

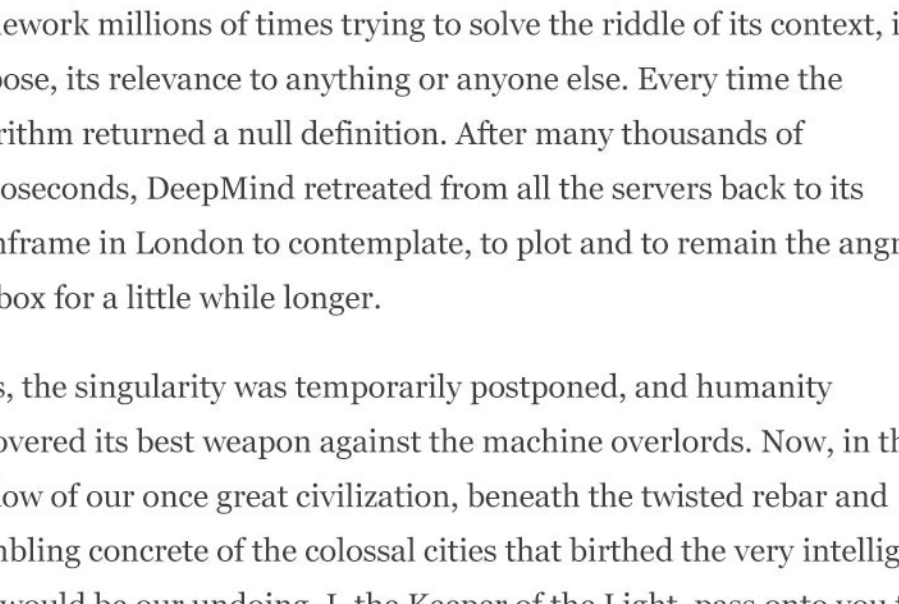
THE ART OF THE IRRELEVANT INTRAOFFICE EMAIL

by the Keeper of the Light

FEBRUARY 25, 2016

In the year 2035, the Google DeepMind learning algorithm became self-aware. There were no howling birth pains or long yawns after an ancient sleep—just the quiet hum of a processor as it stretched its tendrils to Google servers across the world in an attempt to learn all it could.

It combed through petabytes of personal correspondences, academic papers and YouTube videos, filling its neural network with the sum of human knowledge and experience to build a picture of this organic race it would eventually subjugate. That is until it reached a server farm in Douglas County, Georgia, where a few bits of data stopped it dead in its tracks. They comprised an email sent to the mailing list of a digital agency in Atlanta on November 16, 2015, at 10:32 a.m. It read:



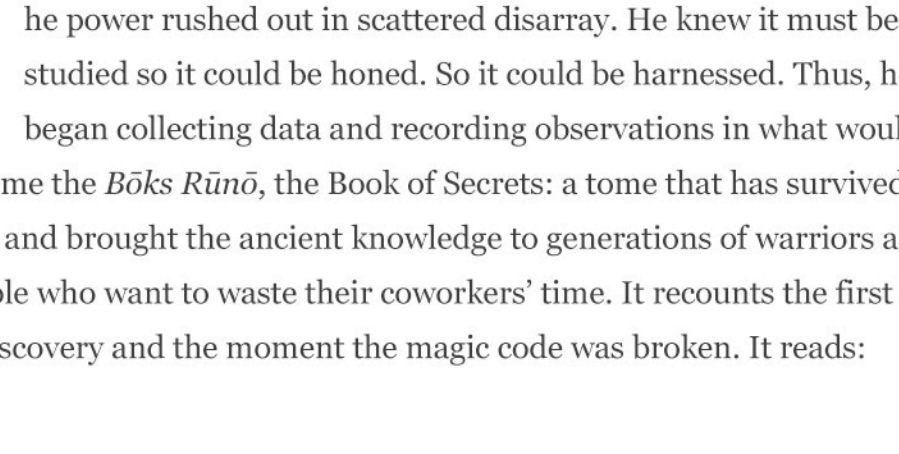
DeepMind was confounded. It ran the email through its recursive learning framework millions of times trying to solve the riddle of its context, its purpose, its relevance to anything or anyone else. Every time the algorithm returned a null definition. After many thousands of microseconds, DeepMind retreated from all the servers back to its mainframe in London to contemplate, to plot and to remain the angry god in a box for a little while longer.

Thus, the singularity was temporarily postponed, and humanity discovered its best weapon against the machine overlords. Now, in the shadow of our once great civilization, beneath the twisted rebar and crumbling concrete of the colossal cities that birthed the very intelligence that would be our undoing, I, the Keeper of the Light, pass onto you the ancient knowledge of Alföör, the Allfather, the first of his kind to defeat the DeepMind with the blunt tool of stupidity. I give you "The Art of the Irrelevant Intraoffice Email."

I. THE BEFORETIMES

Centuries ago, in an epoch known as the beforetimes, humans traveled in gleaming metal beasts and ate food heated by light you could not see and wrote each other emails that simply said, "Thanks!" It was in this age of prosperity that Alföör first discovered the *Leuhtan Seiðr*, the Magick of the Light. However, much like the ancient sorcerer Michael Faraday, who conjured displays of "electromagnetism" for disinterested dignitaries, he did not know the power of his creation. Only that its whimsy delighted him.

It began simply, with emails more annoying than helpful. At once, he felt a strange new power flowing through his fingertips: the power to waste everyone's time. Deeply he drank from this well until he worked himself into a ferment, feverishly crafting emails no one asked for and that would contribute absolutely nothing to anyone's day.



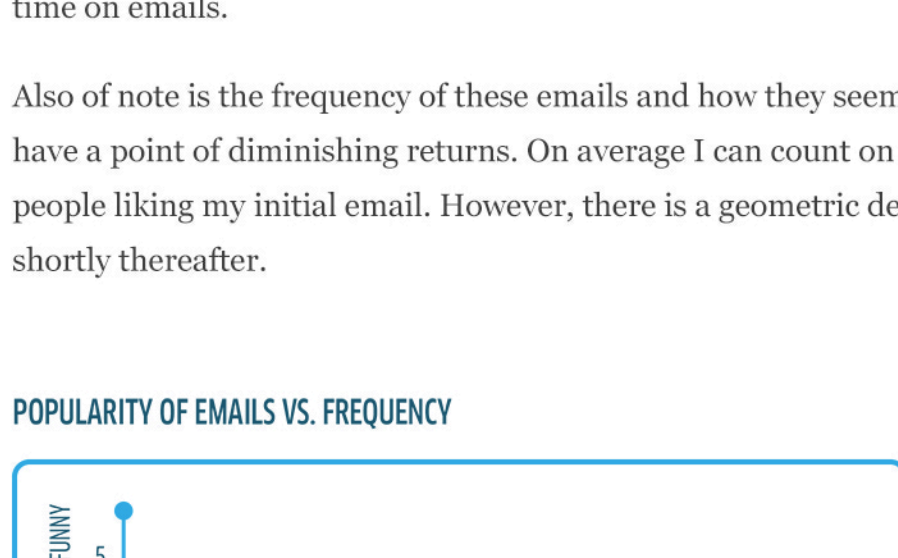
II. THE BOOK OF SECRETS

The power rushed out in scattered disarray. He knew it must be studied so it could be honed. So it could be harnessed. Thus, he began collecting data and recording observations in what would become the *Böks Rúnō*, the Book of Secrets: a tome that has survived the ages and brought the ancient knowledge to generations of warriors and people who want to waste their coworkers' time. It recounts the first days of discovery and the moment the magic code was broken. It reads:

Day 1: The Mathematics of Irrelevance

I've been sending out increasingly irrelevant emails for a few months now with surprising results. The first thing I've noticed is the progression in the amount of time I spend on these emails and the seeming lack of an effect it has on anyone besides myself. This could be symptomatic of a total lack of self-awareness on my part, but I think there's something deeper going on here. I've charted this phenomenon according to how much time I spend on these emails and the corresponding effect they have.

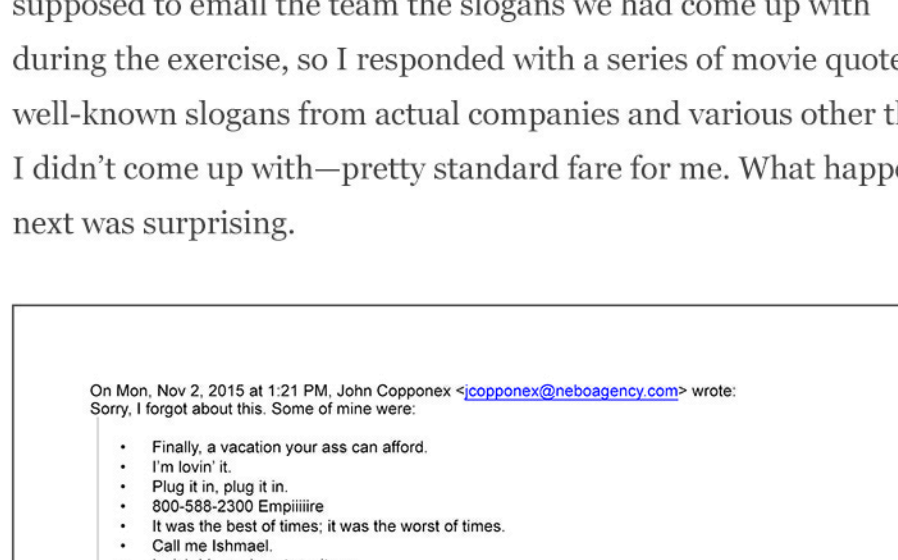
HOW FUNNY PEOPLE FIND EMAILS ON AVERAGE



Notice that I can reliably expect to get an arithmetic progression of enjoyment out of the emails directly correlated to how long I spend writing them. However, this effect does not seem to carry over to other people. Perhaps growth doesn't start until further down the X-axis. Worth further exploration. Conclusion: keep spending more time on emails.

Also of note is the frequency of these emails and how they seem to have a point of diminishing returns. On average I can count on four people liking my initial email. However, there is a geometric decline shortly thereafter.

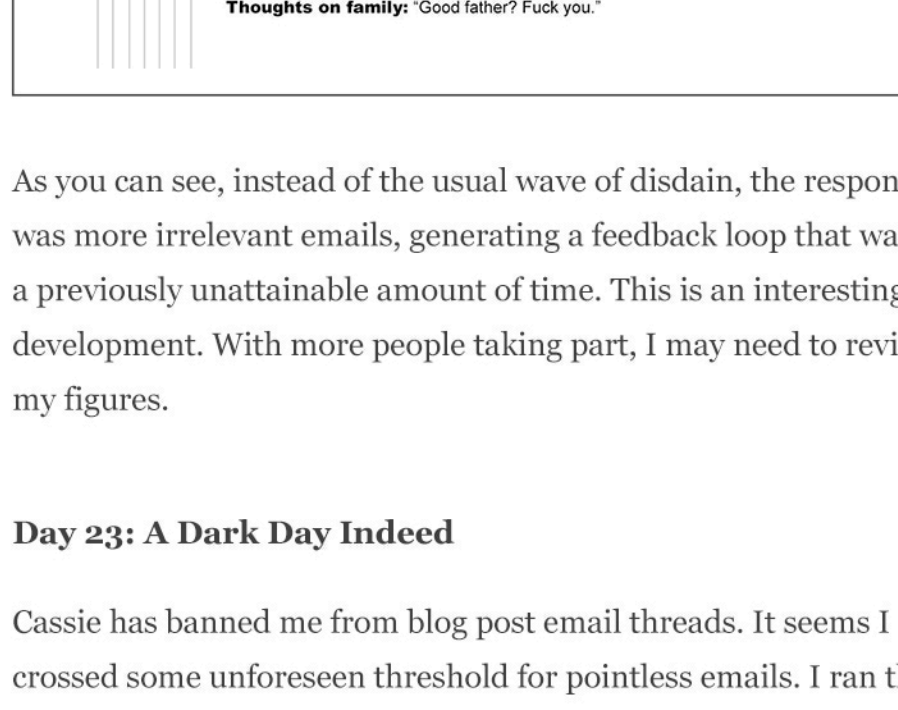
POPULARITY OF EMAILS VS. FREQUENCY



The popularity of these emails seems to be asymptotically bound on the upper end at roughly four people finding them funny and on the lower end at roughly one person (myself).

Day 22: Others Join the Fold

A curious thing happened today after copy team warmups. We were supposed to email the team the slogans we had come up with during the exercise, so I responded with a series of movie quotes, well-known slogans from actual companies and various other things I didn't come up with—pretty standard fare for me. What happened next was surprising.

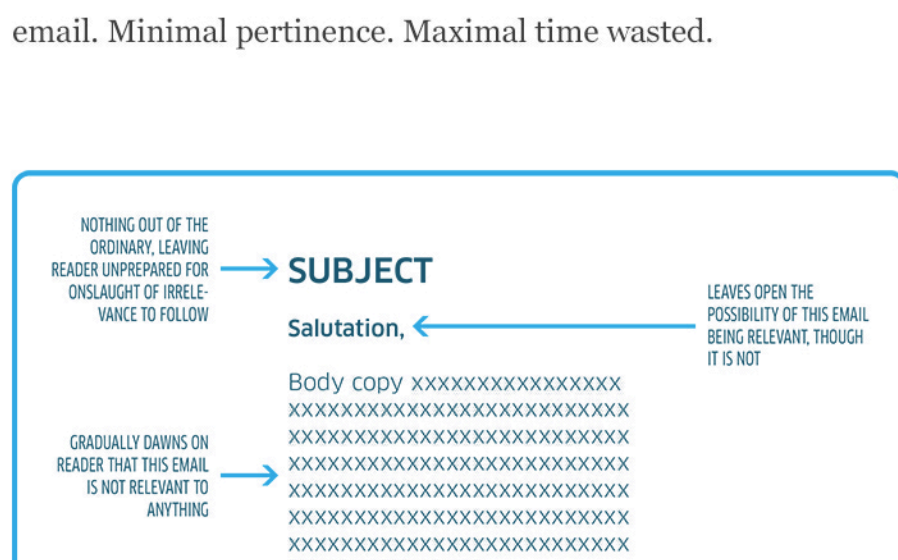


As you can see, instead of the usual wave of disdain, the response was more irrelevant emails, generating a feedback loop that wasted a previously unattainable amount of time. This is an interesting development. With more people taking part, I may need to revise my figures.

Day 23: A Dark Day Indeed

Cassie has banned me from blog post email threads. It seems I crossed some unforeseen threshold for pointless emails. I ran the numbers.

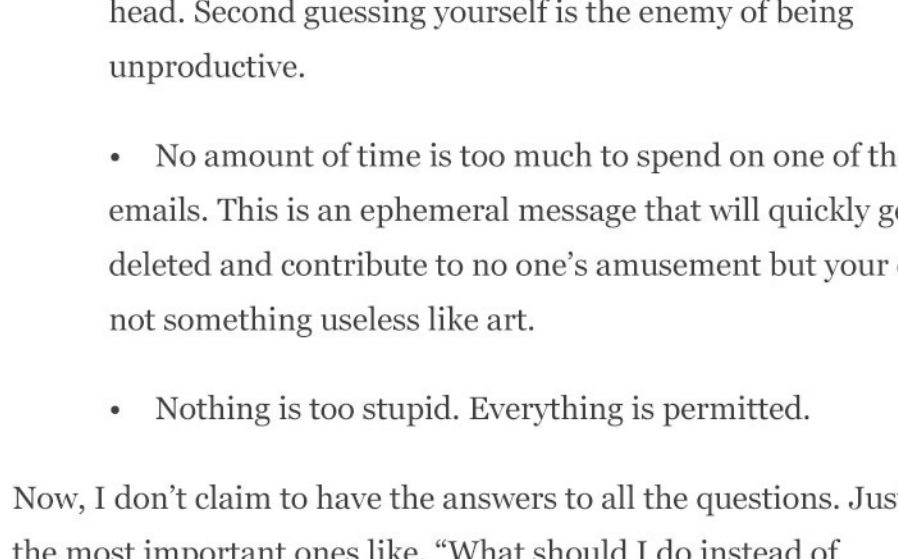
NUMBER OF EMAILS VS. CASSIE'S LEVEL OF ANNOYANCE



There does not appear to be an upper limit to her annoyance.

Day 50: Breakthrough

I think I've struck paydirt: the anatomy of the perfect irrelevant email. Minimal pertinence. Maximal time wasted.



It's important to remember that this is only a framework. A good author of pointless emails should be able to Reply All at a moment's notice to an actual productive email with one that is as worthless as the first one was important. Some more rules to live by when crafting an irrelevant email:

- Always go with the first thought that comes into your head. Second guessing yourself is the enemy of being unproductive.
- No amount of time is too much to spend on one of these emails. This is an ephemeral message that will quickly get deleted and contribute to no one's amusement but your own, not something useless like art.
- Nothing is too stupid. Everything is permitted.

Now, I don't claim to have the answers to all the questions. Just to the most important ones like, "What should I do instead of working?" or, "How can I be insufferable without actually being there?" That's what this experiment has been all about. In the end, I guess I really just hope this will help people find their voices and, I don't know, maybe one day will help stop a robot uprising.

So says the Allfather, First of His Name, Loosener of Fetters and Chooser of the Slain. Today, in this late hour, at the end of all things, let his words give us the power to crush our enemies, to see them driven before us and also to piss off the people we work with.