ARCOM’s 22nd conference in Birmingham demonstrated again the success of ARCOM. Apart from the conferences length of existence, the quality of the papers and the insightfulness of the debates; it is its true sense of community that is unique. This community is formed with no base other than an interest in the subject area and a desire for critical research. It crosses many boundaries: from top research institutions to aspiring entrants, from leading professors to new students, from technical engineers to social researchers, from pure academicians to enlightened practitioners, from developed Britain to developing Africa and Asia. We are fortunate to experience this amalgam which generates a sense of purpose and a sense of development of ideas and a sense of pleasure in being together. It inspires all to continue.

The conference also continues to try out new ideas. It had a session with the Faculty of Building bringing 150 practitioners and academics together where three papers were delivered to an industry audience over breakfast chaired by Bob White the chairman of MACE and Chief Executive of Constructing Excellence. This showed ARCOM’s abilities to be prestigious, critical and applicable. Bob White also provided a keynote speech ‘Increasing industry and research sector collaboration in the built environment’ which presented a wider agenda for construction research. Professor Alan Penn, of University College London, provided another challenging dimension in the second keynote speech, “What can architectural research bring to organisation theory”, seeing space design as an integral part of the construction of organisations. This year’s debate topic was ‘the agency of change in construction’ and was led by Stephen Gruneberg with Will Hughes, David Root each providing a different dimension to the problem.

ARCOM is renowned for its strict reviewing, however, 96 quality research papers were accepted and presented at the conference bringing 120 delegates from 17 countries to Birmingham. The sessions stimulated lively discussion and this was extended outside the formal arena as the conference venue and accommodation were combined allowing delegates the opportunity to mingle.

Apart from this seriousness, there was a canal trip along the famous Birmingham canals to enjoy the exciting redevelopment of the city centre, the industrial heritage and the tranquil countryside. At the conference dinner, Dr Jason Le Masurier of University of Canterbury in New Zealand was awarded Rod Howes prize for the best paper, and Dr Simon Smith of University of Edinburgh was awarded the Paul Townsend Memorial prize. The entertainment was completed by delegates working together to produce structured abstracts for a set of fantasy papers. A good time was had by all.

ARCOM works because people are involved and committed; thanks to all who worked on the organisation and management of the conference and the production of the proceedings.

By: David Boyd
This is my final act as the chair of ARCOM, as my term of office has now expired. During this term we experienced an untimely tragedy: Professor Rod Howes, the first Chairperson of ARCOM, lost his life in a bicycle accident. At ARCOM 2005 we remembered him for his significant and continuous contribution. On the positive note, David Langford’s unexpected appearance at ARCOM 2006 delighted all his friends. His high spirited presence (and consumption) was indicative of his rapid road to recovery. Also, during this period, ARCOM Committee produced 6 professors.

This term commenced with a major task and a vision. The task was to enhance ARCOM’s financial capability in order to support our decision to sustain the ARCOM abstracting facility. This objective was achieved and ARCOM is financially viable to the point that we have decided to employ a part-time administrator to assist with such issues as general admin, and conference proceedings and organization. As for the vision, the ambition was to examine the benefits of expanding ARCOM in a number of directions including size, scope of disciplines, increased engagement with industry and policymaking entities, international dimension, range of activities between conferences, etc. These issues were thoroughly examined at an away day totally dedicated to revisiting ARCOM’s key strategic standing. While it proved difficult to reach consensus on these issues, the general drift was towards consolidation rather than expansion or diversification. Subsequently, over the past two years, the focus has been on improving our current practices. An example of this is our attempt to restructure the membership size and configuration of ARCOM Committee, which resulted in the introduction of five new members. As for our regular practices, already we have seen several cases of improvement, including the following:

As ever, ARCOM activities are in many ways dominated by the ARCOM annual conference. Recently we have experimented with new ideas and approaches for these conferences. In particular we have extended the membership of the Reviewing Panel beyond the members of the ARCOM committee: the use of the web-based conference organisation system has resulted in cost and time savings. Other examples of innovation include the introduction of debate sessions, question-time sessions and industry breakfast event.

Thanks to Vian the quality and frequency of our newsletters has increased significantly. As ever, the key to the success of the newsletter is to maintain the contribution of members. Will Hughes has maintained the smooth running of the ARCOM website and extended the quality and the scope of the ARCOM abstracts which is now a tool for use by ARCOM members and non-members, particularly for researchers in parts of the world with limited access to information. Under Paul Stephenson’s management, ARCOM workshops have gone from strength to strength. There is an apparent appetite for these workshops by colleagues to organize them in their institution and by researchers to take part as presenters and/or participants. Charles Egbu’s persisting passion has introduced new ideas and practices relating to membership issues and at the ARCOM 2006 AGM we voted in favor of the introduction of the Institutional Membership. ARCOMForum continues shadowing the cnbr list while focusing on the issues directly relating to ARCOM members. This list-group remains as a viable tool for communicating and sharing information with fellow ARCOM members. Dave Greenwood has assumed responsibility as the ARCOM Projects coordinator. Members are encouraged to contact Dave to seek support from ARCOM by submitting proposals to undertake definable projects. This is seen as a viable way of engaging and empowering members while generating output.

The above are activities with visible external output. But their realization is also due to the collective wisdom of the committee as well as hard work of functional officers such as Andy Dainty – the treasurer - for his diligent control of our financial standing. He has extended the role beyond simply accounting to binding it with strategic decisions of the Association. This role has now been passed to the capable hands of Francis Edum-fotwe. Another hard working officer is Chris Fortune. In his role as the ARCOM Committee Secretary, he has set and raised the level of standard for organizing committee meetings and AGMs.

Finally, in my view the combined knowledge and contribution of the committee members and their supportive nature is a valuable asset. However, I would also submit that potentially ARCOM’s most important asset is its membership and ARCOM’s future success is closely associated with the extent to which members are engaged and involved in ARCOM’s activities and decision making processes. This is probably a challenge that David Boyd, our upcoming Chair, will need to address, for which, he has our full support.

By: Prof. Farzad Khosrowshahi
The year 2006 has been a remarkable one for a number of our colleagues within the academic community. We share heart felt congratulations with our readers for those colleagues, who have served the community with their hard work, contribution and motivation and can be a source to our aspirations to thrive and do better.

Congratulations to our colleagues & friends of ARCOM!

A previous issue of the ARCOM newsletter shared with its readers the great achievements of Professor Anumba, and his valuable contribution to the academic and construction industry. Professor Anumba, strikes again, as he obtains a Doctor of Science (DSc) in July 2006 !! A DSc is awarded ‘in recognition of published work constituting a sustained, substantial and original contribution to knowledge’. Such news is hardly a surprise to many of us, for such a remarkable achievement, by a remarkable pioneer within the construction community. Congratulations !!

Congratulations to Professor Anumba!!

Professor Chimay Anumba
Profile - Mohan Kumaraswamy

Calm, kind, rigorous, humble, critical thinker and a key international figure within the Construction Management domain. These are notable attributes of Mohan Kumaraswamy, who is an Associate Professor at the Dept. of Civil Engineering of The University of Hong Kong. It is with great pleasure, that we share a Profile of Mohan Kumaraswamy with our readers.

Having obtained a B.Sc. (Eng.) from Sri Lanka, Mohan Kumaraswamy worked on designs, construction and construction management in Sri Lanka and Nigeria, before earning an M.Sc. in Construction Management, and then a Ph.D., both from Loughborough University, U.K. As a Construction Manager and then a Director of the first construction project management company in Sri Lanka, he led many innovative project assignments and internationally funded consultancies, e.g. funded by ILO and by the World Bank. He has been active (and held offices) in many professional bodies, including the Institution of Engineers Sri Lanka, Chartered Institute of Building and the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (where he was Chairman of the Civil Division in 1997/98). He contributes widely to Industry Development/Link Bodies in Hong Kong, such as the Provisional Construction Industry Coordination Board, the Construction Industry Institute Hong Kong, the Asian Construction Management Association (where he was President from 1999 – 2002) and the Centre for Infrastructure & Construction Industry Development (where, as the honorary Executive Director from its launch in 2002, he has ably directed its rapid development). In terms of teaching and research, Mohan is a highly respected Hong Kong based academic, who is prominent in the international construction project management research community.

Mohan Kumaraswamy is also a Fellow of five professional institutions and a Corporate Member of at least three others, which serve the construction domain. He has an impressive track record as a principal investigator, in winning and delivering on research grants from academia, industry and international funding bodies. He has collaborated successfully to achieve synergies with high level researchers from many countries such as Australia, the Netherlands, Singapore and of course the UK. He has supervised 6 Ph.D.s and 2 M.Phil.s with 7 current Ph.D. research students, as well as research staff, and derives great satisfaction from their development. He has over 110 refereed journal publications, over 135 refereed conference papers, chapters in 6 books, and scores of invited publications and reports. Evidently, the wide range and high quality of his publications are as impressive as the numbers. As for national and international

ESF Grant – Black & Ethnic Minority in Construction

A sum of 128k was secured from the European Social Fund in July, 2006, by Dr. Vian Ahmed (project leader) and a team of six academics from Salford (Professors, Jo Tah, Farzad Khosrowshahi, Mel Lees, Mustafa Al-Shawi and Jack Goulding), for a period of 18 months. This project intends to “promote the integration of and combat the discrimination against people at a disadvantage in the labour market in order to promote Equal Opportunities for All and Promoting Social Inclusion” addressing the need to provide help to improve the employability and remove barriers to labour market entry for those groups disadvantaged in the labour market, including economically inactive people of working age, with particular emphasis on combating race and to develop local responses to assist individuals with multiple disadvantage, especially economically inactive people of working age, in the labour market who face the risk of social exclusion.

By: Vian Ahmed

Understanding the Construction Client

David Boyd and Ezekiel Client

This book breaks new ground by creating a framework to understand clients’ actions and needs. Most construction management books focus on improving the construction process; this one focuses on a better engagement with the client. It challenges conceptions of both the construction industry and clients’ businesses so that a more effective process and greater client satisfaction can be achieved. The book suggests that ‘buildings are not about building but about changing and developing the client’. The technical, organisational and psychological aspects of this are described and analysed in detail so that current experience can be explained and better practice determined.

The book offers well-researched information about clients in a number of sectors - developers, supermarkets, NHS, government, airports and housing associations - which will help you understand what these client’s business or service needs are and how construction fits into this. It demonstrates how to develop an appreciation of the client’s perspective with a toolkit for ensuring successful client engagement. This makes Understanding the Construction Client a user-friendly and practical guide, as well as significant text for academia.
activities, Mohan Kumaraswamy has been an External Examiner for M.Phils., M.Sc.s and Ph.D.s at two other Universities in Hong Kong, one University in Singapore and five Universities in Australia; External Academic Advisor to another University in Hong Kong; called upon as a Reviewer of promotion and research grant applications to other Universities & national bodies (including EPSRC, UK and RGC, Hong Kong, ARC, Australia and NRF, South Africa); Joint Editor of the Asia Pacific Journal of Building and Construction Management from its inception in 1995 (now re-named the Journal of Building and Construction Management); on Editorial Boards and/or Referee Panels of major international Journals in Construction Engineering and Project Management; on Advisory/Technical Committees of many International and local Conferences; and on Jury Panels of Technical paper Competitions. His dedication to tasks and commitments undertaken, have led to his reputation as one who will get the job done.

Amidst such remarkable contributions and achievements, Mohan Kumaraswamy considers his greatest achievement to be the cross-fertilisation of his industry and professional networks with scholarly developments in both teaching and research. When asked for his advice to the ARCOM community of researchers, he recalled that someone had recently concluded that “it is not the strongest or smartest who survive, but those who are most responsive to change”; and himself added that “as we become more ‘mature’ (or indeed older!), it may become more difficult to respond rapidly to change, but it should be easier to contribute to (if not drive) change in the directions that we think we should move. So let us mobilise our collective knowledge to identify the ‘right directions’ and push towards them ... together ... and relentlessly”.

On behalf of ARCOM, we congratulate Mohan Kumaraswamy on such great achievements, wish him every success for the future, and look forward to many more fruitful interactions with our international community.

The Editor

Fixing the leak!

Knowledge that leaks out of an organisation (through issues like outsourcing and labour turnover) can work to the detriment of organisational productivity! Similarly, other organisations stand to benefit from knowledge that is ‘leaked out’.

Understanding and assessing the concept of knowledge leakage (EPSRC Grant: EP/D505631/1) is a multi-sectoral, cross-institutional research project that seeks to examine the nature of knowledge leakage and explore, through case study research the impacts on productivity.

The project investigates whether companies appreciate the significance leakage. The project aims to categorise knowledge leakage as a function of firm and inter-firm activities, develop an outline methodology for companies to assess their knowledge leakage holistically and provide tools for measuring the potential effects of knowledge leakage on productivity. To date, the research team has mapped out organisational knowledge leakage in relation to dynamic interactions between firms and their supply chain, customers, competitors, non-competitive collaborators and human resources.

The project arose from an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)/Advanced Institute of Management Research (AIM) Ideas Factory convened to understand the nature and origins of the UK productivity gap. Partners in the project include University of Brighton, Brunel University, Loughborough University and Northumbria University.

For more information about the project, contact Dr. Paul W Chan at the School of the Built Environment, Northumbria University.

(Tel: +44 0 191 227 4219; email: paul.chan@unn.ac.uk).

Dr Paul Chan
A decision support tool for optimising the use of offsite technologies in housebuilding.

In recent years the industry has been exhorted to increase its use of offsite technologies, or ‘Modern Methods of Construction’, in order to address the under-supply and poor build quality of housing. Despite the well-rehearsed benefits of such technologies, the take-up within the industry has been slow. Many studies have attempted to scrutinise the barriers and seek solutions, but the perspectives and practices of housebuilders of using offsite remain unclear. This is significant given that housebuilders contribute nearly 90% to the housing unit completions by the industry overall.

This thesis aims to provide a strategy for optimising the use of offsite in housebuilding by investigating UK housebuilders’ views on, and utilisations of, such technologies. This has been achieved through a combination of a survey of the top 100 firms, a one-and-half-year case study of a large housebuilding organisation, and a series of validation interviews and group exercises, within the existing theoretical framework. The thesis reveals that the current low level of offsite usage in large housebuilders was likely to increase given the pressures to improve quality, time, cost, productivity and health & safety. However, a wider take-up was inhibited by perceived higher capital costs, interfacing problems, long lead-in time, delayed planning process and current manufacturing capacity. For addressing this a framework of strategies is presented, surrounding changing the industry’s perceptions, improving procurement, providing better cost data, tackling planning and regulations, encouraging political levers, and providing guidance on decision-making and offsite integration.

The thesis then contextualises these findings into the organisational and project contexts, examining the historical and current offsite practices within the general housebuilding business. It reveals that housebuilders primarily aspired to improve business efficiency and mitigate financial risks through the use of offsite despite a complicated agenda for such usage. For using offsite housebuilders developed strategies centred on process, procurement, learning & benchmarking, and training. However, the current heuristic approach to decision-making, coupled with the lack of knowledge of build system selection (BSS) for housebuilding, prevents the benefits from offsite being fully realised. A robust, structured and transparent decision support tool for BSS is developed, transferring knowledge in operational and construction management research to the housebuilding context. It provides an improved decision-making process and databases for system selection. Both the process and data were validated within the wider industry and academic domain, by which the tool was claimed as an effective mechanism for optimising the use of offsite and enhancing organisational learning.

The thesis contributes to a better theoretical understanding of offsite and provides strategies for its increased take-up in housebuilding. This helps housebuilding organisations to achieve long-term profitability, but also contributes to addressing the current under-supply of housing. The thesis also contributes to knowledge of decision-making and construction management research. This has an implication for wider organisational and decision theory.
PhD Thesis - Joseph Gaiva Kappia

Career Dynamics within the Construction Industry – A Trade and Craft Perspective.

Recruiting and retaining an adequate share of the UK workforce is vital to meeting the construction industry’s demands and sustaining its current growth. This requires the industry to attract new employees, adopt a proactive approach to Human Resource Development (HRD) and the formulation of effective retention strategies. Career development programmes are required which can align the industry’s needs with the career expectations of the individual employee. However, despite the importance of such schemes to the trade and craft occupations, most research devoted to career development has a professional and managerial focus. A need to redress this imbalance has been compounded by a variety of factors such as the scarcity of skilled people, falling recruitment levels and high employee turnover rates. The overall aim of the work reported in this thesis is to develop an understanding of trade and craft career dynamics. The information can be used as a framework for supporting specific career management and career development initiatives, which in turn will serve to actively encourage skill development, attract new employees and retain the services of the current workforce.

Drawing on the conceptual languages of extant “Careers” and “Human Resource Management” theory, the research adopted an ethnographic research approach. An iterative multiphase research design framework was utilised, involving a combination of research paradigms. These quantitative and qualitative methods included: a questionnaire of 563 informants; discussions with 54 groups of trainees; and 88 in-depth interviews with both New Entrant Trainees (NETs) and Qualified and Experienced (QE) construction workers. By encouraging systematic narrative accounts of the attitudes, behaviours and idea systems of the actors involved a better understanding of the nature of trade and craft employment was developed.

Combining and comparing the findings of both datasets (NETs and QEs) and relating this to the outlined theoretical perspectives sheds new light on the career dynamics within the industry. The research found that although employees are not comprehensive in their information and search of career options; they do place a high priority on career development. However, career development is limited due to the realities (opportunities and operational conditions) of the industry; which influence attitudes of individuals and their peers. Employees often further encounter a series of career decision errors which affect the employment relationship.

The findings suggest that good career development practice is capable of helping to attract, recruit and retain a sustainable share of the UK workforce. As such, the findings provide a platform from which effective employment strategies can be developed in the future.

PhD Thesis - Gordian Udechukwu Ojiako

Project failures: A comparative study of information and communication technologies (ICT) and construction projects.

In the ICT industry, since de-regulation business objectives have been closely linked to the lowering of prices and improvement in quality of service. Unfortunately, the industry has arguably failed to deliver the majority of its projects.

This research examines this described failure and considers the reasons why it occurs. As a starting point, the research suggests that the ICT industry might be better off by comparing its progress against that already made by the construction industry, an industry involved in projects with similar characteristics such as complex relationships, detailed information and long delivery periods over many phases.

A framework demonstrating similarities and differences in project characteristics between construction and ICT was developed from available literature. The framework was examined and refined by carrying out in-depth interviews. It was then tested using data from a survey of professionals involved in Construction and ICT projects. The results of the analysis indicate that there are no fundamental differences either in the definition of projects or the application of project management systems, principles and methodologies between the two industries. Therefore this is not the reason for the failure of project delivery within ICT. The real problem appears to be in the method of project performance measurement, which is based on an approach to project success that is separate from progress measurement criteria.
Go on, smile….Construction Worker Lunches

An Irishman, a Mexican-American, and a Redneck were doing construction work on scaffolding on the 20th floor of a building. They were eating lunch, and the Irishman said, "Corned beef and cabbage! If I get corned beef and cabbage one more time for lunch I'm going to jump off this building."

The Mexican-American opened his lunch box and exclaimed, "Burritos again! If I get burritos one more time I'm going to jump off, too."

The Redneck opened his lunch and said, "Bologna again. If I get a bologna sandwich one more time I'm jumping too."

Next day the Irishman opens his lunch box, sees corned beef and cabbage, and jumps to his death. The Mexican-American opens his lunch, sees a burrito, and he jumps too. The Redneck opens his lunch, sees the bologna, and jumps to his death also.

At the funeral the Irishman's wife is weeping. She says, "If I'd known how really tired he was of corned beef and cabbage I never would have given it to him again!"

The Mexican-American's wife also weeps and says, "I could have given him tacos or enchiladas or even a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich! I didn't realize he hated burritos so much."

Everyone turns and stares at the Redneck's wife. "Hey, don't look at me," she says. "He makes his own lunch."

Message from the editor

I hope you have enjoyed reading this issue of the newsletter. The editor welcomes your comments, ideas, articles, events, photographs, news in general, research experiences, achievements, workshops, funny stories, serious stories - anything that you would like to share with other members, through this newsletter please contact the editor.

Vian Ahmed, The Editor

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