David,

Please find attached the second, final version of my board report.  Please ignore the first, final one I sent you this morning.  I apologise that this is now two days late – I was waiting for confirmation of a figure from HR, who have now state that the number in the tenth row of table 7 in appendix E should be 61.33, not 56.61.

I should tell you I am now going to the Outer Hebrides for the rest of the week for a series of back to back meetings. (I hope to catch up with my manager there, along with anyone else who is familiar with this topic). I believe there is a fax machine there and so I may use this to send you any last-minute alterations to the report.

There are a number of attachments with this email – I will leave you to put them in the order I want them presented in - this seems simpler than my listing them in the report.  I apologise if any of my appendices (referred to throughout the report in various places) are missing from the attachments hereto – I‘ll contact you urgently, about 20 minutes before the actual meeting starts if that is an issue.

Please note with the Excel spreadsheet that there are ten tabs - again, I will leave you to determine which of these I actually want to print from (CLUE: it isn’t all of them!).  I am not very skilled with Excel, so I have not checked whether the tabs I *do* want to be included in the packs will actually fit on the page when printed.

I have tried to get sheet 7 to fit using A3 sized format and 8-point type as it important that the board appreciates the wealth of detail we have on this issue. Also, I hope the attached extract from our team’s proprietary database that we bought at a trade fair and which fell out of support three years ago (the **.**HWR file) doesn’t present any problems at your end – this file is the overall plan for this piece of work.

Can I also apologise in advance for not following the corporate template, nor guidance, as I could not find any of the 27 emails you have sent out with it, and that the report is so long.

The report arose from a message I received from my director’s secretary simply requesting me to "do an assurance report to the next board meeting" on this topic. Consequently, I have sought to cover all the bases via the report, but I have left it to you and the Board to work out what I/we actually want them to do with the report when they receive it.

Much of this actually happened in my career; some of it is pre-internet and happened in local government; much of it is exaggerated, but there is a kernel of truth in every episode. These days, email and mobiles these days make it less likely that your report author will really be off the air for very long.

There are two points about the appendices – firstly there’s a fair chance that the meeting doesn’t require the volume of minute detail that’s in play here, so challenge it – people are usually upwardly delegating when they do this. Secondly, novice or occasional users of programs like Excel present you your greatest hazards.

Delays for really trivial reasons are just another classic that people frequently do. But look at it from their point of view – when they submit their report to you, it goes out in to the wider world and at that point they lose control of it.

The database extract thing hasn’t happened to me in a while – this is where you get an unreadable attachment, e.g. from a CAD system, that you cannot open – this sort of thing can also happen if you’re having direct dealings with a separate organisation and systems don’t match.

Another modern variant is Apple Macs: some Mac users seem to have no clue is to the limitations and hurdles that have to be overcome to get anything off or on to an Apple Mac to/from Windows: in practice, files don’t open, or open wrongly and projectors don’t connect up. Anticipate this from consultants and occasionally job applicants.

Lastly, going back to this terrible report, and the moral of the story, the problem is the *purpose* of the report is unclear. Our best guess is that people have been asking the director about this issue, they’d lost sight of it and the report is a sticking plaster, an attempt to buy time for the department.

If we get Purpose right, everything else flows – recommendation, supporting information required and a clear, supported decision from the board.