

File 20111125.2113: Generalising from ‘every contest rule exists because someone exploited that loophole in the past’, we claim that organisational policies exist for the same reason. Every policy can probably be traced back to a person who got in trouble, or more precisely, caused trouble for the company.

But email retention policies are different in their effects. Imposed from above for exactly the preceding reason—because the company, or another like it, got subpoenaed for its email records—these policies cause a sort of voluntary, self-inflicted organisational amnesia, which the company officers evidently have decided is worthwhile in light of the obvious risks. Those officers, who are after all probably not stupid, perhaps even count on the informal policies of persons below them to mitigate the effects of the hierarchical amnesia, knowing that sensible people will tend to keep copies of their important email correspondence. The officers may be counting on it, at the same time maintaining plausible deniability; if caught, the psychopaths among them will coldly sacrifice the miscreants for ‘violating policy’ without a second thought.

References