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A journal in a league of its own with a personalized review system under a highly dedicated, engaging, and influential editor-in-chief

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A journal in a league of its own with a personalized review system under a highly dedicated, engaging, and influential editor-in-chief

It was not before July 29, 2019 that I sent my first email to Prof. Adeli, submitting a manuscript on the modeling of reinforced concrete structures, for publication in *Computer-Aided Civil and Infrastructure Engineering*, the highest ranking journal in civil engineering, construction and building technology, and transportation science and technology. Now, less than one year later, and having the pleasure of having two papers accepted (Xia, Langelaar, & Hendriks, 2020a, 2020b) and having contributed to numerous reviews, I am counting a total of 104 email conversations with Prof. Adeli in my email inbox and sent items folders, a stable average of two emails per week, representing only a tiny branch of the massive tree that forms the journal. Some of these emails comprised a simple “Thank you, Max”, another was a 32 pager with responses to the comments of eight reviewers, and in a recent email I was entrusted with the chance to write an editorial. It is a great honor.

Computer-Aided Civil and Infrastructure Engineering is now celebrating its 35th anniversary and, clearly, I am a newcomer to the celebration. While reading the other 35th anniversary editorials of leading researchers that have been published so far, I was thinking of a way to write an editorial that is complementary to them. I have chosen the angle of a newcomer to achieve this.

In July 2019, at the moment that we were close to submitting our manuscript to *Computer-Aided Civil and Infrastructure Engineering*, I routinely asked my PhD student, Yi Xia, to check the manuscript upload procedure for the journal. When he reported back to me and my colleague, Matthijs Langelaar, that I had to email it to the editor directly, I did not believe him. I should have known better. During the past 12 months, I got more and more familiar with the submission “system,” put intentionally between quotes here, and my attitude rapidly changed from being surprised to being enthusiastic about this “system,” which apparently consisted of an email client operated by a highly dedicated per-

son, with an 100+ *h*-index and holding five Honorary Doctorates and several Honorary Professorships. The quality and reputation of the journal is clearly inextricably linked to the enormous dedication of one of the most highly cited researchers in the field, in the person of Prof. Adeli, profiled as an Engineering Legend in the ASCE journal of *Leadership and Management in Engineering* in 2010 (Weingardt, 2010).

I have been publishing in over 10 different journals in the field of finite element modeling, structural engineering, reliability theory, and concrete structures, published by Wiley, Elsevier, Springer, and so on. I am also reviewing for most of these journals. I have never experienced such an involvement of the editor-in-chief, neither as an author, nor as a reviewer. *Computer-Aided Civil and Infrastructure Engineering* and its editor are clearly in another league. For other journals, I have experienced that the editor was blindly following the votes of the peers; adapting to simple routines like “if one reviewer votes for a decline, the editor will decide for a decline.” For both authors and reviewers, this can lead to frustrating situations, in which dumb robotic electronic manuscript submission systems might further camouflage the process. From time to time, an in-depth discussion is necessary in which the editor should actively participate and dare to deviate from rules-based decisions.

I have tried to put my thoughts and experiences graphically in Figure 1. Along the horizontal axis, D stands for a dumb robotic electronic manuscript submission system and E stands for a “system” based on a simple email client. The vertical axis denotes the quality of engagement of all parties in the reviewing process, and thus the quality of the end product: the journal itself. The highest quality can be obtained by such a simple email “system,” but the actually obtained quality level will be highly dependent on the personal influence of the editor-in-chief. Moving to an electronic manuscript submission system will confine the influence of the editor on the achieved

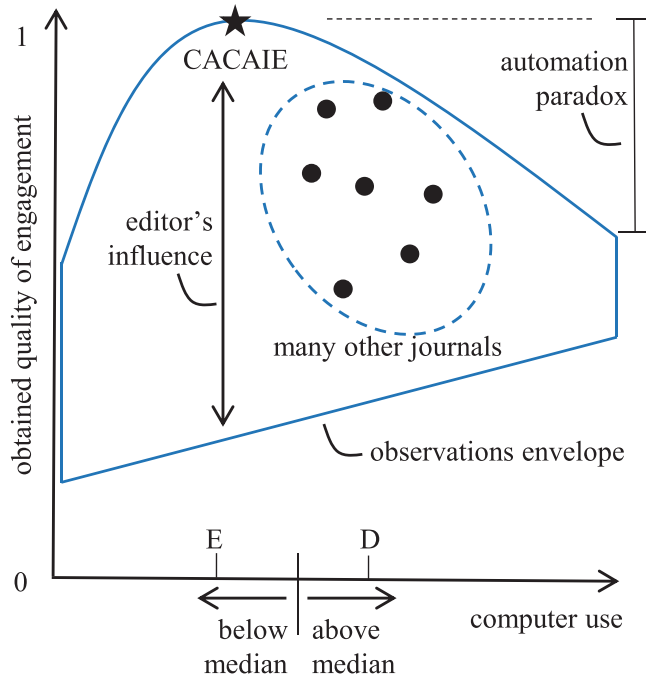


FIGURE 1 Positioning journals based on the level of automation of the manuscript submission and reviewing system and the obtained quality of engagement

quality level, but, more importantly, will limit the maximum achievable engagement of reviewers. Consequently, the increased computer use will decrease the maximum achievable quality of the journal, indicated as the “automation paradox” in the figure. From a newcomer to the celebration, my wish is that *Computer-Aided Civil and*

Infrastructure Engineering will continue using the present submission “system” with Prof. Adeli at its heart, for many years to come.

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