

A Call for More Voices!

By John A. Dal Pino, S.E.

During my two-plus year tenure as the Editorial Board Chair and the several years before that as a Board member, STRUCTURE has received several proposed articles on three topics: 1) the experiences of engineers with many years in practice, 2) the current state of the industry and the inner workings of firms, and 3) the perceived unnecessary expansion of the building code and over-regulation. Of course, the same individuals did not necessarily write these articles. Still, if I were to do some research, I would expect to find that the authors have similar professional experience, job tenure, standing in their firms, firm ownership, and socio-economic situations. Not to generalize, but these engineers are likely to be older and in the middle or later parts of their careers.

We are also starting to see more article ideas from an entirely different engineering demographic, namely younger engineers. This group is generally not satisfied with the status quo regarding professional relationships with their managers, engagement in the firm, pay and benefits, respect, and racial and gender diversity. The national and regional SE3 groups are outgrowths of this general dissatisfaction and represent the desire to be heard and effect change. In terms of the building code, they seem to embrace it and desire to expand it to address non-traditional issues like climate change. This runs counter to what the older group likely thinks.

I think any outspokenness by engineers (of all stripes) is great for our industry since we are all driven by the same genuine desire to make things better. Collectively, we see issues that need to be improved or solved, and rather than just accepting the status quo, we write and speak out about them. I am glad that STRUCTURE can serve as a platform for this dialogue.

Please excuse my generalizations, as there is some overlap between these groups. Some engineers certainly jump back and forth between groups depending on their personal situation or the specific issue. I find it a bit ironic that the general tone I see from the older engineers is advocacy for more independence, less regulation, and a love of being an engineer for the sake of engineering. In contrast, while unhappy with the status quo, younger engineers are not seeking to leave and start their own companies. Instead, they

seem to want to work within their existing firms while fundamentally changing their firm's systems.

This all seems a bit upside down to me, but maybe not. The older group grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, which saw the tail end of the Vietnam war protests and a general rejection of the establishment, i.e., the "man," however defined, on several fronts. I suspect that the younger group was born in the late 1980s and early to mid-1990s. By then, the government had grown immensely in terms of influence and as a financial backstop, and seemed to be involved in *everything*. In the private sector, firms were getting bigger and bigger and had global control. There was no "fighting the tide." The idea of working for a little, five-person company seemed crazy.

We at STRUCTURE are searching for a way to facilitate these contrasting dialogues. We would very much like to hear from you if you have an opinion to express. Many opinions drawn from the entire industry should better frame the issues and present possible solutions that will lead to further discussion.

To get this going, let me suggest some topics we believe are of interest to STRUCTURE's readers. Then, please write and let us know if you want to author an article on these topics or another topic you feel strongly about.

- 1) **The personal experiences of engineers.** There is always a benefit in learning from the experiences of others, just like reading biographies. Some things stick, and some will not, but the engineers we hear from generally have long careers and can inspire others. We wish we would hear from more women because they undoubtedly have valuable experiences and perspectives to share. Also, do not shy away from writing about technical issues or your projects. Think of it as an easy way to build your personal brand or to advance within your firm by showcasing your work and your firm's expertise.
- 2) **The industry's current state, the firm's inner workings, professional relationships with managers, engagement in the firm, pay and benefits, respect, and racial and gender diversity in**



the workplace. Just because it has been done before does not mean it is the best or only way. There is often a valid reason that should be understood before moving in another direction. The industry developed in response to the world it was working within. When the world changes, the best firms change accordingly, particularly if they want to retain staff.

- 3) **The expansion of the building code and over-regulation.** The objection to code expansion is likely a push against what is perceived as an undemocratic process. When the code was smaller and engineers were closer to the writing process, I suspect they perceived some influence over the process. Today, codes are written nationally, and the influence of any individual engineer is greatly diminished. This process riles the group from the 60s and 70s, and their stance is a general rejection of the establishment. But what about the viewpoint of younger engineers?

The easiest way to start the process is to submit a one- or two-paragraph abstract on STRUCTURE's digital Author Intent form – an easy process. Visit STRUCTUREmag.org on the *For Authors* page. We hope to hear from you soon! ■



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