LEARNING BOX OF UNPLUGGED ACTIVITIES

The email overload

In this unplugged activity, participants are faced with a familiar modern challenge: opening an inbox filled with 200 unread emails, including urgent work messages, routine notifications, personal emails, and spam. Their task is to analyze the inbox, determine priorities, and create an efficient strategy for sorting and responding to the messages.

Participants must decide how to classify emails, identify which require immediate attention, and filter out irrelevant or low-priority content without becoming overwhelmed.

Target Group

- ☑ Low-skilled adults with low digital competences
- ☐ Low-skilled adults with limited formal education or qualifications
- ☐ Low-skilled adults with low participation in lifelong learning / training opportunities

Learning Objectives

- Analyze and organize large volumes of information into manageable categories
- Apply decomposition to break down a complex information set into smaller, actionable groups
- Recognize patterns in types of information, sources, and levels of urgency
- Apply abstraction to identify relevant details and filter out unnecessary information
- Apply computational thinking to improve decision-making in complex information-management tasks

Competence Areas

a) Innovation Competences

- ☐ Creativity
- ☑ Critical thinking
- ☑ Problem solving

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Theme

Digital communication management and information prioritization in everyday life

Duration

45 mins

Level

Beginner

Computational Thinking Steps Used

- ☑ Decomposition
- ☑ Pattern recognition
- ☑ Abstraction
- ☐ Algorithmic thinking

Methodological Approach

- ☐ Gamification
- ☐ Challenge-Based Learning
- ☐ Collaborative learning
- ☑ Experiential learning

- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Collaboration

b) Information Literacy Competences

- ☑ Ability to access, understand and critically analyse information
- ☑ Interpretation of digital and visual content
- ☐ Awareness of media influence and biases

c) Life and Career Competences

- ☑ Flexibility and adaptability
- ☑ Initiative and autonomy
- ☐ Sociability and intercultural competence
- ☑ Productivity
- ☐ Leadership and responsibility

Learning Outcomes

- Categorize items according to urgency, relevance, and type
- Identify patterns in recurring information such as repeated messages, notifications, or requests
- Apply decomposition and abstraction to manage large volumes of information efficiently
- Make justified decisions about which items require immediate action and which can be delayed or ignored

Notes

- Include ambiguous cases where urgency is unclear to stimulate discussion and justification of choices.
- Allow multiple valid prioritization strategies, as different organizational methods may be equally effective.
- Adapt difficulty by changing the number of emails, categories, or urgency levels.
- Reinforce that the objective is not to “read everything,” but to design an efficient process for filtering and responding.

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The email overload

Step 1: Examine and classify the inbox

Participants are presented with a fictional inbox containing 200 unread emails, including urgent work messages, spam, newsletters, personal emails, and automated notifications. They begin by scanning the inbox and grouping emails into meaningful categories based on visible information such as sender, subject line, and message type. This helps reduce complexity and makes the information easier to manage.

Computational thinking focus: Decomposition, breaking down a large and complex inbox into smaller, manageable groups.

Step 2: Identify patterns and prioritize messages

Participants analyze the grouped emails to detect recurring patterns, such as repeated senders, spam formats, urgent keywords, or similar types of requests. Based on these patterns, they determine which emails are urgent, which are important but non-urgent, and which can be ignored, deleted, or postponed.

Computational thinking focus: Pattern recognition, identifying repeated structures that help classify and prioritize messages.

Step 3: Filter relevant information and make decisions

Participants focus only on the information necessary for decision-making, such as urgency, sender relevance, and subject importance, while ignoring distracting or unnecessary details. They then justify their choices about which emails to answer first, archive, delete, or leave for later, explaining the reasoning behind their prioritization.

Computational thinking focus: Abstraction, selecting relevant information and ignoring non-essential details to make efficient decisions.

ACTIVITY CARDS

The email overload

Card Categories

Roles

Classification

Events

Priority Levels

Essential
Extremely necessary to take into consideration

High
Importance

Medium
Helpful to take into consideration

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Print and cut the cards on the following slides to use in the activity.

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COORDINATOR

Guide, organize, and ensure that everyone works in harmony towards the goal of managing the 200 emails

Functions:

- Organize the team and assign tasks
- Guide the classification process
- Monitor progress and adjust strategies
- Facilitate communication between roles

ANALYST

Examine your inbox to identify patterns, detect urgent emails, and prioritize them according to their actual importance

Functions:

- Review senders to detect emergencies
- Identify repetitive patterns
- Sort by priority level
- Alert about critical messages

FILTRATOR

Identify and remove irrelevant emails, spam, and unnecessary notifications before the team wastes time

Functions:

- Detect spam and junk emails
- Delete useless notifications
- Identify unwanted subscriptions
- Mark duplicate emails

COMMUNICATOR

Write and send quick, clear responses. You are the voice of the team to the outside world

Functions:

- Drafting responses to priority emails
- Maintain a professional and concise tone
- Confirm receipt of urgent items
- Coordinate with the Analyst

URGENT

Classify emails according to their level of urgency: immediate, today, this week, no rush

Advantages:

✓ Address critical issues first ✓ Reduce the risk of missing deadlines ✓ Clear action hierarchy

Disadvantages:

✗ May ignore important but non-urgent emails ✗ Generates stress due to constant pressure

BY SENDER

Group emails according to who sends them: boss, colleagues, clients, strangers, systems

Advantages:

✓ Easy to identify spam ✓ Allows batch responses ✓ Clear context per person

Disadvantages:

✗ Does not distinguish urgency within the group ✗ May delay critical messages from new senders

BY TOPIC OR PROJECT

Organize emails according to the project or subject they belong to

Advantages:

✓ Complete project overview ✓ Facilitates thread tracking ✓ Ideal for collaborative work

Disadvantages:

✗ Requires reading each email for classification ✗ Takes more initial time

FOR TIME RECEIVED

Sort emails from newest to oldest (or vice versa)

Advantages:

✓ Simple and fast ✓ No prior analysis required ✓ Default method for most

Disadvantages:

✗ Does not prioritize ✗ Old, urgent emails are left at the end

URGENT EMAIL FROM THE BOSS

An urgent email arrives from your boss with a deadline in 30 minutes. You must reorganize your priorities immediately.

Decision: The team must decide: Who responds? What gets postponed? How is this communicated to the rest of the team?

Priority: Essential

SYSTEM LOCKOUT

System notification that temporarily blocks access to the tray. The computer must wait or find alternatives.

Decision: Do they use this time to plan? Do they change their strategy? Do they delegate tasks offline?

Priority: Essential

IMPORTANT PERSONAL MESSAGE

Important personal message that requires a quick response. How do you balance urgent work matters with personal ones?

Decision: The team discusses: Should it be addressed now or postponed? Who on the team can cover?

Priority: High

SPAM AVALANCHE

Suddenly, 30 spam emails arrive, clogging the inbox. The filterer must act quickly to avoid losing visibility

Decision: Are all emails filtered at once? Are legitimate emails prioritized first? Does the strategy change?

Priority: High