A SHORT BRIEF FOR FOUNDERS AND OPERATIONS LEADS

The Inbox Gap

Copying your supervisor on every send feels like transparency. One bulk batch adds dozens of messages to her inbox, and the one reply that needed her answer looks exactly like the rest.

ONE BULK SEND, SEEN FROM THE SUPERVISOR'S INBOX

Left: copied on every message. Right: the same batch, reported once.

Copied on every send — dozens of messages per batch

- cc: Missing detail on account record, request 1
- cc: Missing detail on account record, request 2
- cc: Missing detail on account record, request 3
- cc: Re: Missing detail, "Done, thanks"
- cc: Missing detail on account record, request 4
- **Re: Missing detail, sent only to you: "Can you confirm by Friday?"**
- cc: Missing detail on account record, request 5
- cc: Re: Missing detail, "Noted"
- cc: Missing detail on account record, request 6

... and a few dozen more like these

Reported once

Batch summary

What went out, to whom
Who replied, and what they said
What still needs an answer
One message, one read

Separate email, clear subject

"Needs your answer by Friday:
one account record"

Urgent asks never ride inside a summary.

Visibility that buries the reader is not visibility.

The one reply that needed her sat between dozens of copies she never asked to read.

The person whose inbox it is decides how she sees the work.

The average worker already receives 117 emails a day, most skimmed in under a minute. Every copy you add joins that pile.

Microsoft Work Trend Index, 2025. Practice figures banded from real work, no client detail.

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WHAT THIS IS, AND WHAT THE DATA SAYS

This is not a brief about email etiquette.

It is about a default small teams adopt without deciding: copy the person you report to on everything, so nobody can say they were not told. The default feels safe, and it lands on an inbox that was already full before you added to it.

What it is not

A rule against copying people. A complaint about a supervisor. A case for sending fewer updates, keeping anyone in the dark, or replacing email with yet another channel.

What it is

One decision, made once, about how a busy person sees a high-volume task. Drawn from a back office sending bulk outreach on client accounts, where every message copied the supervisor.

117

emails the average worker receives each day, most of them skimmed in under 60 seconds

Microsoft Work Trend Index, 2025

28%

of the workweek the average interaction worker spends managing email, by estimate

McKinsey Global Institute, 2012

Every 2 min

a meeting, email or chat interrupts the heaviest-hit fifth of Microsoft 365 users

Microsoft Work Trend Index, 2025

A WARNING

Read these numbers for what they are

Microsoft's figures come from anonymised Microsoft 365 signals, not a survey, and the every-two-minutes figure describes the top 20 percent of users by volume, not everyone. McKinsey's 28 percent is a 2012 estimate made before chat tools spread, so treat it as a floor on attention spent, not a current measurement.

NOT USED

"It takes 23 minutes to refocus after every email"

That line is everywhere and it misstates the research. The real figure, on the next page, measured how long until interrupted work was picked up again, usually after other tasks in between. It is not a refocus time per ping, and I will not quote it as one.

THE PROBLEM AS IT LOOKS

Copying her looks like transparency. It works like noise.

Most owners see a copied supervisor as a safety net. In practice the net catches so much that the one important thing falls through it, and the research on interruptions explains why.

How it usually looks

If she is copied, she knows. If something goes wrong, the record is already in her inbox. More visibility can only help, and it costs the sender nothing at all.

What is really happening

She is not reading the copies. She is scanning past them. The one reply sent only to her, asking for an answer by Friday, looks exactly like the dozens of copies around it.

23m 15s

average time before interrupted work was resumed, from 36 professionals shadowed for three days

Gloria Mark, UC Irvine, via Gallup, 2006

Faster

interrupted people finished sooner with no loss of quality, but reported more stress, frustration and time pressure

Mark, Gudith, Klocke, CHI 2008 (48 participants)

361bn

emails sent and received worldwide each day in 2024, forecast to pass 424 billion by 2028

Radicati Group, 2024

SIGNAL 01

Replies that reach only her

People reply to whoever looks most senior on the thread. Copy the supervisor and some answers skip the sender entirely, landing with the person who has the least context to act on them.

SIGNAL 02

Confirmation-only emails

"Done" and "Noted" sent to the people you report to add volume and carry nothing. Each one is a small interruption with no decision attached, so I stopped sending them.

SIGNAL 03

Urgent asks mixed into routine traffic

The lab result above is the trap: people absorb interruptions by speeding up, not by reading more carefully. An urgent request inside a thread of routine copies gets read at routine speed, if it gets read at all.

THE OPTIONS I CONSIDERED

Three ways to keep her informed, each with a cost.

None of these is free. The real question was not which option was best on paper, but which cost she would rather carry, because every one of them lands in her inbox.

OPTION 01

Keep copying

Full visibility of every message and nothing new to build or maintain. The cost: important mail gets buried under copies, and she pays that cost on every batch, for as long as the habit lasts.

OPTION 02

Stop copying

A clean inbox and no extra work for anyone. The cost: she loses the thread when someone replies only to her, because she has no context for what they are answering or why.

OPTION 03

Stop copying, send one summary

Visibility through one message per batch: what went out, who replied, what still needs her. The cost: one more report for me to build, send and keep accurate every time.

OPTION 01

Cheapest for the sender, dearest for the reader

It costs me nothing and costs her attention on every batch, indefinitely. That asymmetry is exactly why it survives as a default: the person who could change it never feels it.

OPTION 02

Cheapest for both, until a reply lands without context

Works well while replies come back to the sender. Fails quietly the first time someone answers her directly about a message she has never seen.

OPTION 03

A few minutes of my time, one read of hers

The most balanced on paper, and only worth it if she actually reads the summary. A report nobody opens is option two with extra work on top.

WHAT ALL THREE HAVE IN COMMON

Every cost lands in her inbox, not mine. That is the detail that decided who should make the call.

THE CALL I MADE

I did not choose. I asked the owner of the inbox.

The decision looked like mine because I was the one sending. It was not: every option's cost landed in her inbox, so the choice was hers to make.

THE ASK

One short message, two options, one line of cost each

Should I stop copying you on outreach batches, or stop copying and send one summary at the end of each batch? The first keeps your inbox clean; the second adds one message per batch. Your call.

WHY NOT 01

Keeping the default was off the menu

I had already seen what the copies did to her inbox. Offering it would have asked her to defend her own time against my habit, which is not a fair question to put to anyone.

WHY ASK

Because options 02 and 03 fail differently

One fails if she needs context; the other fails if she never reads reports. Only she knew which failure she could live with, so guessing on her behalf would have been the real risk.

THREE WORKING RULES CAME WITH IT

No confirmation-only emails to the people I report to. Urgent asks go in a separate message with a clear subject. The end-of-day note never carries anything urgent.

> The person who pays the cost of a default should be the one who picks it.
>
> From the decision log

WHAT I WATCH AFTERWARD

A cleaner inbox is not the finish line. A missed reply is the risk.

Removing copies removes a safety net, even a bad one. So I watch the places where that net used to catch things, and I check them before I assume the change worked.

WATCH 01

Replies that reach only her

When someone answers her directly about a message she was never copied on, she needs context fast. I forward the thread with one line on what it is and what, if anything, she needs to decide.

WATCH 02

Requests she misses because of volume

If anything addressed to her still goes unanswered, the volume problem has moved rather than gone. I look for it in the next few batches before calling the fix done.

WATCH 03

Urgent asks in routine places

An urgent item that turns up in a summary or the end-of-day note is a broken rule. It goes out again on its own, with a clear subject, and I note why it slipped.

IF SHE PICKS 02

Watch for context loss

The first direct reply is the test. If she has to ask what it is about, the clean inbox cost more than it saved, and I offer the summary instead.

IF SHE PICKS 03

Watch whether the summary gets read

If summaries go unanswered for a week while questions still arrive by other routes, I ask again rather than keep sending into silence. A report is only visibility if it is opened.

THE REVIEW

I check back after a couple of batches. A choice made once can still be the wrong one, and asking again costs one line.

EVIDENCE, NOT ADJECTIVES

I have run outreach that respects the reader.

Bulk outreach, reporting and handoffs are executive support and operations work. This is how I have actually run them in a back office serving many small client accounts.

BATCHED

One person, one message

Every date a person owed went into a single message, with a first-contact or repeat template chosen from a running contacted list. Roughly two thirds of a full batch replied and were fixed the same day.

REPORTED

Counts from a log, not memory

Every update was written to a dated log as it landed, and the end-of-day report was built from those lines. A named non-responder list reached the supervisor before every run.

CONFIRMED

A two-line confirmation

One generic confirmation replaced replies rewritten per person. Fewer words, no dates to get wrong, and nothing in it that anyone had to read twice.

THE HABIT

Ask the owner of the attention before spending it

Status updates, report schedules and meeting invites are the same decision as copying. I name the options, the cost of each, and let the person who pays choose.

CREDENTIALS

Google Project Management Professional Certificate and Google AI Essentials

Plus Anthropic AI Fluency and Model Context Protocol. 31 certifications in total, every one independently verifiable.

> I especially appreciate his proactive communication style, which consistently keeps workflows running smoothly and heads off bottlenecks before they happen.
>
> Marlon Nasiba · AI Data Specialist · Google · Cross-functional collaborators

HOW TO START

Count what you copied them on last week.

Search your sent mail for every message that copied the person you report to. The number is usually higher than you would guess, and most of it they never asked for.

STEP 01

Count the copies

One week of sent mail. How many messages copied the person you report to, and how many of those actually needed them? That ratio is your whole case, and it takes ten minutes to find.

STEP 02

Offer two options, not a question

Stop copying, or stop copying and send one summary. Name the cost of each in a single line. Let them pick, then check back after a few rounds to see whether the choice held.

STEP 03

Separate the urgent

Anything urgent goes in its own message with a clear subject. No confirmation-only replies. Write both rules down so they survive a busy day and the next person in the seat.

FREE TOOLS THAT FIT

The Exception Email Builder drafts one clear message per person, and The Diff playbook turns a batch into a short summary of what changed. Both free at me.kabuhayan.app/tools.

Available now for remote work

Chief of Staff · Operations · Senior Executive Assistant · Project Manager

Tell me how many messages you copied your manager on last week, and how many they needed.

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linkedin.com/in/paulpacardo
me.kabuhayan.app

Sources: Microsoft WorkLab, Work Trend Index special report "Breaking down the infinite workday", 17 June 2025; aggregated, anonymised Microsoft 365 signals to 15 February 2025, excluding education and EU tenants; the interruption figure is based on the top 20 percent of users by ping volume. McKinsey Global Institute, "The social economy", July 2012; an estimate for interaction workers, made before workplace chat was common. Gloria Mark, UC Irvine, interviewed in Gallup Management Journal, 8 June 2006; 36 professionals shadowed for three days; the figure is time until interrupted work was resumed, not time to refocus after a single message. Mark, Gudith and Klocke, "The cost of interrupted work: more speed and stress", CHI 2008; a lab study of 48 participants, mostly university students. Radicati Group, Email Statistics Report 2024 to 2028, executive summary; worldwide volume, all email types. Deliberately excluded: the claim that every email costs 23 minutes of refocus time, a misreading of the Mark research. Figures are third-party research, not results I am claiming. Practice figures are banded from real work and describe patterns, not a client.