

Developing work breakdown structure matrix for managing offsite construction projects

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Abstract

Offsite construction techniques continue to receive considerable attention in academic/research discourse. Currently, offsite techniques still require a certain portion of construction works to be conducted onsite; albeit with a significant proportion delivered in a controlled offsite environment - typically in manufacturing facilities. Whilst discourse in seminal literature critique the positive and negative aspects of offsite; on balance, the benefits outweigh the barriers, especially when fully integrated and managed. From a management perspective, the project management techniques typically applied to offsite construction projects typically commence in determining the work breakdown structure (WBS) of these projects. Whilst the WBS approach originated from the manufacturing and engineering domain, this approach is equally applicable to offsite deliverables, reflecting site-based construction activities and concomitant dependencies with the manufacturing processes. However, there are slight discrepancies in processes, and equally, some areas of repetition and duplication. This mismatch has a fundamental impact on integration, creating pockets of confusion, where less seamless (sub-optimal) synergy between offsite and onsite works is lost. This is an acknowledged challenge. Even in cases where the WBS of the manufacturing side was converted into activities to facilitate synchronisation, precise information of the 'product' is still needed. There is therefore a real need to retain the product breakdown structure, particularly the manufactured portion of the works; but, at the same time, ensuring a seamless interface with the onsite works is maintained. This is a challenge. Whilst the WBS-matrix has been implemented in the project management domain to bridge the 'products' and 'activities', this arrangement has not yet been developed for offsite building construction projects. This paper reports an on-going research project set up to implement WBS-matrix for offsite construction projects. Two cases of recently completed offsite construction building projects were used in a case study setting to analyse current practices - to inform the way forward to further develop the WBS-matrix. Findings from this research provide clear guidance for practitioners involved in offsite construction projects; particularly on the development of the WBS-matrix for manufacturing deliverables/activities in order to more effectively manage offsite construction projects.

Keywords: matrix, offsite construction, process, work breakdown structure

Introduction

Stimulated by the need to deal with increasing complexity and specific needs to address time, cost, and quality issues; the Architecture Engineering and Construction (AEC) sector has been challenged to develop new and innovative ways of delivering products and services. This challenge is reported in AEC literature, and is enshrined in many leading global reports and initiatives. More recently, offsite construction has attracted much attention in this respect; the main concept of which is to shift on-site construction activities into an off-site controlled environment (*cf.* product/process delivering and enhanced value proposition). Historically, producing parts of buildings using offsite techniques is not new, having originated in the early 1800's. More recently however, it

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6 has attracted increased attention for its ability to deliver bespoke benefits, not least:
7 enhanced efficiencies in the traditional time/quality/cost trichotomy (Sutrisna *et al.* 2017;
8 Goulding *et al.*, 2015; Smith 2010). Given these benefits, offsite construction developed a
9 resurgence and was proffered as ‘modern method of construction’ in the UK (Gibb
10 1999). Specific advantages of the offsite construction methodology also include a raft of
11 niche benefits, including speed, quality, health and safety, sustainability and life cycle
12 costing (e.g. Steindhart and Manley 2016; Pan and Goodier 2012; Schoenborn 2012).
13 One of the main arguments here is that by shifting a relatively large proportion of the
14 construction activities to an offsite environment (typically in a manufacturing facility),
15 the constructability of the delivery phase can be better envisioned and the delivery itself
16 can be better planned to take place in this controlled environment (Gibbs 1999). Whilst
17 critiques highlight recurrent challenges viz ‘mirroring’ fragmented practices (cf.
18 coordination and process integration); proponents (on balance), proffer a myriad of
19 solutions for mitigating these negative issues see - Arashpour *et al.* (2018); Khalfan and
20 Maqsood (2014); Pan and Goodier (2012); Pan *et al.* 2007.

21 The management of construction projects typically follows professional frameworks and
22 industry best practices embodied in official guidelines such as the Project Management
23 Body of Knowledge also known as PMBOK (PMI 2015) or the Projects in Controlled
24 Environment also known as PRINCE2 (ISO 2009). As advocated by both frameworks,
25 one of the most fundamental tools used in these frameworks and guidance is the work
26 breakdown structure (WBS). The WBS has been considered as the standardised method
27 to hierarchically subdivide a project into its sub-parts aiming to reduce project
28 complexity (Hartmann *et al.* 2012; Smith 2010). When implementing the project
29 management techniques in offsite and construction projects, there have been difficulties
30 reported mainly due to the repetitive nature of manufacturing for offsite construction
31 and also the uncertainty and variability of the offsite operations (Salama *et al.* 2016;
32 Harris and Ioannou 1998). From the manufacturing process perspective after a customer
33 order is placed, a WBS of functional components is created to determine the overall
34 production schedule in which each functional component is mapped to its design
35 engineering, production engineering, purchasing and manufacturing (Griess and
36 Restrepo 2011). On the other hand, in executing construction site activities, the
37 construction’s WBS typically shows the site activities to be undertaken by the main and
38 subcontractors (Winch and Kelsey 2005). This incompatibility between the WBS systems
39 in the manufacturing based and construction based activities has potentially resulted in a
40 less seamless interface and integration between them, which has been considered as one
41 of the weaknesses and hence criticisms of the offsite construction projects (Arashpour *et*
42 *al.* 2018; Arif *et al.* 2012). Attempting to address this issue, the research project reported
43 here proposes WBS-matrix especially developed for offsite building projects as the
44 potential solution. The use of WBS matrix to provide a systematic breakdown of the
45 project into smaller components by recognising both product and activity views of the
46 project has been considered beneficial in managing the project (Chua and Godinot 2006;
47 Godinot 2003). Thus the findings of this research are expected to provide guidance for
48 practitioners involved in offsite construction projects to develop WBS matrix to manage
49 offsite construction projects in a more holistic manner.

50 Literature Review

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52 Off-site construction is one of the many terms referring to the prefabrication of building
53 components constructed or assembled outside the construction site followed by the
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6 installation of these components into their final position on site (Ramaji and Memari
7 2018; Pan *et al.* 2008). Examples of other terms to describe similar construction
8 methodology include offsite manufacturing (e.g. Blismas and Wakefield 2009), off-site
9 prefabrication/production (e.g. Kale and Ardit, 2006) or industrialised building (e.g.
10 Jonsson and Rudberg, 2013; Kamar *et al.* 2011). In terms of industrialisation in the
11 construction field, prefabrication is merely regarded as the first level of industrialisation
12 before mechanisation, automation, robotics, and reproduction (Richard, 2005). Previous
13 research has identified positive correlation between the extent of prefabrication and the
14 time/cost performance of the offsite construction project (Shahzad *et al.* 2014). The
15 extent of offsite prefabrication in a construction project also determines whether a
16 project is classed as non-volumetric offsite construction or volumetric offsite
17 construction (Schoenborn 2012; Smith 2010; Gibb 1999). The non-volumetric offsite
18 construction includes the use of processed materials and prefabricated building
19 components (e.g. beams, columns, slabs, wall panels) and the volumetric offsite
20 construction extends the inclusion of offsite components by constructing volumetric
21 pods and modules offsite before installing them on site.

22 The main concept of offsite construction lies in the relocation of construction activities
23 from site (in-situ) into a controlled environment offsite. Thus the central argument
24 revolves around enabling these activities to be better planned and delivered similar to
25 processes in manufacturing sector to achieve the intended outcomes (Barlow and Ozaki
26 2005). It has been argued that by delivering these construction activities in a controllable
27 environment, safety, efficiency/productivity and quality could all be improved with less
28 waste generated and therefore cost can be better controlled and less impact would be
29 brought on the environment (Khalfan and Maqsood 2014; Krug *et al.* 2013; Azhar *et al.*
30 2011; Gibb 2001). The higher degree of standardisation and repetition in this controlled
31 manufacturing environment has also been regarded as important factors to reduce
32 dependency towards skilled trades by utilising semi-skilled or lower-skilled operatives
33 (Nadim and Goulding 2009). These potential benefits from shifting construction
34 activities to be conducted offsite has prompted the UK Government to consider offsite
35 construction as the 'Modern Method of Construction' (MMC), particularly in the UK
36 housing sector (Pan *et al.* 2008; Goodier and Gibb 2007; Gibb 1999).

37 In managing the offsite (manufacturing processes) and on site construction, the work
38 breakdown structure (WBS) has been applied to model their processes. The WBS has
39 been used to describe a hierarchical representation of the work to be executed by the
40 project team, usually represented in a 'top-down' orientation (Siami-Irdemoosa *et al.*
41 2015; Perdicoúlis 2013) and has been widely recognised as a powerful project
42 management tool for better performance control (Hartmann *et al.* 2012; Wu *et al.* 2010;
43 Chua and Godinot 2006). Thus its ability to define the scope and structure of the project
44 and establishes the foundation for planning, budgeting, responsibility assignment, project
45 control and information management has earned the WBS reputation as the most
46 valuable tool for project management (Garcia-Fornieles *et al.* 2003). Whilst the relatively
47 recent scholarly development [particularly in lean construction, [e.g. Koskela *et al.* (2002);
48 Ballard (2000)] includes criticisms to the "classic project management" theory in which
49 WBS serves as a fundamental concept to decompose projects, this research subscribes to
50 a more reconciling few of Winch (2006) that the lean construction including its Last
51 Planner system still consist of decomposition of the project through value stream
52 mapping and process flow charting. Thus the difference is mainly in the subsequent
53 procedures and not in the act of decomposition of the project itself.
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From the manufacturing side, the works to be delivered mainly follow the product specifications. From the manufacturing perspective, the product design information have been considered an important factor in the interface between design and manufacturing process (Skander *et al.* 2007; Twigg 2002). Thus in manufacturing, the WBS typically shows the decomposition of products in such a way that the products at one level of WBS are the inputs to the next higher level (Wu *et al.* 2010). Following the input from a customer order, a WBS of functional components will be created to further determine the overall production schedule in which each of these functional components is mapped to its design engineering, production engineering, purchasing and manufacturing (Griess and Restrepo 2011) as presented in figure 1 below.

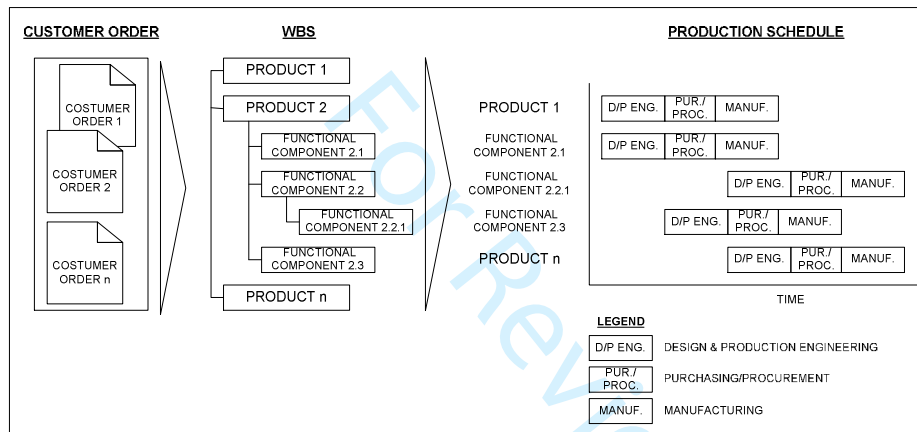


Figure 1. WBS in manufacturing (adapted from Griess and Restrepo 2011)

The WBS on the manufacturing side can be considered more oriented towards the products to be manufactured and typically resembles the product breakdown structure. Product breakdown structure itself has been defined as a hierarchical representation of the outcomes of a project, which may be physical products and/or services permitting an aggregation-detailing of the product (Perdicoulis 2013). This style of upper stream breakdown is also considered within the scope the project management methodology, which has been regarded a key methodology in the manufacturing sector (Skander *et al.* 2007). From project management perspective, this type of WBS is considered as the deliverable-oriented WBS as opposed to the activity-oriented WBS (Rad 1999).

On the other hand, the WBS used in structuring construction activities in the construction industry is typically the activity-oriented WBS. Assuming the traditional construction procurement method as the most common choice in the construction industry (Masterman 2013), the design and specifications will inform the development of WBS. Following the development of the WBS, a construction schedule will be prepared based on an activity precedence networks that consider a project as a series of activities that can be related by links, which represent the planned order of work (Russel-Smith and Lepech 2012; Cole 1991). With the main emphasis on the project execution stage or construction stage, the WBS of a construction project can be considered the lower stream WBS and are typically prepared periodically for the scheduled works to be delivered using allocated resources and materials within the timeframe (Ahuja and Thiruvengadam 2004). Thus the main purpose of WBS in construction projects is decomposing the project into a hierarchical structure of construction activities and to determine the needed construction resources including labours, materials, equipment and

administration to deliver the project and determine each activity's and eventually the whole project's time, cost, and quality (Hu and He 2014; Russel-Smith and Lepech 2012). These are presented in figure 2 below.

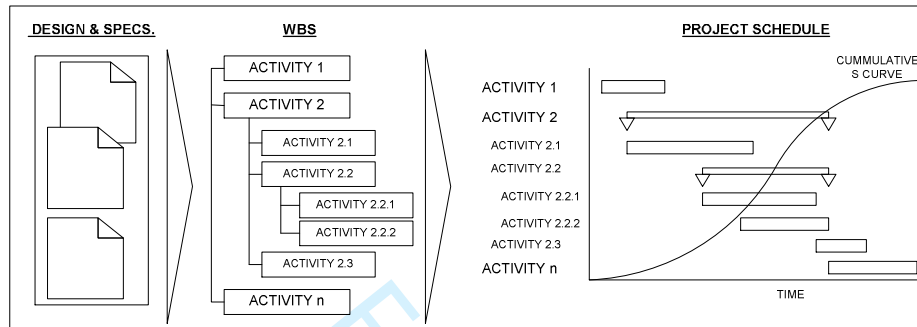


Figure 2. WBS in construction projects (adapted from Hu and He 2014; Russel-Smith and Lepech 2012)

Both PMBOK and PRINCE2 have suggested an intermediate phase to facilitate the transition from product oriented into activity oriented breakdown structure. The PMBOK recommends a decomposition components of the product phase (between the project scope definitions and the development of WBS) to subdivide the major project deliverables to support future project activities (PMI 2015) whilst the PRINCE2 advocates the creation of product flow diagram (between the development of product breakdown structure and the development of WBS) to identify and define the sequence of the components of the product to be developed that will naturally lead into consideration of the activities required (ISO 2009). Whilst it has been argued that a WBS should be a uniform, consistent, and logical method for dividing a project into small, manageable components for planning, estimating, and monitoring (Rad 1999), this paper does not intend to analyse the 'correctness' of the practices in the manufacturing and construction sectors but to highlight the differences in practice in those two sectors.

These differences in the manufacturing and construction practices in terms of WBS, however, have brought their own issues in the attempt to plan a smooth interface between the manufacturing and construction processes in offsite construction projects. Among various aspects identified as priorities in implementing offsite construction techniques, synchronising construction processes and activities with that of the manufacturing as well as better linking manufacturing schedules to actual construction processes have been considered high priority to be resolved (Arashpour *et al.* 2018; Arif *et al.* 2012). Incompatibilities in offsite construction projects that have been reported mainly stemming from the difficulties to synchronise the manufacturing activities that are repetitive in nature and in a highly controllable environment with the onsite construction tasks that are typically unique and carrying high uncertainty and variability in delivery (Salama *et al.* 2016; Harris and Ioannou 1998). Therefore, it can be argued that the synchronisation of the offsite manufacturing activities and onsite construction activities should be happen from the very early stage in offsite construction projects. As a WBS has been considered pivotal to the success of project management and planning (Siami-Irdemoosa *et al.* 2015), the synchronisation in this research is attempted at the development of WBS stage. The challenges remain at this stage as the conflicts between types of WBS used, particularly between the product oriented and activity oriented have

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6 been reported and acknowledged as an issue in the last two decades (NASA 2015;
7 Godinot 2003; Christensen and Thayer 2001).

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9 Given the differences in focus and hence differences in practices between the offsite
10 manufacturing and onsite construction identified in the ongoing discussion, the
11 synchronisation was not attempted to reduce either of them but to integrate. In looking
12 for a suitable integration method, a tool known as WBS-matrix emerges as the potential
13 solution to provide a systematic breakdown of the project into smaller components by
14 recognising both product and activity views of the project (Chua and Godinot 2006;
15 Godinot 2003). The basic concepts of WBS-matrix were first proposed by Bachy and
16 Hameri (1997) in manufacturing production domain making clear distinction between
17 product breakdown structure (PBS) and assembly/activity breakdown structure (ABS)
18 before crossing them to form a matrix to subsequently determine distinctive work
19 packages. Thus by simultaneously presenting and crossing these two breakdown
20 structures (the information on the description of the intended product by specifying its
21 main components and the information on activities and sub-activities to be performed),
22 the resulting WBS-matrix clearly defines and support visualisation of the distinct work
23 packages to be communicated to all project stakeholders. This reconfiguration of
24 activities and product details allows the grouping together relevant product components
25 or sub-activities that may not be necessarily displayed next to each other in either PBS or
26 ABS. Whilst carrying potentials to bring together both product oriented and activities
27 oriented work breakdown structure, however, the implementation of WBS-matrix can be
28 considered limited in sectors such as building (Chua and Godinot 2006; Godinot 2003).
29 Current literature reported WBS-matrix implementation in engineering projects (Yeh *et*
30 *al.* 2017) as well as in designing modularisation in offsite projects (Isaac *et al.* 2014) but
31 none so far reporting synchronisation of activity breakdown structure and product
32 breakdown structure in offsite construction projects. Thus the main contribution of this
33 paper includes expanding the current body of knowledge in the development of the
34 WBS-matrix for offsite construction building projects signifying a step forward in
35 resolving to the need for synchronisation in offsite construction projects.

36 **Research Methodology**

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38 Research methodology should clearly explain the philosophical underpinning followed by
39 the justification of the research design that includes its sampling, data collection
40 procedure, data analysis method and demonstration of the research finding's credibility
41 (Sutrisna and Setiawan 2016; Creswell 2003). This research is influenced by the critical
42 realist paradigm, recognising that human beings can have access to reality albeit limited
43 as well as accepting the co-existence of both objective and socially-constructed reality
44 (Sutrisna and Barrett 2007; Lomborg and Kirkevold 2003). The ontological and
45 epistemological stance of this research accepts the WBS as both an objective tool in
46 delivering and managing offsite construction projects as well as a social system of how
47 the project scope is recognised and accepted by its stakeholders to work together and
48 interact with one another to complete the project. This stance has resulted in the broader
49 consideration of WBS in this research not only as a project management tool but also as
50 a representation of the stakeholder's background and mind-sets in articulating their roles
51 in the project and interfacing with other stakeholders. This was found important in better
52 understanding the reasons behind selecting a particular type of WBS in their project. This
53 has also influenced the selection of the data collection method in the research that was
54 aimed to compile objective evidence through archival study of cases and allow the
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researcher to develop an interpretation of “what happened” in the studied cases without being influenced by the project stakeholders’ opinions and views.

In order to contextualise the use of WBS in offsite construction projects, case study has been selected as the research approach in this research to evaluate the current practices and formulating the way forward. Both physical and social dimensions of a phenomenon have been acknowledged to occur in specific contexts (Yin 2014; Robson 2011) and case study approach captures them as an empirical inquiry that investigates phenomena within their natural context and setting (Yin 2014). The research approach selected in a research is typically determined by the researcher’s ontological and epistemological stance as well as the nature of the research problem itself (Sutrisna, 2009; Gill and Johnson, 1997). Thus, to understand the current practices in implementing activity based and product based WBS in offsite construction projects, it is considered necessary to investigate contextualised by case study approach, i.e. within the real world setting of such projects. Two cases, one in the Western Australia and one in England have been selected for this purpose. These two cases were selected due to their recent completion that represents the most contemporary practices in offsite construction projects with relatively high level of research attention towards the offsite construction technique in both countries. Both selected cases are primary/secondary educational projects of similar size and complexity suitable for comparison purposes. The selection of the two cases was intended to highlight the different use of product based and activities based WBS in these two offsite construction projects. The profiles of the cases are provided in table 1.

Table 1. The case study profiles

Profile	Case 1	Case 2
Project type/scope	New build 2 storey educational building	New build 2 storey educational buildings
Floor Area	1,980 m ²	2,250 m ²
Offsite elements	47 volumetric units	56 volumetric units
Project location	Western Australia	England
Project duration	10 months	13 months
Project budget	£ 3.286 M*	£ 4.023 M

*exchange rate used £1 = AU\$ 1.613

As the main focus was on the implementation of WBS in these two projects, the data collection in this research was conducted through archival study, supplemented by clarification discussions with the offsite construction providers whenever found necessary. This is mainly due to the fact that the offsite construction providers in the two cases performed the role of the offsite manufacturers as well as the main construction contractor and offered a complete package solution for the projects. Archival study is therefore considered suitable to provide evidence of the most current practices of WBS implementation in offsite construction projects. Thus, the importance of the archives themselves to this research has justified its application as a standalone method in this qualitative research [for further discussion on archival study as a standalone in qualitative research, please refer to Bowen (2009)].

In archival study, the archives are typically considered as potential sources of evidence of past events representing those events from the objectivist’s point of view whilst from the subjectivist’s perspective, the archives are treated as “the way” to socially contextualise and understand those events (Furner 2004). Therefore, the archival study is considered inline with the critical realist stance of this research that accepts both point of views and

utilises both perspectives in studying the archives. The archival study was conducted by analysing project reports, technical drawings and specifications, correspondences between the client and the offsite construction providers as well as project costing and project schedule/programme. In interpreting meanings, it was found prudent to seek clarification of certain points with the offsite construction providers but only when needed allowing the development of a holistic understanding of the two projects from a neutral point of view. Due to the aim of this research, i.e. to evaluate the current implementation of WBS in offsite construction projects, findings were allowed to emerge naturally from the archival study of real-life projects rather than from its stakeholder's opinions. The informal discussions were held with the project manager, factory manager, construction manager and technical director of the offsite construction providers but only served for clarification purposes. It is anticipated that the further development of this research may involve formal interviews with (offsite) construction practitioners, mainly to formulate the way forward, but this will be beyond the scope of this article.

Findings and Discussion

Case Study 1

The WBS of case 1 is presented within the project programme/schedule in figures 3 and 4 respectively. Figure 3 captured the first page of the project programme/schedule to show the first five of the offsite manufacturing items (volumetric modules number 1 to 5) and figure 4 captures the third page of the programme/schedule to show the last manufacturing item (volumetric module number 47) and the construction activities.

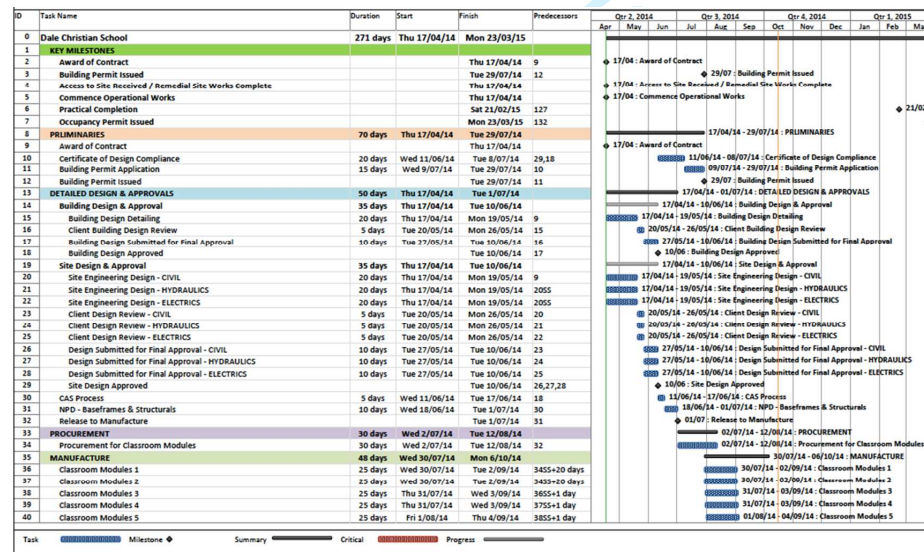


Figure 3. The first page of case 1 project programme/schedule.

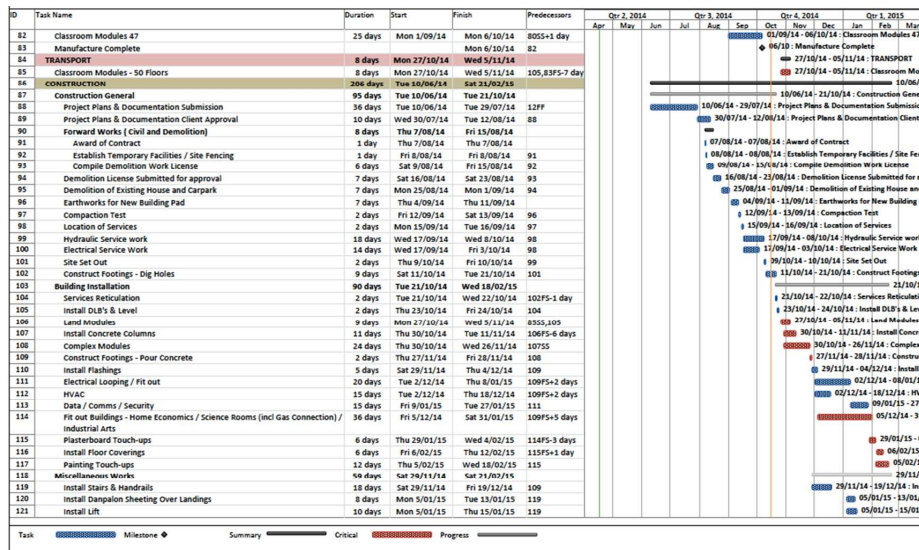


Figure 4. The third page of case 1 project programme/schedule.

The WBS of the programme/schedule in this project was developed mainly based on activities with the exceptions of the offsite manufacturing process of the volumetric modules (modules 1 to 47). The offsite manufacturing process was represented by the products (the volumetric modules), which were scheduled to be completed in 25 days each. This is one of the most common ways of representing the offsite manufacturing tasks in WBS of offsite construction projects. The offsite construction provider in this case clarified that it is not a common practice in the sector to breakdown further into activities/sub-activities within each volumetric module as the manufacturing process is different from the way onsite construction activities/sub-activities would be broken down. As many of the offsite tasks are typically sub-contracted, particularly for the labour, the most common way is to track down the milestone, i.e. requiring each volumetric module (which are all comparable in terms of complexity, size, materials and resource needs), to be completed within 25 days in this case. This has unveiled the views from the offsite construction provider that the modules are perceived as “manufactured products” and the role of the manufacturing sub-contractors as the suppliers of the products rather than as the constructors as it would typically be perceived in traditional onsite construction projects.

Whilst understandable and can be considered common practice from the manufacturing sector perspective, this practice does not convey the same level of information to the construction side of the project. Thus, from the construction project management’s point of view, the offsite manufacturing tasks appear to be a “black box” process simply represented by a single item in the WBS that merely describes the final product. The product oriented WBS represents the upper stream or earlier phase of the development of WBS that will typically transform into activities oriented WBS in the later stage to support the management of project’s activities and project delivery (PMI 2015; TSO 2009; Rad 1999). Thus, this particular case study has provided evidence that this “black box” approach is a common approach in the construction industry and further discussion has pointed out that within the context of offsite construction projects, the product oriented WBS is needed mainly to manage the offsite manufacturing processes but the activities oriented version of the WBS should also be prepared to synchronise the

entire project in a holistic manner. This synchronisation between manufacturing schedules to actual construction processes have been considered high priority in the further development of offsite construction to be resolved (Arif *et al.* 2012).

Case study 2

The WBS of case 2 is presented within the project programme/schedule in figures 5 and 6 respectively. Figure 5 captured the first page of the project programme/schedule to show the higher activity of the offsite manufacturing items (Factory Manufacture Period/Module Fabrication Summary) and figure 6 captures the second page of the programme/schedule to show the manufacturing tasks as well as the beginning of the construction tasks of the smaller building out of two buildings as examples of the manufacturing and construction tasks.

This project consists of a smaller nursery building and the main secondary classroom building. The offsite construction portion is a part of a larger project that also includes extensive external works as well as the onsite construction of a school hall and other facilities. For the comparison purpose between the two projects in this research, only the construction of the smaller nursery building and the main secondary classroom buildings are included in the analysis as they are the ones that were built with offsite construction methodology. For example, the project value described here (refer to table 1) excludes other construction works that were beyond the scope of the offsite construction provider in this case.

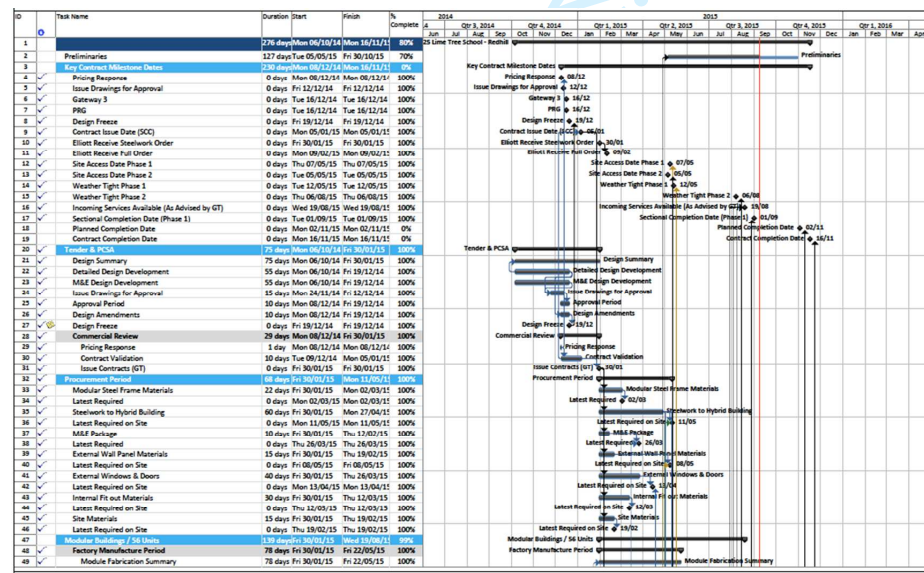


Figure 5. The first page of case 2 project programme/schedule.

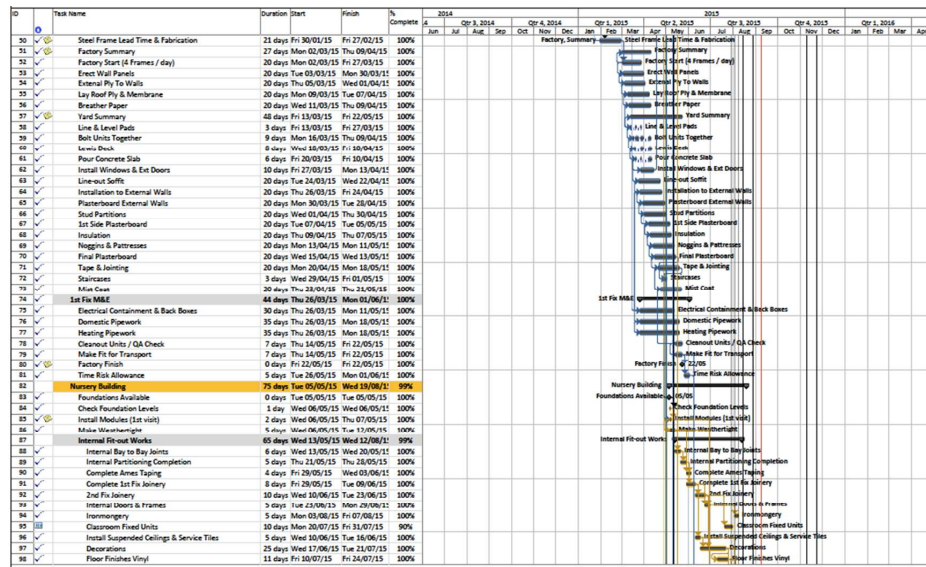


Figure 6. The second page of case 2 project programme/schedule.

Underpinned by the findings in case 1 that activities based WBS is also needed in an offsite construction project, particularly from its project management point of view, attention was now focused on case 2. The WBS of the programme/schedule in this project was developed mainly based on activities including for the manufacturing tasks. Different from the approach applied in case 1, the development of the WBS in case 2 follows the style of the onsite construction WBS. This has unveiled the opposing view of the offsite construction provider in this case that the modules are perceived as a set of activities to be performed by their subcontractors and/or their internal team. The initial expectation was that case 2 project will demonstrate a more “construction-friendly” approach compared to case 1 as the WBS used in case 2 was based on activity which is more inline with WBS in its onsite counter parts. However, it was evident that even in a WBS that was developed to represent activities, there is still a need for information typically contained in the product breakdown. An example would be task number 72, staircases. As the steel stairs in case 2 were supplied by a specialised manufacturer, they have to be connected to the relevant steel frames of the volumetric modules. Therefore, in this case, that particular item refers to a task to install the steel stair and finalising the staircase part of the relevant volumetric modules. The WBS, however, does not provide the information regarding which volumetric module this task should apply at which point in time. Information such as this is would have been typically provided by the product breakdown structure or product oriented WBS. This example has demonstrated the fact that even though the WBS of the manufacturing portion in an offsite construction project has been designed to be activity oriented WBS, there is still a need to have the product oriented WBS.

This matter has also been recognised in the general project management domain. PRINCE2 methodology for example, advocated that one of the functions of product breakdown structure is to identify external products (already exist or to be created) that are required to complete the products within the scope of the project (TSO 2009). The product breakdown structure has been regarded particularly useful to uniquely identifying

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6 all components that makes the end product as well as providing common reference for
7 explicitly associating the characteristics of the product and/or components that make up
8 the final product (Lamers 2002). Underpinned by the literature as well as by the case
9 study in this research, it can be argued that whilst activities breakdown structure or
10 activity based WBS is needed in offsite construction projects, the product breakdown
11 structure containing the necessary information to manage projects, is also needed in
12 offsite construction projects if a holistic project management is to be implemented in
13 such projects. Hence, this research attempts to bring together and simultaneously display
14 information in both product-oriented and activities-oriented WBS of offsite construction
15 projects using a technique known as the WBS-matrix.

16 17 *Development of WBS-matrix*

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19 The development of the WBS-matrix in this research follows the procedures
20 recommended by Chua and Godinot (2006), i.e. by crossing the product-oriented
21 breakdown structure (product-oriented WBS) and the activities oriented breakdown
22 structure (activities oriented WBS). One of the most important matters was the
23 determination of the level of details that should be included in the matrix. From the
24 manufacturing perspective, the product-oriented breakdown structure should be based
25 on the functional components of the product (Griess and Restrepo 2011). Using the
26 information from a typical volumetric unit in both projects, the main components of a
27 typical volumetric unit to be included are the steel chassis (volumetric frame), external
28 walls, roof/ceiling, internal walls, floors and mechanical/electrical/plumbing (MEP). The
29 level of finishing and completeness of these components in a volumetric module differs
30 from one offsite construction projects to another but these main components will most
31 likely be constructed before they are transported to their onsite positions to benefit from
32 the offsite technique. From the construction perspectives, the activities-oriented
33 breakdown structure should include the main activities to complete the project (Russel-
34 Smith and Lepech 2012). Thus, in this case, the intention here is to construct a
35 volumetric module ready to be transported to site. Using the WBS items from case 2
36 (refer to figures 5 and 6) which is an activity-based WBS to represent the recommended
37 level of breakdown for typical offsite activities and therefore used as the basis for further
38 development, the WBS-matrix for a typical offsite construction project can be developed
39 by crossing the product-oriented and activities oriented WBS as presented in figure 7
40 below.
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WBS MATRIX FOR A TYPICAL VOLUMETRIC MODULE TO BE CONSTRUCTED OFFSITE						
CONSTRUCT STEEL FRAMES						
ERECT WALL PANELS						
INSTALL PLY TO EXTERNAL WALL						
LAY ROOF PLY & MEMBRANE						
INSTALL BREATHER PAPER						
LINE AND LEVEL PADS						
BOLTS UNITS TOGETHER						
INSTALL LEWIS DECK						
POUR CONCRETE SLAB						
INSTALL WINDOWS & DOORS						
LINE OUT SOFFIT						
INSTALLATION TO EXTERNAL WALLS						
INSTALL PLASTERBOARD TO WALLS						
STUD PARTITIONS						
INSTALL 1ST SIDE PLASTERBOARD						
INSTALL INSULATION						
INSTALL NOGGINS & PARTRESSES						
FINALISING PLASTERBOARD						
TAPING & JOINTING						
INSTALL STAIRCASES						
APPLY 1ST COATING						
INSTALL ELECTRICAL CONTAINMENT & BACK BOXES						
INSTALL DOMESTIC PIPEWORK						
INSTALL HEATING PIPEWORK						
	1. STEEL CHASSIS	2. EXTERNAL WALL	3. ROOF/CEILING	4. INTERNAL WALL	5. FLOOR	6. MEP

Figure 7. A proposed WBS-matrix for typical offsite construction projects

Figure 7 above is not intended to be a “one size fits all” WBS-matrix for all kind of offsite building construction projects but more of an example how the WBS-matrix for an offsite construction project can be developed. It is now made clear in the WBS-matrix which activities contributing to which product and/or functional components of a product. For example, it is now made clear that an activity known as “Install Windows and Doors” occurred in the “External Wall” and “Internal Wall” components of that volumetric module. It should be noted, however, the WBS-matrix shown above represents activities and functional components of only one volumetric module. Following the same principle, this WBS-matrix can be expanded to include all volumetric modules in an offsite construction project.

As previously mentioned, one of the main difficulties reported are mainly due to the repetitive nature of manufacturing for offsite construction operations (Salama *et al.* 2016). As evidenced in case 1 of this study, the product-oriented WBS carries this repetition of the volumetric modules whilst in case 2 there is literally no information regarding the volumetric modules in its activities-oriented WBS. So, continuing previous example of “Install Windows and Doors” activity for instance. It is now made clear that this activity occurred in constructing both “internal Wall” and “External Wall” components of a volumetric unit. However, this matrix still does not contain information of when the “Install Windows and Doors” activity is to be performed and for which modular unit it should be performed. In order to deal with these, time dimension can be added to the WBS matrix as its third dimension. In order to visualise this, the functional product breakdown can be represented by the x axis, the activities breakdown by the y axis and time by the z axis. This can be illustrated by using the first three activities of constructing one volumetric module from the WBS-matrix as presented in figure 8 below.

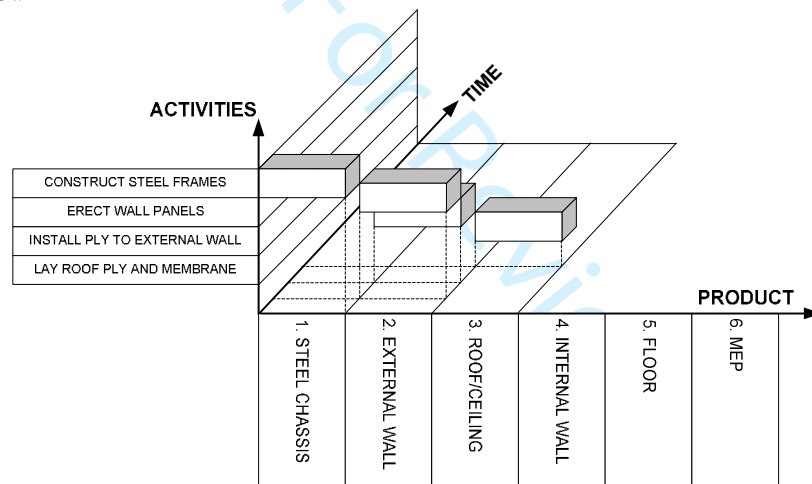


Figure 8. WBS-matrix with added time dimension for one volumetric module

By adding the third dimension to the WBS-matrix as presented in the figure 8 above, the repetition of the activities and functional component representing the volumetric modules can be presented along the time axis and relationship between them can be illustrated. The pattern of the repetition will depend on other factors such as the number and availability of the factory floor, machineries/tools, materials and resources. After all, time and duration are the main reference points of any scheduling but even more so in manufacturing scheduling and decision-making (Framinan *et al.* 2014). Taking the example in figure 8 above, other volumetric modules can be added so for example how many times “erecting wall panel” activities have to be performed to construct the “external wall” component for which volumetric module can be presented (for multiple volumetric modules). Whilst it maybe more complex to visualise, if this repetition pattern can be modelled and presented in the extended version of the WBS-matrix, a more holistic modelling of the process can be provided to further support and inform decision making in managing offsite construction projects. The “WBS-matrix” and “WBS-matrix with added time dimensions” for offsite construction projects reported here can be used to supplement the more traditional project programme/schedule to fully appreciate the manufacturing process of the offsite components in the project. This can be considered a further improvement from the current practice of including them in the project

programme/schedule as a product (case 1) or list of activities (case 2) alone. The overall project programming/scheduling of an offsite construction project can also be presented in the WBS-matrix format to upgrade them, particularly with added time dimension to incorporate both product and activity WBS. However, this level of complexity may make it much harder for users to visualise. A possible tool that can be used to minimise this visualisation issue would be using 3-D visualisation tools and this area needs further research on the capabilities of software applications to model volumetric objects and do 4-D simulation. An example of this possibility is presented in figure 9, which was developed using Autodesk Revit 2017.

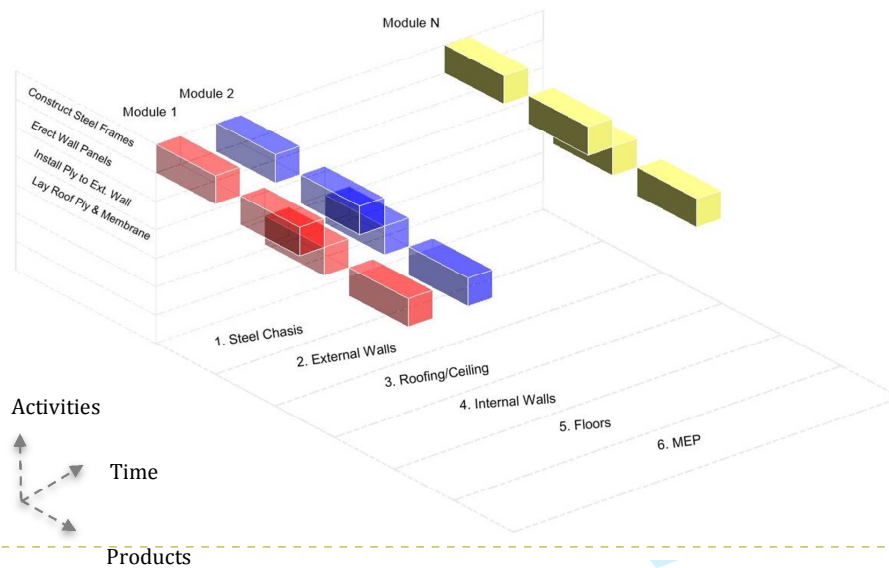


Figure 9. WBS-matrix with added time dimension in a 3-D visualisation tool.

[Each volumetric object is considered as a work package and can be modelled as a ‘mass object’ with three instants properties: ‘Product Name’, ‘Activity Name’ and ‘Module Name’. By presenting the WBS-matrix in Autodesk Revit, the construction sequence, different elements of the volumetric module and time dimension can be presented in 3D and can be clearly visualised. For project stakeholders with no access to specific software applications, such as Naviswork, the construction stimulation can be converted to more common data formats \(for example, Windows AVI\). This will facilitate more clarity in sharing the planned construction procedure. This higher degree of visualisation also supports progress monitoring by making it more transparent compared to Gantt charts for instance. However, this area of investigation will be in the subsequent phase of this research project and is outside the scope of this paper.](#)

Conclusion

Offsite construction can be considered a viable methodology for delivering AEC projects if (and only if), processes are fully understood by all parties. Managing construction projects (including offsite) through WBS is an acknowledged approach for product delivery. The WBS of both the offsite and onsite construction products/activities therefore need to be fully understood from the outset in order to purposefully deliver

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synchronisation. This work was promulgated on the reported mismatch between the construction WBS and manufacturing WBS; the remit of which was to investigate this and determine viable solutions and concomitant integration strategies. The origins of the differences between the product-oriented WBS (originating from the manufacturing side), and the activities-oriented WBS (originating in the construction side) provide fertile grounds for discussion and opportunities for improvement. From this, a WBS-matrix for offsite construction projects was developed and presented, cognisant of the need to combine the two types of WBS into a more integrated solution for offsite construction projects.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the findings and proposed WBS-matrix presented here is only developed for one volumetric module, there are significant opportunities for exploring further developments, including incorporating multiple volumetric modules in an extended WBS-matrix. An extended WBS-matrix for offsite construction projects represents a further subsequent phase of this research, which is for now beyond the scope of this paper. However, the development of the WBS-matrix for offsite construction presented here signifies a major step forward in recognising the need for synchronisation – albeit representing the first phase. Given this, the methodology presented can be used as the basis for developing a WBS-matrix for different types of offsite construction projects (depending on the unique needs of a particular project). Further research will need to appreciate the interconnectivity of multiple volumetric modules, including exploring other types of breakdown structure such as organisational breakdown structure (OBS), resources breakdown structure (ReBS) and/or risk breakdown structure (RiBS). Peripheral and contextual issues will also need to be analysed, including dimensional or geospatial nuances, locational or unique functional product-parameters, factory floor/ machinery characteristics etc. Greater understanding of these issues is important for developing improved richness and understanding, particularly evidential veracity on the value proposition stream. It is hoped that this will in turn support the wider uptake and implementation of offsite construction.

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