BIM & AUTOMATED QUANTITIES – IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES FOR THE AUSTRALIAN QUANTITY SURVEYING PROFESSION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues related to the implementation of Building Information Modeling (BIM) and Automated Quantities technologies by the Australian Quantity Surveying profession. The paper is based on a review of current industry trends and issues with BIM implementation, detailed interviews with quantity surveying firms in Australia to evaluate how the profession is dealing with BIM implementation and a case study of a quantity surveying at the forefront of BIM implementation. Current industry procurement and technological trends clearly indicate that firms who are unable to re-engineer their work practices to evolve with these trends and technological advances will find it increasingly difficult to prosper. The literature review and interviews reveal that there are considerable implementation issues for not only the quantity surveying profession but the construction industry generally in Australia. The key problem relates to quality issues with BIM models – the industry requires high quality BIM models for all professionals to be able to use the model most effectively and, more importantly, trust the accuracy of the information and data that is being generated. Liability issues for incorrect information/data generated from the models were also highlighted as a major area that needs addressing. The paper concludes with a case study of a quantity surveying firm successfully engaging in and leading BIM development to demonstrate that these issues are not insurmountable.

Keywords: Building Information Modeling, Automated Quantities, Quantity Surveying.

PROFILE OF SPEAKER

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Peter is the Secretary General of the International Cost Engineering Council (ICEC) and is the Program Director of the Construction Project Management Programs at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). He has also run his own private QS consultancy practice since 1989. Peter has over 32 years experience as a QS practitioner and has a bachelors and masters degree in quantity surveying from the University of Technology Sydney and a PhD from the University of Sydney. He is a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (AIQS), a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and a corporate member of the Australian Institute of Building (AIB) and the Association for the Advancement of Cost Engineering International (AACE). He is regularly engaged as an expert witness in litigation cases involving construction disputes. He has published widely in the fields of international project cost management, quantity surveying, cost engineering, life cycle costing and housing affordability.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Building Information Modeling (BIM) on construction projects is gaining momentum around many parts of the globe. Whilst the technology underpinning BIM has been around for well over a decade BIM implementation and take-up has been relatively slow in the construction industry compared to industries such as manufacturing and engineering. This is starting to change as building proprietors and government entities increasingly become a driving force for the adoption of BIM by mandating its use on their projects and the technology and implementation issues continue to improve.

BIM and automated quantities technologies provide both enormous opportunities and challenges for the quantity surveying profession. As quantification increasingly becomes automated and BIM models develop the role of the quantity surveyor will need to adapt accordingly to provide more sophisticated cost management services that incorporate 4D time and 5D cost modelling and sharing cost information/data with the project team as part of the BIM integrated project delivery approach.

This paper will commence with a review of current BIM implementation trends and issues in the construction industry both within Australia and globally and will then focus on the issues for the quantity surveying profession in Australia. The latter will be based on detailed interviews with Australian Quantity Surveying firms. This will then be compared with a case study of innovative BIM approaches being used by a leading quantity surveying firm in the field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining BIM

A rudimentary issue is the high level of confusion in the industry about what BIM is and this is not helped by a wide variety of terminology used to describe it (Goucher 2013, Building Smart 2012, RICS 2013, Owen 2010). Building Smart, previously the International Alliance for Interoperability (IAI), continue to be one of the key industry leaders of BIM development over the past decade and have investigated the varying terminology being used. They have formed the following definitions:

'A Building Information Model is a 3D object database that can be easily visualised, has rich data and structured information. Building Information Modelling is a process of representing building and infrastructure over its whole life cycle from planning, design, construction, operations, maintenance and recycling. BIM importantly provides a framework for collaboration, a multi-disciplinary environment that brings together all the parties that design, construct and operate a facility, suggesting a new model of procurement Integrated Project Delivery (IPD)'. (Building Smart 2012, p. 7).

The RICS (2012) contend that BIM does not simply involve the use of new software/technology but rather that it requires a different way of thinking and a new approach to project procurement and delivery. Fundamental to this is the need to move from the traditional approach of project participants working on separate information pools typically with different and incompatible software technologies to a totally integrated common platform whereby participants can share and work on the same information – the BIM model is the primary tool for the whole project team.

BIM involves more than just 3D modelling and is also commonly defined in further dimensions such as 4D (time), 5D (cost) and even 6D (as-built operation). 4D links information and data in the 3D object model with project programming and scheduling data and facilitates the simulation analysis of construction activities. 5D integrates all of this information with cost data such as quantities, schedules and prices. 6D represents the as-built model that can then be used during the operational stages of the facility. Mitchell (2012) describes the importance for the quantity surveying profession to embrace the 5^{th} dimension and become key players in the BIM environment – the '5D Quantity Surveyor'.

Muzvimwe (2011) supports this notion and describes the value of the quantity surveyor in being able to simulate and explore various design and construction scenarios for the client in real time through having their cost data and quantities integrally linked in the live BIM model. This certainly raises the value of the quantity surveying service but is dependant on the quantity surveyor having BIM capability/expertise, sharing their cost data in the model and having the experience, expertise and intuition to analyse and critique the information that is being generated by the model.

The concept of Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) is now widely supported as being integral to the successful implementation of BIM. The American Institute of Architects define IPD as *'a project delivery approach that integrates people, systems, business structures and practices into a process that collaboratively harnesses the talents and insights of all participants to optimize project results, increase value to the owner, reduce waste, and maximize efficiency through all phases of design, fabrication, and construction'* (IAI 2007, p.2). BIM facilitates this by enabling far better and efficient information collaboration between project participants. IPD also incorporates the concepts of lean construction to increase productivity and efficiencies in the delivery process.

A study by Allen (2010) found that the adoption of BIM in collaboration with IPD delivery strategies could improve productivity in the Australian construction industry by 6-9%. CIFE (2007) analysed 32 major construction projects in the United States that used BIM and found the following returns on the investment in BIM: Cost Estimating accuracy within 3%, up to 40% elimination of unbudgeted change, savings of up to 10% of the contract value through clash detections, up to 80% reduction in time to generate cost estimates and up to 7% reduction project time.

Global BIM Implementation Trends

North America and the Scandinavian regions are generally regarded as the construction industry leaders in BIM development and implementation (Wong et al. 2009). McGraw Hill Construction (2013) found that BIM adoption by project team professionals in the North American industry had grown from 17% in 2007 to 71% in 2012 which demonstrates that BIM is now in the mainstream in the industry. This indicates that this region is leading the way on a global scale. A major catalyst for this dates back to 2003 when the General Services Administration (GSA) established a National 3D-4D-BIM program through its Public Buildings Service (PBS) Office. As a major public sector client with approximately 8700 buildings across the United States this program has had a tremendous influence on BIM adoption thus demonstrating the importance of major client and government leadership for the industry (Building Smart 2012).

Brown (2008) also found that there was a significant increase in support for BIM in the United States following the publication of two major reports by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) that measured the cost consequences of inadequate interoperability in the capital facilities sector of the US construction industry. They estimated the annual cost burden to US$15.8 billion.

The Scandinavian region also has a strong BIM development and implementation track record. Government mandates for the use of BIM on government projects have provided further impetus in countries such as Finland, Norway, and Denmark. The Finnish Government have invested heavily in IT research in the construction industry since the 1970s (Granholm 2011). They recently released a Universal BIM Guide for the industry which is being heavily supported. The Finnish public sector is the key driver in BIM adoption with Senate Properties, a major government entity with a property asset portfolio of approximately 6 billion Euros, a major leader requiring BIM on their projects and undertaking many pilot and research projects. Across the industry BIM is used on 20-30% of government projects with predictions that this will increase in the near future to 50% (Koppinen & Henttinen 2012). In Denmark the Danish Enterprise and Construction Authority established a Digital Construction Program in 2007 that has been implemented by major government entities. The program requires that BIM is used on all projects over 5.5 million Euros with information exchanged using the Industry Foundation Class (IFC) format. A number of reports and guidelines have been produced to assist firms in meeting these requirements (Building Smart 2012). In Norway Statsbygg is the Norwegian government's construction and project management representative and requires the use of BIM on all public projects. The Norwegian government is a strong supporter of BIM and invests heavily in research and development (Granholm 2011).

Singapore is also emerging as a world leader in BIM implementation. The Singapore Building and Construction Authority (BCA) have developed a strategy to have BIM widely implemented on public projects by 2015 (Granholm 2011). The government has also established a Construction Productivity and Capability Fund (CPCF) of S$250 million with BIM a key target. In 2000 the Construction and Real Estate Network (CORENET) program was established as a strategic initiative to drive transformation in the industry through the use of information technology. CORENET provides the infrastructure for the exchange of information amongst all project participants. The CORENET e-Plan Check system for development applications is a further initiative to encourage the industry to use BIM. The system enables architects and engineers to check their BIM designed buildings for regulatory compliance through an online 'gateway'. Singapore has adopted the Industry Foundation Classes (IFC) as the standard for BIM implementation (Building Smart 2012).

In the United Kingdom the government has introduced a BIM implementation strategy for the UK construction industry that is considered by many to be the most ambitious and advanced centrally driven BIM implementation program in the world (HM Government 2012). The objective is to transform the UK industry into a global BIM leader in a relatively short space of time (Withers 2012). In May 2011 the UK Government Construction Strategy was published which detailed the government's intention to require BIM on all of its projects by 2016 through a 5 year staged implementation plan. BIM is seen as central to the government's objective in achieving a 20% saving in procurement costs (Cabinet Office 2011). This strategy has had a dramatic impact on the UK industry as firms scramble to develop the necessary technological capabilities to meet these requirements. This strategy has the potential to influence BIM implementation on a wider global scale as other countries take note of these developments.

BIM Implementation by the Quantity Surveying Profession

The RICS (2011) undertook a survey of BIM usage by Quantity Surveyors in the United Kingdom and the United States which is likely to be the most comprehensive survey of its type around the world to date. The survey provides a snapshot of the level of BIM adoption by the quantity surveying profession and the issues encountered that may well be applicable to many other countries in which quantity surveyors operate.

The survey was sent to 8,500 RICS members in April 2011 asking about their firm's engagement with BIM with 298 responses from quantity surveyors (156) and building surveyors (96). The following outlines the key findings from the quantity surveyor responses.

Only 10% of QS firms used BIM regularly with a further 29% having limited engagement with BIM. Accordingly 61% of QS firms had no engagement with BIM. For the QSs that were using BIM the most frequent use was for construction scheduling (14%) followed by the extraction of quantities and facilities/asset management (both 8%). Only 4% of QS firms regularly invest in BIM training and only 10% actively assessing BIM tools for potential adoption (RICS 2011.

This indicates that the QS profession in this region is not embracing BIM to the level that is needed. However, given that the UK government mandate for BIM usage was introduced at the time of this survey it would be interesting to see what effect this has had on QS firms since then. The biggest barriers for QS firms adopting BIM were cited as the lack of client demand, training, application interfaces and standards.

BIM Implementation in Australia

In Australia BIM use in the construction industry is not currently widespread and there has not been any government mandates to use BIM on projects of any note. But the past five years has since interest in BIM adoption intensifying as a result of a number of initiatives to engage and inform project stakeholders about the potential productivity gains and gaining competitive advantage (CIBER 2012). These initiatives include the development of Australasian BIM guides such as the 'National BIM Guide' by the National Specification (NATSPEC), 'National Guidelines for Digital Modelling' by the Corporate Research Centre for Construction Innovation (CRC-CI), the 'Australian and New Zealand Revit Standards' (ANZRS) and the BIM-MEP[AUS] guidelines and models. The 'buildingSmart' organisation (previously called the International Alliance for Interoperability) continue to play a major leading role in BIM development and implementation in Australia that includes establishing an 'Open BIM Alliance of Australia' that involves an alliance with a number of software vendors to promote the concept of 'Open BIM' (CIBER 2012)

The CRC-CI 'National Building Guidelines for Digital Modelling' have received widespread industry support. They have produced the following BIM Integration Map that is widely cited both in Australia and internationally:

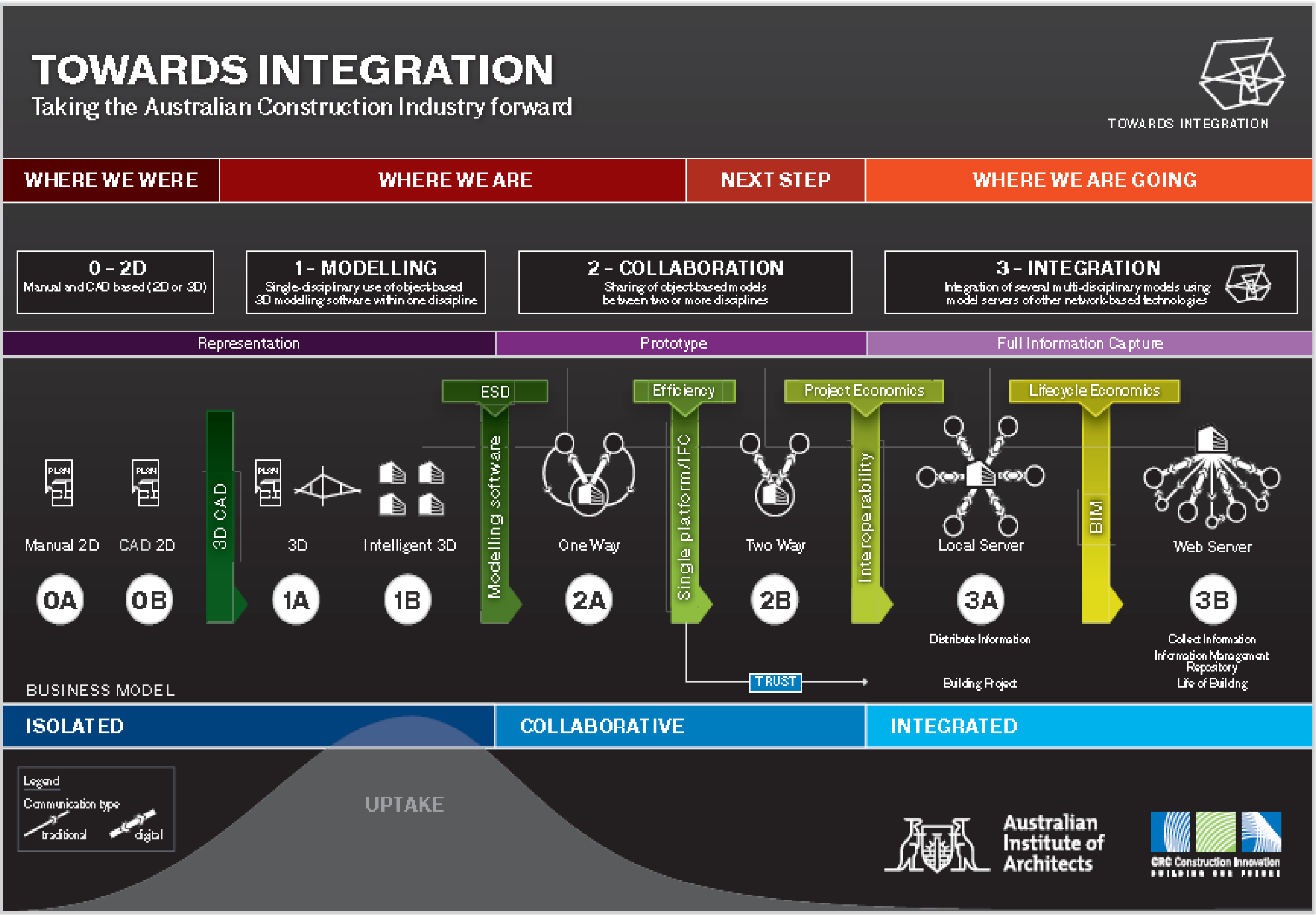

Figure 1: Australian BIM Integration Roadmap (CRC 2009, p. 13)

Figure 1 provides the 'road map' for implementation of BIM across the industry. It shows the initial stages of the movement from 2D CAD to 3D modelling with different disciplines increasingly working collaboratively. The initial stages take place in-house but then opportunities arise to integrate information from other consultants, contractors, sub-contractors and others who are working on the same project. The final stage is integration, with full information capture for the project (AIA 2010). Building Smart (2012) found that BIM implementation has accelerated markedly in Australia since 2008-09 due to a significant increase in the number of engineering firms adopting BIM thus facilitating multi-disciplinary BIM collaboration (as the larger architectural practices have been using BIM technologies since the late 1990s).

The main driver for BIM implementation is the potential economic benefits at both macro and micro levels. The business case for firms in the industry is becoming clearer and the economic benefits for government are increasingly being recognised.

BIM Implementation Issues In Australia

BIM implementation issues in Australia are not dissimilar to those experienced in other countries. The AIA (2010, p.2) highlight leadership as the key requirement. *'Leadership is required to move the AEC industry forward. Users of BIM are taking different approaches to solving the issues that are presented, and the resulting fragmented approach across the industry has made it difficult to capitalise on the considerable benefits of a coordinated approach based on trust, communication and commitment'*.

To this end government is widely cited as the key driving force for change and that leadership should stem from that level (CIBER 2012, AIA 2010). The AIA (2010) contend that the Australian federal government should provide the leadership to facilitate a coordinated approach across all state and territory boundaries.

In a major industry report titled the National Building Information Modelling Initiative, Building Smart (2012) developed key recommendations for BIM implementation which also serve to provide an excellent synopis of the main issues facing the industry. These recommendations focused on industry and government working together and comprised the following:

- An Australian government mandate should be developed that requires full 3D collaborative BIM based on open standards to be used on all Australian government projects by 1 July 2016
- Encourage all states and territories to do likewise though the Australian Council of Governments
- Implement the proposed 'National BIM Initiative Implementation Plan' comprising the following six programs:

  Procurement: develop procurement contract that support collaborative model –based procurement systems

  BIM Guidelines: develop a set of Australian BIM guidelines based on collaborative working, open standards and alignment with global best practice

  Education: deliver industry awareness and re-training programs through a national BIM education taskforce and develop multi-disciplinary BIM curriculum, vocational training and professional development

  Product Data and BIM Libraries: establish an Australian online BIM Products Library for easy access to certified product data for use in all types of model-based applications

  Process and Data Exchange: establish open standard data exchange protocols that will support collaboration and facilitate integration

  Regulatory Framework: establish a mechanism for planners, local government and government regulatory bodies with integrated data on building and services, land, geospatial and definition of human and related activities to measure and analyse performance of the built form

  Pilot Projects: encourage and support pilot projects to demonstrate and verify the readiness of the outputs from the six work programs

- Establish a taskforce with key stakeholder representation to manage a 5 year program for the delivery of the above (Building Smart 2012, p.4)

The AIA (2010) also emphasised the need for industry and professional associations to be more proactive and to help lead the many changes required in the industry. They developed a series of key recommendations for BIM implementation which also provide insight into the industry issues:

- Leadership and coordination across the industry with government mandates for BIM use and industry/professional association partnerships to work together
- Industry skills development with coordinated approaches to training
- Multi-disciplinary approaches to education with universities and colleges providing BIM courses across disciplines and faculties
- Software compatibility development
- Client BIM awareness and education strategies (AIA 2010, p. 12)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The literature review revealed that there has not been any current study carried out on the level of BIM adoption and implementation by the quantity surveying profession in Australia. Accordingly the research methodology adopted for this study was to undertake industry interviews with medium to large quantity surveying firms in Australia and to undertake a case study analysis of one quantity surveying firm that is providing innovative leadership in terms of BIM implementation.

The quantity surveying firms comprised three medium sized firms (10-20 employees) and three large firms (20 plus employees). All of the firms had affiliated offices in Australia but focus was placed on the quantity surveying services provided by the home office. The firms were located in NSW and Queensland. Four of the firms (the three large firms and one medium sized firm) had experience with the use of BIM and automated quantities whilst the other two firms had limited experience with automated quantities and no experience with BIM on their projects to date.

The interviews were conducted individually with experienced quantity surveying practitioners from each of the firms and involved general discussions on the benefits and issues surrounding BIM and automated quantities implementation. The interviews enabled a deeper interrogation and understanding of the issues than might be obtained via questionnaire surveys. The firms represented a good indicative sampling of medium and large sized firms in the Australian quantity surveying profession.

The interviews were complemented by an in-depth case study of a medium sized quantity surveying firm that is one of the leading QS proponents of BIM and automated quantities adoption with a reputation for leading edge innovative approaches.

RESEARCH RESULTS – INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

The interviewees were asked a range of questions relating to the issues, problems and benefits associated with the implementation of BIM and automated quantities. The following provides a summary of the main findings.

Automated Quantities

All of the firms interviewed used automated quantities software to prepare quantities on their projects. Four of the firms used this software extensively particularly in the cost planning stages whilst the other two firms used such software in a limited capacity. The firms used both proprietary and in-house software with the CostX program the most commonly used program. The CostX program is now the most widely used software of this type in Australia and is now used in over 40 countries around the world (Exactal 2013). The CostX program and the in-house programs were all capable of linking in with BIM models.

The firms all agreed that they were on the 'automated quantities' path and that this would continue to develop as their own expertise and the software improved. The main issue that they found was in the quality of the electronic documentation (be it 2D, 3D or BIM models). The quality of documentation is critical to the development of accurate quantities and this issue has existed long before the introduction of electronic documentation. In the traditional 2D paper based days interrogation of the drawings and queries to correct design and information errors and inconsistencies was a normal part of the measurement process. The firms stressed that nothing has changed in the new electronic environment. The documentation still needs to be checked for errors and inconsistencies.

The new problem though is that it is more difficult to check the documentation accuracy despite advances in clash detection in BIM models. In the 2D days measurers would spend days and weeks measuring and 'absorbing' the project information in great detail. In the electronic 3D environment far less time is spent measuring and 'absorbing' and understanding the documentation details. There is also a new breed of young quantity surveyors who don't have that solid fundamental training in 2D paper-based measurement and may lack the experience and expertise to identify problems in CAD/BIM models as they might have done in the 2D environment. This leads to the major problem of not trusting the automatic quantities produced due to quality issues with the model. Problems may also occur where quantity surveyors are not fully conversant with the automated quantities software. This requires experience, expertise and intuition to be able to identify problems with the quantities produced.

The firms only use automated quantities to the extent that is feasible – whilst ideally suited to cost planning measurement there are still limitations with more detailed measurement for Bills of Quantities, Builders Quantities and other detailed estimating requirements. Automatic quantities will also only reflect what is detailed in the model– the need to identify information and quantities not in the electronic model is critical. It is also of note that with all of the interviewed firms a considerable amount of measurement is still done via traditional means (i.e. not automated quantities) particularly with respect to detailed measurements for Bills of Quantities and Contract/Claims Administration. All firms saw automated quantities as a 'journey' as they evolve with the technology and use it where practical and useful. They all agreed that there has been a significant increase in the use of automated quantities over the past few years within their firms.

BIM Demand

Four of the firms have been involved with BIM on their projects albeit limited at this stage. Two of the firms have not been involved with BIM at all. The key reason cited for this limited use at this point is the lack of Client demand. The main inhibitor to greater use of BIM was that the majority of their clients and projects do not require the use of BIM. Even where BIM models are used the interviewees noted that it was not uncommon for their firms to provide their services outside the BIM model – in other words the BIM model was not used to its full potential. However all firms recognised the need for their firms to gain expertise in the use of BIM and to be able to market these capabilities to the market. All cited the developments in the UK where the government is mandating the use of BIM on their projects by 2016 as a wake-up call for the industry in Australia. All believed that BIM use was going to accelerate over the next few years particularly in the upper end of the construction industry market and on the larger infrastructure style projects. Opinion was divided on whether the Australian government would adopt a similar implementation strategy to the UK government.

However all interviewees felt that it was a different story for the middle to the lower end of the construction sector where the capacity to develop BIM capabilities is more difficult. The industry is dominated by small firms and reaching the supply chain throughout industry will take many years.

Quality of the BIM Model

As mentioned with automated quantities, all interviewees cited the quality of BIM models as their major concern. The use of BIM models require the input of vast amounts of interconnected data and information that is typically complex. Whilst BIM models have clash detection facilities there are limitations in terms of checking all information in the model. Clients also need to be prepared to invest in the proper development of a quality model – often the limitations are brought about by consultancy fees that are insufficient to develop the model to the level required. The concept of 'Rubbish In Rubbish Out' certainly holds true for BIM models. The liability for the use of inadequate or incorrect information in the model is also a major concern.

Business Changes

The move towards BIM capability and expertise requires quantity surveying firms to re-evaluate and re-engineer their business practices. The interviewees all agreed that this is nothing new for quantity surveying firms who have typically had to adapt and rebrand their services to meet the changing demands of clients and the industry generally. A trend has emerged whereby the larger quantity surveying firms are forming alliances with other firms to form global management consultancy practices that provide services well beyond the traditional domain of the quantity surveying practice.

Nevertheless the business impacts of moving to BIM and automated quantities are significant. Whilst the software and technology does require significant up-front investment the greatest cost lies in staff training and development. Whilst the aim is for this to reap benefits and competitive advantage in the longer term these development costs are significant particularly in the current climate where market activity in many sectors of Australia are at relatively low levels and fee cost-cutting amongst quantity surveyors and other construction professionals is common-place. Many firms have limited financial scope to invest in current and future digital technologies and capabilities. The added complication is that the technology is always evolving and the interviewees commented that a lot of time and expense can be spent on software and training with uncertain outcomes. The 'pioneering' path can be high risk as firms become 'test pilots' for certain technology whilst their competitors wait in the wings to see if the 'testing' will result in commercial value and competitive advantage. But all interviewees agreed that the 'wait and see' approach is no longer viable for firms that want to be key players in the construction market particularly at the top end.

Cultural business change is another challenge for firms - changing the mind-set of staff to embrace and evolve with this new technology. This is seen by many firms as the significant inhibitor to major change – the conservatism and inability to adapt by staff members. However the interviewees commented that they have noticed clear shifts in attitudes in the past couple of years as professional staff realise that if they do not evolve with this technology and develop expertise they will be left behind. The younger quantity surveying generation moving into the profession are more amenable to digital technologies and change and in many ways represent a threat to more senior personnel resistant to change.

The issue here raised by interviewees was whether this younger QS generation are moving too quickly with this technology without developing fundamental QS competencies and skills. Traditionally young quantity surveyors would spend much of their time physically measuring and 'absorbing' project details and documentation. The more progressive firms are now getting their young QSs to use automated quantities software immediately but there is a question of whether they are moving too fast and are not developing the analytical and checking skills and competencies required to evaluate and critique the information being automatically generated.

Lack of Standards/Software Incompatibility

All of the interviewees note that the lack of consistent standards and software incompatibility along the project supply chain remains an issue despite great improvements in recent years. Fully integrated project delivery with multi-disciplinary project teams working on a single integrated and compatible BIM model is essential for the optimal use of BIM. The scope for this currently remains limited. The use of BIM is generally considered to be currently more suited to larger projects with larger clients and contractors who have the scope to demand that all project participants have the necessary technological capability and compatible software. Even then two of the interviewees spoke of working on BIM projects but effectively working outside of the BIM model due to incompatibility issues in terms of not only software but also standards and practices. This is also compounded by key parties in the project supply chain not meeting the capabilities required. All agreed that these issues will continue to improve but nonetheless are critical for successful BIM implantation across the industry.

Sharing Cost Data Information

The full implementation of BIM on projects involves the sharing of information amongst project participants. A quantity surveying firm's cost databases provide the foundation for the quality and value of the services they provide and can provide significant competitive advantage. Accordingly the concept of sharing this cost data with the project team is still being addressed by firms. Interviewees all noted that this is an issue not easily resolved but agreed that as BIM becomes more mainstream over time this concept will become a reality for firms – either share their data or not be involved.

Legal/Contractual/Insurance Issues

The legal and contractual issues relating to BIM projects are still being addressed and create considerable uncertainty for BIM participants. The interviewees agreed that this needs to be resolved before the full collaborative potential of BIM can be realised. This starts with clearly establishing legal ownership of the model and legal responsibility for errors and problems with the model through the whole life cycle of the model. The uncertainty over legal liability is also creating issues for insurers in the industry which has obvious implications for firms providing services on BIM projects. This creates uncertainty over insurance coverage and may lead to insurance exclusion for BIM projects.

Overall

Overall the interviewees all agreed that the path to BIM is inevitable but the rate of adoption and implementation remains to be seen. At the moment it appears that BIM is more suited to larger projects where the project teams have the requisite capabilities. Government mandates to use BIM on public sector projects would certainly accelerate BIM implementation but the interviewees expressed concern over whether the industry is ready for this and that it could do more harm than good. Insolvency in the construction industry is at very high levels with a number of major Australian contractors going into liquidation and thousands of other smaller firms going into bankruptcy/liquidation. The reality is that a large number of firms simply do not have the financial capacity to invest in the future by developing BIM capability – many are struggling with short term survival. But longer term the potential for BIM and Integrated Project Delivery (IPD) processes to greatly improve production efficiencies and outputs in the industry may make this short term pain worthwhile.

RESEARCH RESULTS – CASE STUDY

The research interviews were then augmented by a case study analysis of the quantity surveying firm Mitchell Brandtman - one of the most innovative and progressive QS firms in Australia. The purpose of the case study is to demonstrate what is possible for the quantity surveying profession in the BIM and digital technologies fields and to highlight the visionary approaches being undertaken in relation to the role of the modern day quantity surveyor. This case study is based on correspondence with the firm's Managing Director, David Mitchell, and a variety of information published by the firm and David (Mitchell 2012, Mitchell 2013, Mitchell Brandtman 2013).

Background to Firm

Mitchell Brandtmann is a medium sized Quantity Surveying firm that was established in 1970. The main office is in Brisbane, Queensland with branches in NSW, Victoria, ACT and regional Queensland. The firm is well known for its innovative approaches particularly with respect to the use of Information Technology (IT). They are leading QS BIM specialists having been involved in the implementation and development of BIM for over a decade. They have a long history of Information Technology (IT) development having commenced their IT journey in 1981 with the objective of making their business practices more efficient and productive.

They first began utilising CAD systems in 1997 and soon began working on automated quantities generation testing a number of systems. In 2003 they moved to the CostX automated quantities software system and have been integrally involved in the development and use of this software ever since. This has coincided with extensive research and development in the BIM field to the point where they are one of the leading QS BIM proponents in Australia. This has escalated in the past few years with the firm entrenched in 5D Quantity Surveying BIM practice. They now have a dedicated 5D Team Digital Technologies Manager. The following will outline some of the leading edge and visionary practices and directions of the firm.

5D Quantity Surveyors

Mitchell Brandtman market their firm as '5D Quantity Surveyors and BIM Advocates and Specialists'. Mitchell (2012) contends that the modern day QS should be a 5D QS utilising electronic models to provide detailed 5D estimates and living cost plans in real time. Mitchell believes that the QS provides greatest value through their cost planning role at the conceptual front end stages of a project by providing cost advice and estimates on various design proposals and then refining those estimates as the design evolves. Using traditional 2D approaches this cost planning advice takes considerable time and inhibits rigorous comparative analysis within the allocated time frame for the design development process.

However Mitchell argues that the *'5D QS can do this extremely quickly, an endless number of times and in a complexity of combinations. A 5D QS can also re-estimate the developing design an endless number of times providing feedback on the estimate variances and corrective suggestions'* (Mitchell 2012, p.4). The ability to simulate a range of design options with real-time cost advice sets the 5D QS apart and arguably places them at the top of the 'value chain' for project clients. This is simply not possible with the traditional 2D QS due to their labour intensive approaches – numerous 'what if' simulation cost calculations would take far too long manually.

Mitchell (2012) refers to this as the 5D 'Living Cost Plan'. He argues that these modern techniques can be used within traditional frameworks but that it is the behaviour and how the technology is used that is more important than the software.

He considers the following three areas to be the key for a successful 5D QS:

Wisdom - that has been developed through years of providing cost planning advice, observing construction and working with 2D and 3D design technologies, databases and knowledge sharing frameworks.
Intelligence - this is collected and analysed via construction demand research, labour and material price research, as-built elemental building and civil cost analysis and functional performance measurement.
Technology Skills - that interface in two directions with 3D models and enable calculation of accurate quantities and creation of dynamic links between model information, rate libraries and estimate templates. The dynamic links allow estimates to be calculated and recalculated easily and quickly every time the model information is revised and this is fundamental to Living Cost Planning (Mitchell 2012, p.5).

Mitchell Brandtman (2013) provides the following graphical representation of the 5D cost planning process in Figure 2.

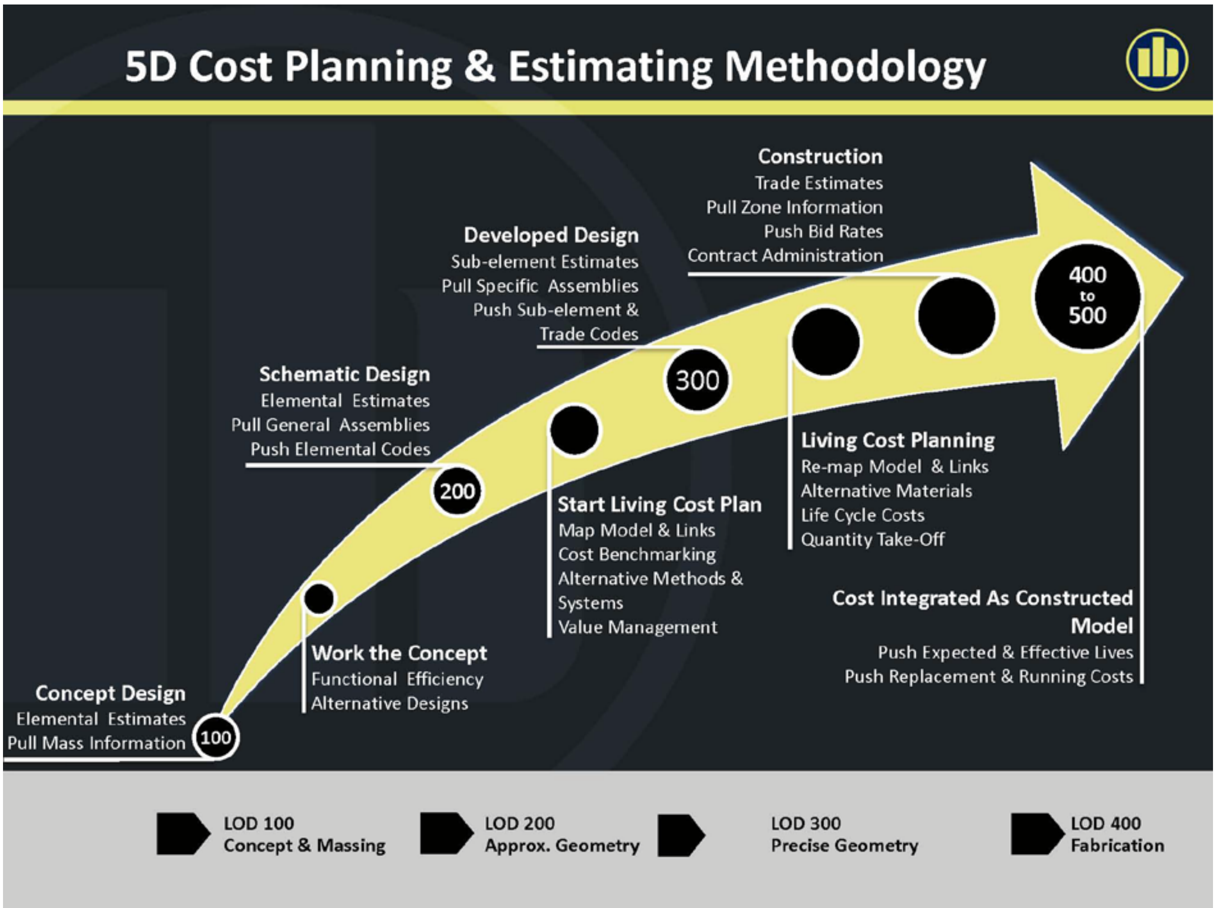

Figure 2 – 5D Cost Planning & Estimating Methodology (Mitchell 2013, p. 1)

The Initial Concept Estimate Stage (LOD 100) involves the development of a fast initial concept estimate working with the model using programs such as Sketchup, Revit or an IFC format. The 5D QS uses their experience to factor in items that are not included in the model. Elemental cost benchmarking is established and a variety of alternative design solutions and analysis of functional performance carried out with the 5D QS providing real-time cost advice.

The Schematic Design Stage (LOD 200) involves the 5D QS producing a schematic design estimate with dynamic links to model information thus forming the foundation for the 'living cost plan'. This provides the basis for providing updated estimates whenever information in the model is changed. Mitchell (2012) states that this can be used for *'forecast final cost, budget variances, value management, finance, funding, final investment decisions or in negotiations with a contractor'* (Mitchell 2012, p. 6)

The Developed Design Stage (LOD 300) involves the 5D QS working with the developed design model in Revit or IFC format and providing extra levels of costing details with the cost plan broken down into sub-elemental and trade categories. The model information will typically need to be supplemented with 2D on screen measurement as required. Coding systems are used to classify and categorise the information. During the construction stage the contractor's rates and prices can be included in the model and then form the basis for variations, change orders and claims.

The Cost Integrated Construction Model (LOD 400) emerges as the information in the model is revised for construction purposes culminating in the As-Built Cost Data and Facilities Management (LOD 500) stage. This requires validation and synchronisation between the as-built model and the Facility Management requirements with cost data refined and adapted by the 5D QS.

Mitchell states that *'instead of spending 90% of the available QS time calculating quantities, an experienced 5D QS spends the majority of QS time applying wisdom and intelligence to generate savings and efficiencies. Once the model is established it is leveraged to calculate and recalculate costs extremely fast for different scenarios and alternative materials. 5D BIM provides the ability to drive costs for buildings, infrastructure, heavy engineering or land development in the direction that is wanted'* (Mitchell 2012, p.9).

BIM Execution Plan (BEP) Cube

Mitchell Brandtman have developed a BIM Execution Plan (BEP) cube to illustrate the requirements for effective BIM implementation. It involves the Project Phase (Process), Collaboration (Behaviour) and Level of Development (Technology) and is shown in Figure 3.

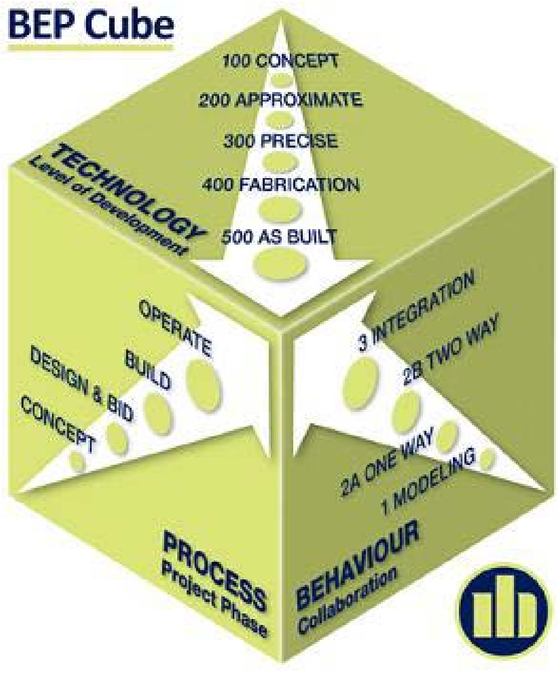

Figure 3 – BIM Execution Plan (Mitchell 2012, p. 3)

They provide the following explanation for the plan. *'When the desired project outcome is positioned on each of these scales the project team is more focused and achieves a high level of clarity about the important information to be included in the BIM. We have learnt that the best approach is to serve the right information, to the right people at the right time. When this isn't done the information can just become clutter. This is the issue at the core of the future development of BIM ie. one single integrated model versus a "federated model" comprising a collection of models. The three scales of process, behaviour and technology need to mature to better push and pull information effectively'* (Mitchell Brandtman 2013, p.1)

Core Competencies

Whilst these innovative approaches are the hallmark of the firm, Mitchell contends that all of this is useless, and in many cases counterproductive, if staff do not have sufficient expertise in the core competencies of the QS profession. Developing competencies in construction knowledge, site experience, documentation understanding, measurement knowledge and other core quantity surveying knowledge areas are as important as they ever were.

CONCLUSION

The innovative approaches to BIM and automated quantities implementation by firms such as Mitchell Brandtman are perhaps too far ahead for many in the profession/industry who have yet to venture down this path in any meaningful form. For these firms, fundamental shifts in their business practices are required and this all takes time to develop. However, the competitive advantages already being realised by firms such as Mitchell Brandtman are likely to provide more of a catalyst for change in the profession than anything else. The longer firms delay their entry into the BIM and automated quantities world the further other firms with these capabilities will progress and add to their competitive advantage. The strategies taken by these firms to embrace these technological tools and adapt their business practices accordingly provide considerable inspiration and assistance for not only other quantity surveyor firms but for the profession generally in Australia.

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