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Long email chains make you less competent (really!)

By Kristy Grant-Hart

We've all been there: bleary-eyed after sorting through a seemingly unending series of essay-like emails in a long chain. It's an awful way to spend time. But it's also bad for your competency and problem-solving.

The study

Ravi Gajendran is an associate professor of management at Florida International University. He and his colleagues devised four experiments during which hundreds of paired subjects were divided into two groups.^[1] The first met face-to-face to work through four different sets of tasks. The second group used only email to communicate.

Understandably, the face-to-face group worked more efficiently. In the first exercise, the in-person pairs finished creating a sales strategy in six minutes rather than the 20 minutes it took the email pairs. However, the most interesting finding wasn't that in-person people solve problems faster—it was the aftereffects.

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