

***Civil Engineering Magazine - Discourse Community Analysis***  
**Daniel Sullivan**  
**June, 2009**

The *Civil Engineering* magazine is published by ASCE, the American Society of Civil Engineers. The journal is a compilation of research documents carried out by various companies and professional engineers (P.E.'s). Civil Engineering is perhaps the most respected and renowned CE magazine (as noted by its subtitle, "The Magazine of the American Society of Civil Engineers). It contains manuscripts concerned with civil engineering projects, news, and applications, as well as products, court decisions, ideas, analysis, and any other information that is pertinent to the civil engineering field. The main articles explain various events, issues, and projects that are currently being researched and implemented throughout the world. The magazine is not very technical in nature, but does provide in depth coverage of a broad range of CE disciplines, and projects within the disciplines (ASCE: Civil Engineering Magazine).

The purpose of the *Civil Engineering* magazine is to educate and inform mainly civil engineers, but also anyone interested in the projects and events that are ongoing in the field. Many of the articles in the journal discuss ongoing issues within municipalities, as well as new ideas or inventions, analysis of ongoing projects (time lines/project dates, progress, etc.), conceptual plans for future development, and an overall examination of civil engineering works. The journal accomplishes its goal of informing and educating the readers by providing comprehensive information about a wide variety of issues and programs while keeping the technical details to a minimum such that any educated person can understand the information at least to a certain extent (ASCE: Civil Engineering Magazine). Many of the articles in the journal include provisions for projects and guidelines for development, and can in this way help the reader to be more properly informed on the ever changing processes and requirements for civil engineering projects.

The *Civil Engineering* magazine is made for a very wide spectrum of readers. Any student or literate person could pick up the magazine and, after reading an article, have a solid understanding of the basis of the project. Technical information is generally not very specific, and can in turn be understood by most anyone. Since the journal is not free (and is quite expensive for non-ASCE members), it is very likely that most of the readers are in fact civil engineers. However, the authors dictate in such a way that most all persons would be able to understand. This results in an expansive network of readers, but also a wide range of impacted people who learn either directly or indirectly about the information within the magazine. Readers can selectively chose which articles will most interest them by the title and abstract of each article. This creates a collection of works that appeals to the masses, such that any one person can pick up the journal and skim through until they find something that interests them, or has an impact on their life. In this way, the Civil Engineering journal has a very wide audience base, and is directed/targeted towards the widest possible spectrum of persons.

The journal does not have one specific thesis that encompasses every article and document that goes into the compilation. However, many of the specific articles have internal theses that are directly related to the work summarized in the piece. Some of the articles do not have a thesis in the sense that the article is an analysis of a project, and is simply a summary of work that has been completed or will be done in the near future. For example, an article in the March 2009 edition explores the construction of tight-fit tunnels that are being dug and built in downtown Pittsburgh. The article details the work and the construction plans, as well as the positive results that will come with the completion of the system. However, the journal also contains articles that explore the needs of specific programs and

projects. These pieces generally have a thesis that either supports or rejects the need for certain CE projects. As an example (also in the Mar2009 edition), a letter to the editor investigates the need for spending on road and transportation infrastructure. Analytical pieces such as this one contain points of discussion in which the author creates a thesis, and then supports his/her argument. Each piece within the magazine differs in its intent. Some of the works have outlying theses and points which the authors work to make prevalent so that the readers will be persuaded to think as the authors do. However, some pieces are merely written as an update, or analysis of a project or program. In these cases, the thesis of the editorial is generally nonexistent; the writing explicates itself, and cannot be interpreted in many different ways as to require for a guiding thesis.

The *Civil Engineering* periodical can be characterized by the tone and style of a professor or instructor. Since the main objective of the journal is to inform and educate, the articles within the compilation are generally explanations and lessons on a variety of topics. The magazine works to include all ranges of CE disciplines, and in this way is a very general overview of projects within the field around the world. Each issue contains a combination of manuscripts and editorials or letters to the editor for a total of approximately 30 different articles. Generally the authors are P.E.'s or employed engineers that are writing on behalf of themselves, or for the company with which they work. Any civil engineer may submit an article or manuscript to the journal to be considered for publication, even if the author is not a member of ASCE. Since there is a high volume of submissions for a limited number of publications, articles must be applicable to a broad spectrum of civil engineers. Additionally, "ASCE publishes journal articles that demonstrate excellence in the quality of technical information and the clarity of expression" (ASCE: Journal Authors). Typically, each manuscript ranges from 4,000 to 12,000 words, with graphic illustrations or photos. The online version of the magazine offers a list of the articles, with the title and an abstract as well as any pictures that are included. The physical magazine offers a table of contents that includes titles, and short abstracts about each article. It is structured in such a way that makes it easiest for the reader to browse the magazine in attempt to find an article of interest.

The articles are not an exaltation of a company for its work on a project or development; they merely serve as an informative source for readers. Often times there will be articles that detail the plans and research efforts of certain municipalities, such as officials in San Francisco exploring a plan to ease congestion via tolling (Feb2009), or the Federal Government's investigation into high speed rail transportation systems (Feb2009). In every case, the work is compiled by numerous respected and renowned practicing engineers. The contributions are specifically informative and are consistently the same in their format, but vary on issues. The end result is a magazine that offers insight into a wide range of topics and issues on a comprehensible level such that most any literate person can develop an understanding of the intent of the article.

- 1) ASCE: Journal Authors. ASCE Publications, 2009 (Accessed 4/10/2009). <  
<http://ascelibrary.org/>>
- 2) ASCE: Civil Engineering Magazine. ASCE Publications, 2009 (Accessed 4/10/2009). <  
<http://ascelibrary.org/>>