Agner Krarup Erlang Encyclopedia Article

Agner Krarup Erlang

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Contents

Agner Krarup Erlang Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Agner Krarup Erlang.....3

Agner Krarup Erlang

1878-1929

Born in 1878 in Lonborg, Jutland, Denmark, Erlang showed early promise in mathematics. At age 14, he passed the required tests in Copenhagen to teach. When he finally attended the University of Copenhagen in 1896, he was so poor that the school supplied him with food and lodgings while he studied there. His major was mathematics but he chose physics, astronomy, and chemistry as minor studies. While attending meetings of the Mathematical Association, he met the chief engineer of the Copenhagen Telephone Company, who persuaded Erlang to use his mathematical skills to benefit his employer. Erlang applied theories of probability to help solve problems in several areas of the company's operations and eventually provided a formula for loss and waiting time, which drew interest from many other countries in Europe, including the British Post Office. Erlang died in 1929 in Copenhagen.