ESTABLISHING INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS (IMS) WITHIN PRINCIPAL CONTRACTING ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract
The Integrated Management System, or IMS, is seen increasingly as an effective way of handling the plethora of management functions and procedures that are conducted throughout construction projects. Quality, safety and environmental management are at the forefront of management systems innovation where the integration of these traditionally independent systems is expected to deliver a range of benefits through efficiency gains at both project and corporate organisational levels. Contracting organisations are implementing integration in different ways which makes potential benefits difficult to identify and share across the industry. This paper reports on a survey and detailed case studies conducted as part of the UK government-funded research project completed in 2004 which examined IMS developments. Involving 30 UK contracting organisations and collaboration with five companies at the leading-edge of management systems integration, the research provided evaluation of contractors’ experiences of management systems, perceptions of IMS, and suggestions for developing an IMS framework based on current best practices. IMS has the potential to create real benefits through delivering greater organisational and operational efficiency, effectiveness and improved performance. However, this paper also identifies that difficulties with implementation are not uncommon. The challenge is to overcome apparent difficulties and establish a generic IMS framework around which contractors can develop their approach. The findings presented in this paper can help principal contractors to become more aware of IMS generally and, specifically assist them with system development and implementation.

Keywords
Construction management, environment, health and safety, management systems, quality, standards.

INTRODUCTION

Previous papers (Griffith, 2002; Griffith and Bhutto, 2004) introduced, described and contextualised the concept of the Integrated Management System (IMS) as applied to construction. The aim of this paper is to add to the evolving knowledge base in IMS. The research presented in this paper is based on the findings of a Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE] sponsored PhD research programme examining IMS application by major UK contracting organisations (Bhutto, 2004). The paper reflects upon the experiences of contractors at the leading-edge of IMS developments within the UK. The findings examine current perceptions of management systems, experiences of IMS, and points the way forward with considerations and advice on developing a framework for IMS implementation within construction. The findings in this paper are relevant to many contracting organisations in the UK and to others worldwide who are embarking on IMS establishment.