FIELD NOTE

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AI that reads only the data in a work email misses the people in it, inocta.io research argues

Two inocta.io preprints on work email: what 357 workers chose, and why AI must read the people as well as the data.

IN SHORT

- In a survey of 357 workers in the US and Canada, about two thirds chose the work email that gives the answer first.
- The same workers gave no simple rule: what they said they accept in length matched what they chose for 54.9%, an exploratory result.
- inocta.io treats a work email as a contract: content a script can check, and a relationship only a person can judge.

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Read online: https://inocta.io/lab/field-notes/keeping-the-contract/

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TORONTO, Dec. 1, 2026 / AI that reads only the facts in a work email misses the relationship, a new inocta.io preprint argues. In an inocta.io survey of 357 workers, about two thirds chose the answer first (survey).

Key facts

- About two thirds of 357 surveyed workers chose the email that gives the answer first (survey).
- What workers said they accept in length matched the email they chose for 54.9% of them, an exploratory result whose interval includes 50% (paper).
- An AI model did not predict each worker's choice better than a simple average (survey).

The second paper, "Keeping the Contract", treats a work email as more than data. inocta.io describes a work email as a contract with two parts: content a script can check, and a relationship only a person can judge (paper). The content covers facts, dates, amounts and commitments.

The survey, "Answer First or Context First?", was pre-registered and ran in the United States and Canada. The answer-first result held for every message type tested (survey).

Yet the same workers gave no simple rule. For a decision request, the share who said they would cap length at a short paragraph or less was 20.4 points lower than for a relational message (survey). Its 97.5% interval is 14.5 to 26.4 points (survey). What workers said they accept in length and what they chose agreed for 54.9%, an exploratory result whose interval includes 50% (paper).

On 90 new workers, an AI model's prediction of each worker's choice did not beat a simple average (survey).

To read the people, the paper names seven dimensions: history, context, objective, sender, receivers, relationship and type (paper). They are a working model. The approach has 25 rules (paper). Each has a card that states its evidence and its limit. inocta.io tests it internally, and it is not public.

The data side has its own gaps, the paper finds. Of 41 public templates that start a new email, 13 (32%) leave a place for a result the sender may not have (paper). In a first look at 40 invented emails, one commercial filter missed all 4 that asked to change or send bank details (paper).

"People told us two things at once: keep it short, and give me what I need to decide. That is human," said Mo. Kahlain, founder of inocta.io. "We think most AI tools treat an email as data. An email is a contract between people. We think AI can help between them if it reads the human context too: who writes, who reads and why."

Both papers are preprints, not yet peer-reviewed. The second paper calls its contract model reasoned and untested. Neither paper claims that this approach improves communication. A field test comes next. The full announcement is on the inocta.io Lab.

Sources: survey (DOI), pre-registration (OSF kzg2j), second paper (DOI).

About inocta.io

inocta.io is an AI operations company. It maps how a company runs, documents its processes and builds the AI and workflow automation the work can carry. Its method has four pillars: Map, Structure, Deploy and Manage. Companies work with inocta.io through three offers: Foundation, A Process with AI and The IO Program. inocta.io was founded by Mo. Kahlain, author of *Adapting to AGI*, after selling, in 2024, the company he had built.

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Media assets

- inocta.io logo, PNG
- inocta.io logo, SVG
- Main image, PNG, 1456 x 816

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