Climate Case Study #2 - Unit-wide Email Blow-up
How to foster respect and inclusion in your unit when...

...an email modifying department policy was sent Friday evening, and now there is a torrent of angry emails coming in, with new audiences being copied into the email thread?

The Climate Case Studies are organized around RISE's *Eight Levers to Shift Climate for Respect and Inclusion* framework. RISE uses the eight levers above to think about the ways in which more inclusive, respectful, and civil climates might be intentionally cultivated in the higher education workplace context.

LEVER	APPROACH	WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE
ENVIRONMENT	Use the unit's physical and digital environments to display expectations for respectful and thoughtful communication	• Share communication expectations in multiple locations and on multiple platforms (professionally designed posters on bulletin boards, a page on the website, a statement in unit leaders' email signatures, a section in faculty/staff handbooks)
EXPECTATIONS	As a unit, discuss and decide expectations for considerate, respectful electronic communication	• Hold meetings with relevant unit constituents to collaboratively develop communication guidelines • Develop a shared, living document to communicate these guidelines and to review and update them as needed
INTERACTIONS	Choose a synchronous mode (phone, video, in-person) for difficult conversations, controversial decisions, or negative reactions	• Set aside part of a faculty/staff meeting to share about new policy decisions and changes • To share concerns about the content of an email message, set up a one-on-one or small group meeting with relevant parties
LANGUAGE	Develop a shared understanding of the language practices that align with (or violate) the unit's expectations for thoughtful and respectful interaction	• Co-create respectful language guidelines during community-wide meetings—be sure to attend to marginal views or the views of those with less power in the unit • Have explicit discussions of language practices that communicate disrespect
MODELING	Respond in a way that demonstrates desired behaviors and redirects the email conversation	• Offer an apology, if appropriate, and open up discussion about how to move forward • Employ civil and respectful language in your verbal and written responses
OPPORTUNITIES	Consider how to use the email blow-up as an opportunity to address underlying problems that led to the issue	• Host an open discussion about key principles and community values • Create multiple and different kinds of opportunities for community members to discuss what happened and to share ideas about how to do better in the future
ROUTINES & STRUCTURES	Build processes and mechanisms for sharing important decisions and concerns	• Develop and share a plan for how/what/when information will be shared with members of the community • Provide opportunities for constituents to offer input and feedback on policies and practices that affect them • Be specific about appropriate platforms, audiences, timing, etc. for different communication types (including guidance about communicating outside of standard business hours)
TIME	Allocate time to address what happened and to identify measures that will prevent a similar situation in the future	• Set a time for leadership to listen and respond thoughtfully to concerns (consider what times and modes will maximize the likelihood for diverse views) • Avoid sending emails with sensitive topics outside of standard business hours (consider using the "schedule send" feature for your messages)

Additional Resources:
- Email Incivility: Don't Be Rude! (Grabarek, WorkrBeeing, 2020)
- Protecting Company Culture Means Having Rules for Email (Thomas, Harvard Business Review, 2018)
- When an Email Exchange Turns Ugly (Maxfield, Harvard Business Review, 2018)

ADVANCE PROGRAM
RISE COMMITTEE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN