life conflict and emotional exhaustion. These relationships were partially mediated by techno-distress invasion so that employees who experienced co-worker email incivility were likely to perceive that their personal life was invaded by technologies and then develop higher levels of work-to-private life conflict and emotional exhaustion.

**Limitations :** This cross-sectional study used self-report measures only. Data to compare e-mail incivility with in-person incivility were not collected.

**Conclusions :** Unlike most previous studies that focused on email incivility from supervisors, this study adds to the literature on incivility by concentrating on co-worker email incivility and showing its detrimental effects not only on employees' well-being but also on their personal life. Moreover, even if the previous literature confirms the crossover effect of cyber-incivility on spouses' work withdrawal (Park & Haun, 2018), this research helps understand through which mechanisms receiving an uncivil email from a co-worker may spill over to the personal life domain. This suggests that organizations should provide their employees with training about time and email management as well as adopting family-friendly practices by recognizing the “right to disconnect” Organizations

should also set “netiquette” codes to provide their employees with rules about writing emails in a civil tone, facilitating positive interpersonal online-based interactions. Organizations should consider inform their managers about the costs associated with email incivility so that they can act as role models for civil email communications at work. Additionally, training programs that increase employees’ awareness of the tendency to misinterpret online-based communications and knowledge of the harmful effects of incivility may also represent helpful interventions to mitigate incivility in the workplace.

Relevance to the Congress Theme : Interpersonal interactions via email are becoming increasingly common to the extent that the rising number of emails sent and received per day is forecast to grow to over 376 billion by the year-end 2025 (The Radicati Group, 2021). This may represent a fertile ground for the rise of email incivility episodes at work. Therefore, by demonstrating for the first time that co-worker email incivility is related to techno-distress invasion and then to work-to-private life conflict and emotional exhaustion among affected employees, this study enriches the scientific literature on the topic and encourages practitioners to adopt work-related intervention aimed to reduce the incidence of this kind of rudeness.

Relevant UN SDGs : Good health and wellbeing.

*Keywords: email incivility, emotional exhaustion, techno-invasion*