Personalization in Organizational Communications:
The Case Study of Organizational Bulk Employee Email

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Any employee of a large organization (company, university, government agency) is quite familiar with the large number of internal bulk email, from "HR notices" or "IT updates" to letters from the CEO and company-wide newsletters. We have been studying these communications within the University of Minnesota, including qualitative and quantitative studies of message senders and recipients[1] and an experiment in personalizing organization-wide newsletters to improve recall of organizationally-important messages[2]. We have also been building and calibrating economic models that consider the different goals of message originators, recipients, channel owners (e.g., newsletter owners), and the organization overall. Such analysis shows the challenge of maintaining awareness – every time messages are perceived as irrelevant by employees, the employees become less likely to read subsequent messages sent along the same channel. One strategy employed by channel owners is to add messages they feel will interest employees, even when those messages are not important to the organization. This increases the overall communications cost to the organization, but may result in higher read rates.

Our larger research agenda here involves multi-stakeholder personalization. Organizational bulk email is different from marketing spam. Management has the right to require employees to be aware of certain information, and information that is interesting to employees may not be a valuable use of their time (from the perspective of their managers). Even more complicated, management is itself multi-stakeholder. An organization's CEO may think it is very important that employees know what's happening at the next Board meeting, but the manager of an an internal travel accounting team may feel this information is remote from the team's job needs and that their time would be better spent processing more travel transactions.

We are exploring the question of how visibility of predicted costs/benefits and multistakeholder personalization can address this challenge, and how the challenge inspires new recommender systems techniques and approaches.

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[1] Ruoyan Kong, Haiyi Zhu, and Joseph A. Konstan. 2021. Learning to Ignore: A Case Study of Organization-Wide Bulk Email Effectiveness. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. Vol. 5*, No. CSCW1, Article 80 (April 2021), 23 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/3449154

[2] Ruoyan Kong et al. 2022. Multi-Objective Personalization in Multi-Stakeholder Organizational Bulk E-mail: A Field Experiment. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact., Vol. 6*, No. CSCW2, Article 528. Publication date: November 2022. To appear.