How Do Committees Invent? and Ironies of Automation

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THE FORMULATION OF CONWAY'S LAW AND THE COUNTERINTUITIVE CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASING LEVELS OF AUTOMATION

The Lindy effect tells us that if a paper has been highly relevant for a long time, it's likely to continue being so for a long time to come as well. For this issue's selections I am going back to a couple of papers that have most definitely stood the test of time. The lessons they contain could continue to bear fruit for many more years.

My first choice, from 1968, is entitled "How Do Committees Invent?" This is the paper that gave us Conway's law, and while we all know that law today, author Melvin E. Conway provides a lot of great material that led up to the formulation of the law that bears his name. It's one of those wonderful papers that tends to give you fresh takeaways every time you come to it. It should be good for another 52 years, according to the Lindy effect ;).

For my second choice we go forward in time to 1983, with Lisanne Bainbridge's "Ironies of Automation." It's a classic treatise on the counterintuitive consequences of increasing levels of automation, and something oh-so-relevant to this forthcoming decade. Where will the experts be when we need them?

For the complete column, go to <https://queue.acm.org/TheMorningPaper/71>.

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