MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INTEGRATED PROJECT DATABASES

RECEIVED: July 2001.
REVISED: September 2001
PUBLISHED: September 2001 at http://itcon.org/2001/5/
EDITOR: B-C Björk

Robert Amor, Dr.
Department of Computer Science, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand.
email: trebor@cs.auckland.ac.nz

Ihsan Faraj, Dr.
Department of Business Information Technology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK.
email: i.faraj@mmu.ac.uk

SUMMARY: *The notion of an integrated project database (IPDB) has existed for decades. Over that time many projects have been undertaken to develop the technologies and frameworks required to implement an IPDB. Also over that time, there has been promotion of the benefits and impacts that IPDB systems will have on the industry. As there are still no industrially stable IPDB systems in existence, the industry's perception of what they are and what they can do has diverged from many of the original presentations. It is also clear that researchers and developers involved in IPDB development have many different ideas about what constitutes an IPDB and what is, or is not, possible to create. This paper aims to describe misconceptions which are growing up around IPDB systems, and presents the authors' view of reality (informed by the opinions of the UK network of experts in objects and integration (URL-1 1999) which was run by the DETR).*

KEYWORDS: *integrated project database, misconception.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to promote discussion on what is, and is not, possible with an Integrated Project Database (IPDB) with an attempt to draw out a consensus and common understanding for those who work in the area. With the concept of an IPDB promoted for the industry at top levels (e.g., Egan 1998) there are many new people coming into the area. The authors' perception is that this is also leading to a plethora of views and standpoints, not all of which reflect the reality of historic IPDB research and development.

In this paper the authors raise a number of ideas and issues where they believe there are misconceptions. A short case is argued for each of these. The authors are aware that they may have their own misconceptions about the area, and there may be important points missed from this list. This paper has developed from an earlier discussion paper that was circulated within the UK network of experts in objects and integration (URL-1 1999).

1.1 Definition of an IPDB

As a starting point let us consider the scope of what is encompassed by an IPDB. The description and definition of an IPDB that comprises this sub-section is taken from Anumba and Amor (1999).

There are several views within the construction industry and the research community on what constitutes an integrated project database (which is also sometimes referred to as the shared construction project model). Some see it simply as an amorphous collection of all the information relating to a project, irrespective of the storage medium (people's heads, paper drawings and specifications, CAD files, etc.) or the method of dissemination of the project information. Others see it in terms of a single database which holds all the information on a project and which is accessible to all members of the project team. Yet others view the integrated project database as an integration of product models (which hold information relating to the building product) and process models (which hold information regarding the construction and business processes required to translate the product information into a constructed facility). These different perspectives are reflected in some of the following definitions:

- Gann et al. (1996) 'a single project database is an electronic data model to which all participants refer throughout the processes of design, construction, operation and maintenance'
- Björk and Penttilä (1989) 'project models are conceptual structures specifying what kind of information is used to describe buildings and how such information is structured'
- Fisher et al. (1997) 'project modelling is object modelling applied to a project and including more information than just geometry'

Although the concept of an integrated project database may be difficult to define precisely, the above definitions focus too much on the data representation aspects and thus, are neither wholly accurate nor comprehensive. Greater insight into what constitutes an integrated project database can be gleaned from its requirements and characteristics.

1.1.1 Attributes, Requirements and Characteristics

Several attributes, requirements and characteristics have been associated with the integrated project database. Many of these are reflective of the individual perspectives and biases of the authors whilst others are more robust and generic. There are also those that constitute no more than a wish list.

Anumba et al. (1997a and 1997b) see the shared construction project model or integrated project database as central to concurrent engineering in construction and vital for facilitating effective communications between project team members and between stages in the project lifecycle. They suggest that, as a minimum, it should support the following:

- individual discipline interactions with the central model;
- heterogeneous intra-discipline tools;
- configuration management;
- perpetuation of design intent and rationale across stages in the project lifecycle;
- emerging standards for information representation, interchange and interoperability;
- integration with a robust and multi-faceted project communications infrastructure;
- enhanced visualisation of design and construction processes based on multimedia, virtual and mixed reality, simulations, video, etc.
- an open architecture to facilitate extensions and customisation to suit individual project and team requirements.

Similar views on attributes, requirements, and characteristics are promoted by Construct IT (1996), Fischer and Froese (1992), Froese et al. (1996), Arnold and Teicholz (1996), Law and Krishnamurthy (1996), and Gadient et al. (1996).

These attributes, requirements and characteristics of a shared construction project model or integrated project database extend the definitions provided earlier well beyond the scope of just data modelling. They are reflective of the huge potential that many in the construction industry (researchers and practitioners alike) think is embodied within the concept of the integrated project database. Some of the general approaches being employed in the development of the integrated project database are summarised below.

1.1.2 Approaches to Development

Although there is a consensus that an integrated construction project database is highly desirable for computer-integrated construction, there is far less agreement on what form it should take. This was alluded to in the discussion of definitions of the term, 'project model' or 'integrated project database'. It is also reflected in the approaches that have been proposed or adopted so far in the development of the model. Some of these approaches are briefly summarised here with references, where appropriate, to prototypes.

1) Project Model as Reference Model - This is the approach that many practitioners seem to favour. This is based on having a 3D CAD or Virtual Reality (VR) model, which simply acts as a common

reference model for the project team. In this case, the model does not necessarily hold all project information but acts as a gateway to it.

2) Centralised Project Database - This approach involves the use of a single centralised database to which all members of the project team have controlled access. The main difficulty with this approach is that the database can become very large and unwieldy with consequent maintenance and information retrieval difficulties, particularly in a multi-user environment. This approach also raises issues of ownership and control of the centralised data. This approach includes current systems that contain only project documents (Document Management Systems) such as Buzzsaw, Columbus, Cadweb, etc.

3) Distributed Project Database - In this approach, there is no single repository. Rather, aspects of the project database (such as those produced by each discipline) are held at various locations and accessed via a common, standard interface (such as CORBA or DCOM). This approach requires that the different applications support the standard interface, but is potentially very effective. Conceptually this approach is identical to that described in 2). However, the impact on ownership rights and current business models are such that a distributed system is seen as distinct from 2) above.

4) Neutral Format Project Database - A neutral format database is the core of this approach which requires that individual applications transfer information to a central project database in a neutral (e.g., STEP-based) format which can be read by other applications. This has the potential for facilitating multi-lateral information interchange but requires that all applications have pre- and post-processors for effecting the bi-directional transfer of information (or mapping of information from their bespoke viewpoint). There is potential for the loss of data integrity and semantics in this approach. Currently, the neutral standards required for this approach are not developed to an extent that makes it commercially feasible (Eastman and Augenbroe 1998).

5) Proprietary Approaches - In addition to the above generic approaches, there have been a number of proprietary developments which embody some features of the above. A couple of these will be given a brief mention. Fischer and Froese (1992) propose an object-oriented system called OPIS that provides for integration of a product model, a process model, a resource model and an organisation model. It also allows for objects to be classified as either project-specific or project-independent. Tah et al. (1997) describe a concurrent engineering environment for integrated design and construction which links CAD and project management applications using a central object-oriented database management system and Microsoft's OLE/COM distributed computing standards. A developing commercial system of this type is Bentley's ProjectBank (Aish 2000, Bentley 2001) service.

Currently, the commercial route towards an IPDB is embodied in the commercial success of (Internet-based) document management systems as described in 2) above. The evolutionary path from these current systems to a more data centric approach (as in 4) above) is not clearly defined or understood.

2. MISCONCEPTIONS

With an understanding of what may constitute an IPDB this section looks at a series of misconceptions which have grown up around IPDB development.

2.1 OO provides the complete solution

The fad of the moment is objects. Object technology has been embraced in almost every area of IT and construction. This ranges from object-oriented modelling (e.g., UML, EXPRESS-G), to object-oriented programming languages (e.g., C++, Java), through to object-based CAD systems (e.g., ArchiCAD, AutoCAD Architectural Desktop, ProReflex, MicroStation TriForma, etc). The appeal is easy to see, analogous to Minsky's frames (Minsky 1975), objects are intuitive to specialists and non-specialists alike. For example, in contrast to relational representations, where there is a formal underpinning which requires specialist knowledge to utilise (e.g., 3rd normal form), object-oriented representations require no rigorous analysis to apply. This means that object-based systems can more easily model a user's view of the world (a major criticism of relational systems whose requirements often render a user's view incomprehensible), however, it also means that object-based systems are more likely to contain inconsistencies and redundancies.

The majority of construction IT work is not object-oriented in the sense understood in computer science, it is more object-based (in that abstractions to object level representations are supported, e.g., wall, column, window, etc) but the more powerful notions of reuse, functionality, inheritance, etc are poorly supported. In the computer-science arena it is recognised that objects are just one of a set of approaches which form the toolkit required to solve problems, and many research projects have been initiated to find the successor paradigms to objects. This is in recognition of some of the problems associated with objects, and these are worth considering in the construction IT area. Major problems include the following:

- Object-oriented modelling and programming is not well suited to very large systems. This should be of serious concern to the construction industry's modellers as construction models are arguably some of the largest and most complex models which have ever been developed. The main problem here is that object-based systems are well suited to micro-level specification, but have few constructs which enable a macro-level specification to be managed. Those who have worked with large object-based models will recognise this problem (e.g., understanding ISO-STEP (ISO/TC184 1993) or IAI-IFC (IAI 2001) models with two to three hundred object definitions), even where higher level graphical representations are employed (e.g., EXPRESS-G).
- Object-oriented systems are not easy to validate. It is not easy to show that an object-oriented model is consistent and non-redundant. This is due to the paradigm having no underlying formalism, unlike relational systems where, when the steps are followed, it is possible to guarantee that there is no duplicate or inconsistent information in the model, and that changes will never cause inconsistencies. It is also not easy to test (or prove) that an object-based system works correctly. This is mostly due to the method paradigm for describing the functionality of an object. For example, as public methods can be invoked by any object, it is very difficult to show that a large object-based system will work correctly under all circumstances.

The main point here is that object-oriented modelling and systems are not a panacea for the construction industry. While they offer a range of tools and systems which provide great benefits for construction, they also bring problems to the table. The industry needs to recognise that object-based approaches are not inherently better than non-object-based approaches, and that object-based systems are not guaranteed to be better than non-object-based systems.

2.2 The single data model will appear

This idea, which is intoxicating in its naivety, seems to be raised by everyone new to this field. Indeed, august organisations such as ISO initially promulgated this idea when they started working on the STEP data models in the 1970's. History has consistently shown this to be impossible for complex domains and it is frustrating to have to reiterate the problems with, and arguments against, a single data model with every new generation of modellers in this area. There are publications and books around this topic (e.g., Eastman 1999; Brandon and Betts 1995; Eastman and Augenbroe 1998) and it would behoove new researchers to study previous work to gain a proper understanding of the problems. Summarised, there are several issues which make a single data model improbable:

- A major issue in developing a single data model for the built environment is the scope this embraces. When one starts mapping out the various axes of this area it becomes clear that a single data model would have to encompass an enormous range of information; for example, requirements of clients, architects, engineers, constructors, facility managers, renovators, and demolition specialists, along with sub-domains such as landscape architecture or civil engineering. There is even major overlap with other industries, for example, ship building and aeronautical for structures, HVAC, wiring, etc where there are existing data models.
- Following on from the point above is the number of objects that would need to be modelled for such a data model. Current views are that two to three hundred objects in a data model are not easily manageable (the CIS/2 model (CIMsteel 1995) is seen as a likely upper-limit on the size of

model which can be handled). A single data model would have tens of thousands of objects to describe, with complex inter-relationships between one another.

- Another major issue related to the domains involved is how the differing views would be reconciled. For example, the world view of an architect (and hence the model they would require) is very different from that of a structural engineer, or a quantity surveyor. Even if a single model could be created for each domain (and this is not thought to be feasible) it would not be possible to merge all views into a single coherent whole (see Section 2.4).

2.3 We represent reality

Some people believe, in a similar way to the notion outlined in Section 2.2, that it is possible to completely model reality. It is clear that a data model is an approximation of reality, or some conceptual notion; for example, space and zone. The effort that would be required to model the full range of attributes of any single object utilised in construction is beyond the effort available for simple objects (e.g., a nail), and representationally impossible for more complex objects (e.g., a door or chair). Simply put, it is impossible to model all the designed combinations of the majority of objects. This means that every model that is generated is only capable of representing a portion of the possible structures that could be created. For those interested in how complex this can be there is an excellent data model developed in the EC-funded ATLAS project which, despite its prodigious size, represents a small percentage of the door types which exist in this world (ATLAS 1993).

There are few rigorous approaches to tackling this problem. For example, in the IAI every model is developed for a closely defined set of processes in the industry. This helps draw the bounds around what needs to be modelled, but does not help in the final decision of what range of a particular object should be modelled (e.g., 80% of what is used in the world; at least all of the products of the manufacturers involved in defining the standard, etc), and who validates this, or how it is validated. Arbitrary decisions, which have a major impact on representational scope and are hard to document, are constantly made as a model is specified. When creating a model there are three aspects of modelling which are used to ensure a larger set of possible representations. These are:

- Structural specifications which define a particular type of object fairly abstractly and then have more detailed specialisations based upon them (e.g., door with sliding, revolving, etc specialisations). This also allows the major components of an object to be identified and modelled independently, for example with a door having its frame, hinges, handle, lock, and inserts. The structural specification provides the most information about the object in terms of explicitly representing the major aspects, but provides the greatest difficulty in providing enough structure to cover all possibilities (e.g., all structures which can be doors).
- Functional specifications allow the modeller to define what an object does rather than the structures and components which makes it possible. This is a less detailed, but more general method of providing a model with information about the utility of an object. For example, that a door allows egress and ingress for a space and the parameters of the possible movement.
- Graphical specifications which, if general enough, allow any permutation of a structure to be represented graphically. This provides no machine understandable structuring for an object (e.g., not possible to infer that the fire resistance is 2.5 hours), but allows every possible type to be represented in a way that can be comprehended by a human user. Herein lies the dilemma: we can represent everything if we have dumb graphics, but can not do anything intelligent without the structural and functional specifications which can never be comprehensive.

2.4 User views are reconcilable

This is a view which is proffered in many modelling areas; the assumption seems to be that because professionals are able to communicate and understand each other, then their views are obviously reconcilable. This view is closely related to issues in Section 2.2 and 2.5 where a parallel is drawn from human comprehension to computer-based models and systems. However, the basis for this association is unclear.

The authors' contention is that different professionals' perspectives of a system are often irreconcilable. The only reason that the utterances of different professionals are understood and lead to a single view of a construct is through the application of considerable human intellect and experience to understanding them. To reconcile formalised models of two different professionals' world view would require a greater application of artificial intelligence than is currently possible; let alone to meld two models into one and still represent both of those world views. An analogous problem of similar complexity is language translation. It is clear that two humans who know part of the other's language can communicate and reach an understanding. However, despite many years of intense research, it is still not possible to completely represent different languages in computerised form, let alone translate between them consistently, let alone have a single common representation which covers the complexities of both languages.

Two concrete examples of the types of views which cause problems are described below. One is the difference between a space-based view of a structure versus a component-based view (e.g., walls, floors, etc to enclose a volume). The models to represent these two views are structurally very different and hard to reconcile without loss of detail from one of the views. Another, an example of aggregate versus component views, is where one professional would consider a series of walls which are vertically aligned as individual components, the second would view this as a single element (e.g., a structural wall).

Many projects look at reconciling the views of their respective users and tools. However, it is clear that, except in trivial cases, the reconciled views can not be complete, i.e., there is not a total mapping between the scope of the views. As in section 2.3 this leads to a problem in specifying how much of the individual views has been reconciled (i.e., what has been missed or was not possible to fully reconcile).

2.5 Mapping is easy

There are many who proffer a view that once two data models exist it is then a relatively straightforward process to provide a mapping between them. This unfortunately is not the case. Because construction encompasses a number of inter-disciplinary domains and work efforts, a major study must be undertaken to know what has been done and what can't be done. There are many examples of very simple mappings which are not possible to perform; the majority in the category of aggregate to component views. For example, a U-value is a concept well understood by certain professionals and used consistently in their domains. However, in other domains there is a requirement for greater detail than offered by a U-value, and the equivalent representation of thickness, capacitance, and resistance is utilised. It is impossible to map automatically from a U-value to thickness, resistance, and capacitance.

Even if such simple mappings did not trip up the mapping process, there is a difficulty in providing bi-directional mappings between models (Amor 1997). In relational systems there is a concept of a view which is utilised to provide different representations of an underlying model (analogous to a one-way mapping). However, the view mechanism is only bi-directional under very tightly constrained conditions. This is due to the great difficulty that exists in being able to describe a mapping which can work equivalently in both directions. The best solution would be if the same mapping code could be run in both directions. Anyone conversant with procedural programming will understand that this is not feasible. So, to create a bi-directional mapping, it is necessary to write two sets of mappings, one for each direction. This approach makes it impossible to prove that the two mappings are equivalent, and hence whether moving information from one view to another, and then back again, will preserve the information that existed in the first place. This must be a serious concern to all attempts to create a collaborative work environment around an IPDB. While standardised mapping languages are being developed (EXPRESS-X (ISO/NWI 2000)), novel (incremental and just-in-time) mapping approaches trialled (e.g., Eastman et al. 1997), and projects are developing bespoke mappings for their users and design tools, it is clear that these mappings are asymmetrical in nature and semantically incomplete in their specification.

2.6 The Internet solves the communication problem

The Internet is assumed to be able to solve all communication problems existing between dispersed project partners. While it is indeed becoming a ubiquitous transfer mechanism, the control offered by the Internet is still quite simple in comparison to the requirements of collaborative construction projects. As the Internet does not have a session-based protocol (Gutzmann 2001), or centralised management, many collaborative tasks are harder to manage. For example, the Internet does not support identification of who is working on a particular resource (e.g., a document) at any one time, or to work out when the resource is available for another project participant to work on. Another example is the openness of the Internet, which allows anyone to communicate with whomever they wish; whilst this makes it very easy to interact with others, it does not enforce the centralised management and registering protocols which are liability management requirements for many firms. It is recognised that these are mostly process management issues. However, it must be realised that the Internet does not currently offer solutions to enforcing good practice for collaborative working.

2.7 XML solves the representation problem

If you listen to the marketing, XML (eXtensible Markup Language) is the hottest new technology, with everyone jumping on the bandwagon. However, all it really provides is another (albeit Internet-based and extensible) method of coding data, and one which has less representational capability than current ISO methods. The STEP physical file format (ISO-STEP Part 21 (ISO/TC184 1994)) is a comparable (though not Internet-based) notation. In order to be usable for construction, it is still necessary to have an agreed standard data model (e.g., ISO-STEP or IAI-IFC). There are major initiatives to develop the data models for construction in this area, including ifcXML (based on the IAI-IFC data model), bcXML, and aecXML (initiated by Bentley and now incorporated into IAI developments). However, a generally accepted XML vocabulary has not emerged to date, and the restrictions on single data models described in section 2.2 will still apply to XML-based vocabularies.

A widely adopted and comprehensive XML schema for the architecture, engineering, and construction (A/E/C) domains could greatly benefit the construction industry. It could play a major role in the future development of software applications, in particular how information is coded, represented, accessed, queried, shared, and exchanged on the Internet. It would certainly reduce the entry cost for organisations wishing to exchange information in a structured format, with standard XML tools appearing in many office automation systems, e.g., Microsoft products. This is likely to be a benefit for the whole industry irrespective of developments in building representation. XML technologies are exciting compared with the high cost and complexity of implementing interfaces to products for the ISO and IAI standard formats. However, until agreed data representations are available and utilised all of these potentials are not achievable.

2.8 Documents will disappear

IPDB systems will not cover the whole project cycle, from inception to demolition, in the foreseeable future. Further, construction projects involve a large number of participants with varying capabilities which range from a one person company to multinational organisations, which makes it difficult to assume that everyone has the same capability to work and share information electronically.

Many information systems have been developed; the intended benefit is to cut down the time and cost associated with exchanging information between the project teams and members through a paperless link between the remote offices. Our observation shows that although a large amount of the information is generated electronically, they are printed on paper to be processed by other members of the team, or re-keyed into another system. Although this process adds no value to a project, is time consuming, and makes the management of information difficult as the same data exists in more than one form, many find it necessary. For example, site engineers carry a paper copy of the design around the site with their notes upon it. These notes are considered important to the individuals. Subsequent electronic updates to the design necessitate the need for the updated copy of the design to be reprinted, which may cause loss of information.

A report by Barbour (1999) states that “project information is recorded on a mix of paper and electronic media, with paper still being the predominant medium. Incompatibility of systems, varying levels of IT adoption and concerns about contract and legal issues are given as factors limiting greater usage of electronic media”. Further, a survey reported in the same document (Barbour 1999) shows that 71% prefer paper-based sources as the means of delivering information.

Although developing data models have the potential to support a large subset of the project lifecycle, not all the documents are, or can be, derived from a data model e.g., contracts for a project or site instructions.

2.9 CAD is the centre of an IPDB

A common assumption is that a CAD system will be the centre of an IPDB. This is certainly promulgated by CAD developers in their marketing strategy (e.g., Autodesk, Graphisoft, Bentley, etc), through new offerings of their CAD tools (e.g., with IFC exchange capability), and in their adjunct products (e.g., ProjectBank). So whilst data sharing and exchange in an integrated computer environment can be achieved through a project model inside a CAD system, this is not a necessity. This project model can reside anywhere, it could be distributed across a range of systems, each supporting a portion of the project data and, perhaps, each owned and controlled by a different player in the process. This distributed and open model is more closely aligned with practice in the industry. For example, Augenbroe et al. (1998) in their analysis of difficulties associated with the implementation of CAD models states that "A rigid 'one size fits all' product/process model has not been proven to work".

2.10 IPDB solves information ownership problems

Many of the legal implications of exchanging and sharing project data between partners need to be clarified in order for an IPDB to be assimilated into current processes. In the construction industry, the ownership of and liability for data, as well as the way projects are managed, impose restrictions on how, what, and when data should be exchanged. It is within this context that other components must be added to the integrated environment. Howes (2000) puts the legal ownership of data as a major obstacle in the uptake of IT in the construction industry.

The issues of private and public data should be considered in order to ease and control the exchange of data between the different disciplines. Data which are required by other disciplines to effectively fulfil their roles must be made available as and when required. These are referred to as 'public data', while data which are confidential and not necessarily required by other disciplines are known as 'private data'. This distinction between data is important in addressing the problem of liability and ownership within organisations. Data become public only when they are formally released by an organisation. This situation is similar to the practice of posting out documents to other disciplines. In such a case the data will be marked according to their released version, status, and date.

Current data models contain few mechanisms for distinguishing between ownership and use of data. These are similar concepts: both convey a variety of privileges, from read and query access to creation and modification rights. However, ownership refers to the right to determine these privileges for others. If the liability issues are to be resolved, mechanisms (probably contractual) must be implemented that impose control over the data, and ensure that these issues are managed in an agreed manner.

2.11 IPDBs guarantee co-ordinated and consistent information

One of the major arguments for an IPDB is that it allows collaboration with guarantees of co-ordinated and consistent information across the whole project. Computer supported collaborative work (CSCW) is an active area of research, and hence the level at which consistency and co-ordination can be managed is still developing. Currently, it is hard to ascertain what level of collaboration will be supported in an IPDB, at what cost to a project and its processes. Issues still being addressed include:

- Data access: How to define who should access certain data and at what stage of the project lifecycle; who should be responsible to assign such privileges, and how are they specified and managed.
- Data change: How to define who can change the data and who should be notified; whether notification should be sent out, even if irrelevant parts of the data are changed; who should decide which are the relevant parts of the data.
- Database locking and transactions: How to control what happens when more than one person works on the same set of data. Some activities require a team member to work continuously for a long period; as a consequence the database will be locked for the duration, resulting in the other team members being unable to access the data. Beetz et al. (1998) state that current technology gives only little, or no support at all, to parallel work even within one A/E/C application. They argue that file locking mechanisms force designers to split their work topologically e.g., into building sections or storeys. This mostly is in contradiction with the division of work that is more task oriented. ProjectBank (Bentley 2001) provides an indication of what commercial offerings can support in this area.
- Data partitioning and integrity: How to define whether users can retrieve and save only part of the instances of the model, or whether they must retrieve or save the whole model every time an alteration is performed. For example, if two designers are working on the same project, this deter-

mines whether the first designer can work on his/her part of the design without affecting the other designer's data. Beetz et al. (1998) argue that today's software applications do not provide enough support to ensure consistency between the different parts of the data model.

To date, the authors are not aware of any IPDB system that fully addresses all these issues. However, many projects have examined these issues to some extent. For example, COMMIT (Brown et al. 1996); WISPER (Faraj et al. 2000); ToCEE (Amor et al. 1997); various CIFE projects (Fruchter 1998); and Phase(X) (Schmitt 1998).

2.12 The industry is ready for IPDBs

An implicit assumption in many IPDB research projects is that industry is ready and waiting for IPDBs. However, effective implementation of large IT systems, such as integrated environments, require a substantial process and culture change. This is likely to produce a new set of business processes, which could have a significant impact on organisational structure and current practices. It is therefore important that construction organisations first of all ensure that any significant departures from traditional practices which are essential for achieving the business objectives are implemented in well-measured stages.

Many prototypes have been developed as a proof-of-concept and tested on small projects. The real challenge begins when the technology is applied to more complex projects and when project teams and the organisation as a whole begins experimenting with or using such tools. Organisations need to develop well thought-out strategies for moving to integrated systems. The transition to such systems is not only a transition in tools and techniques. It is an evolution into a new way of performing today's tasks and a new approach to project problem-solving.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presents twelve views that the authors believe are misconceptions about IPDB systems. The aim of this exposition is to gain critical feedback and suggestions which will form a consensus on what IPDB systems will be able to deliver. Some of the arguments may be show-stoppers for the type of IPDB system which are promoted for the future (e.g., if it is impossible to map between views). If this is the case then the IPDB researchers need to ensure that what is sold to industry and government funders does not overstate the case and benefit. The risk of over-hyping the possibilities is that IPDB development will be viewed with the same suspicions as AI work is currently in this field. From the misconceptions outlined in this paper it is clear that the dream of a ubiquitous IPDB serving all project members across a building's life is very far away. What is likely is an increasing number of islands of integration, where there are a small numbers of tools, for a small process, and perhaps a small number of organisations, being able to interoperate successfully.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the financial support of the UK Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions (DETR) for the initial development of this work whilst they were working at the BRE as part of the UK Network of Experts in Objects and Integration. Feedback on the initial paper for the network was provided by (in alphabetic order): Robert Aish, Grahame Cooper, Abdul Samad Kazi, Nick Nisbet, Jason Underwood, Wanjau Wambugu, Alastair Watson, and Erik Winterkorn.

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