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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD LINKING BUILDING INFORMATION MODELING AND ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An electronic construction collaboration system for managing a construction project is provided. The electronic construction collaboration system includes an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) sub-system including a contract engine configured to generate at least one project contract including a contract data set and ERP metadata corresponding to Building Information Modeling (BIM) metadata included in a structural object of a construction project model in a BIM sub-system and an interconnection engine configured to associatively link the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata and send the contract data set to the BIM sub-system in response to associatively linking the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata.

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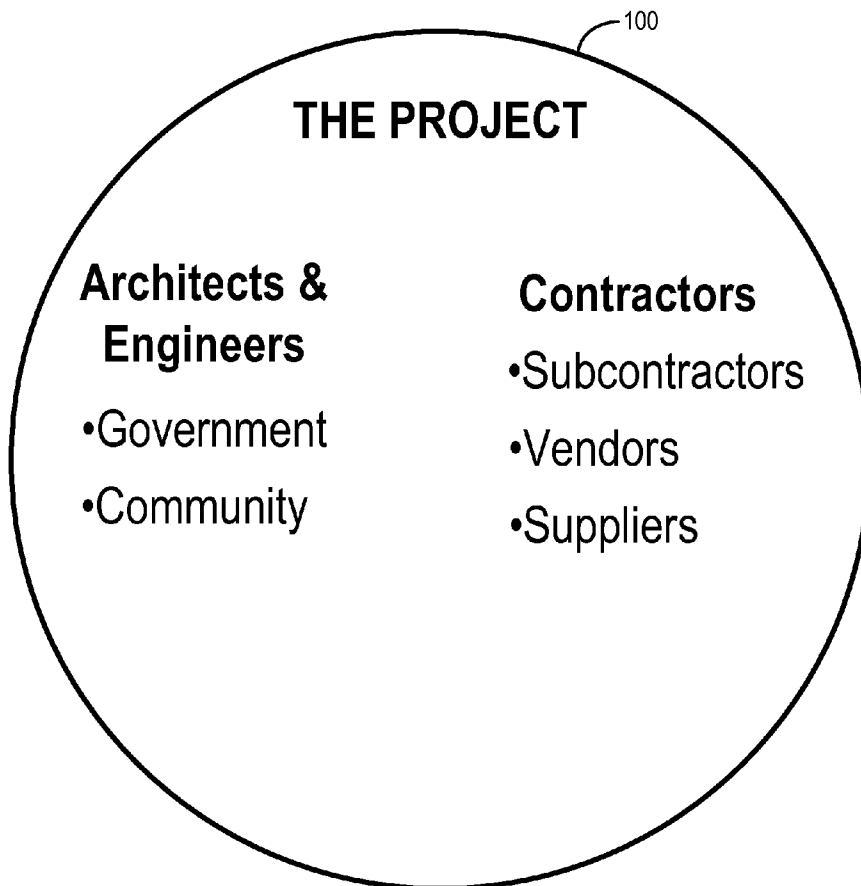


FIG. 1

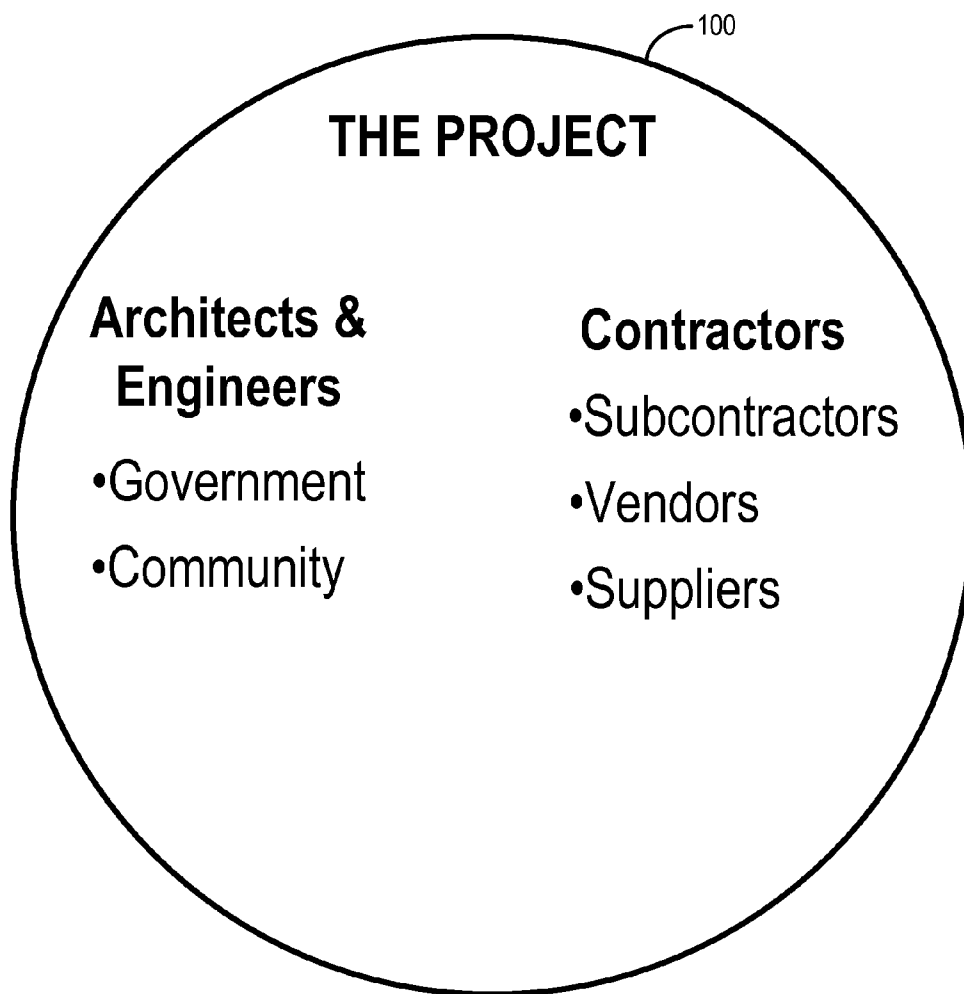
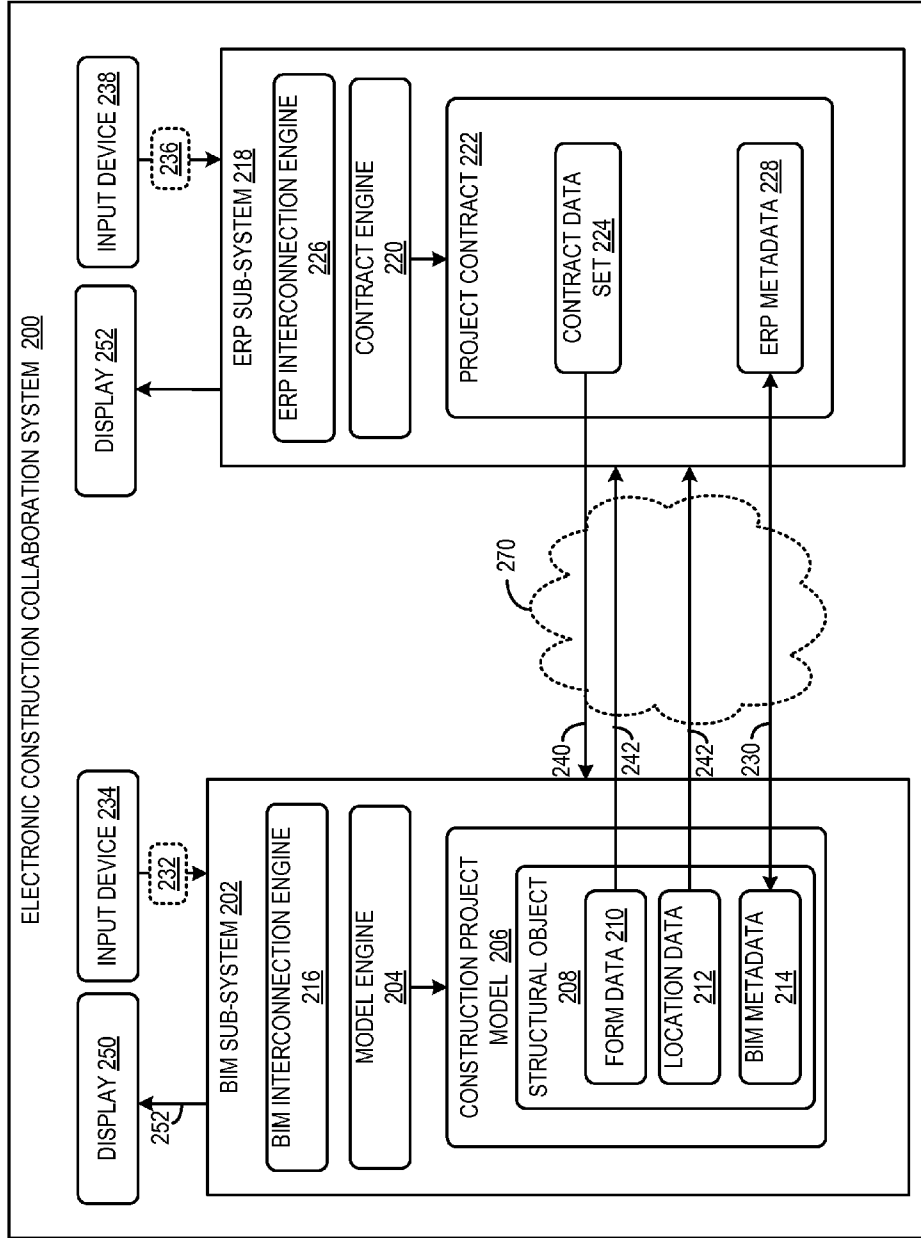


FIG. 2



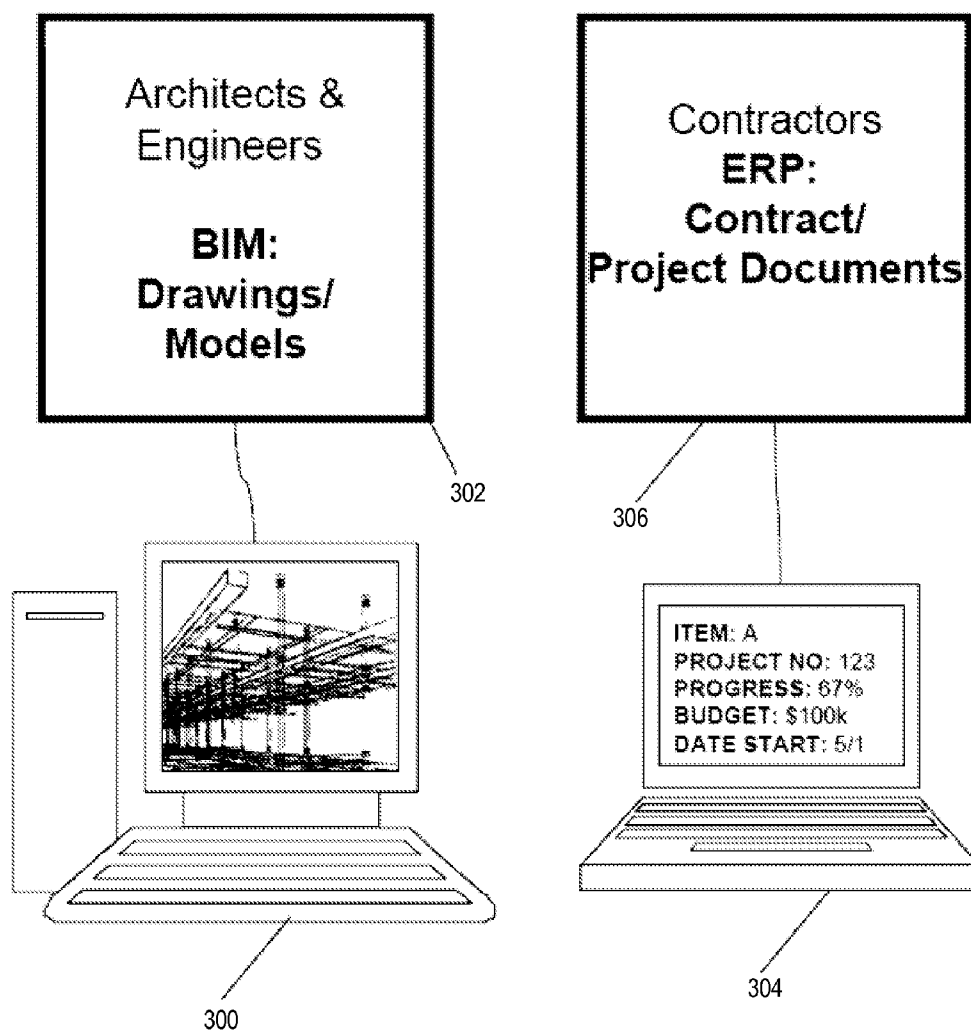


FIG. 3

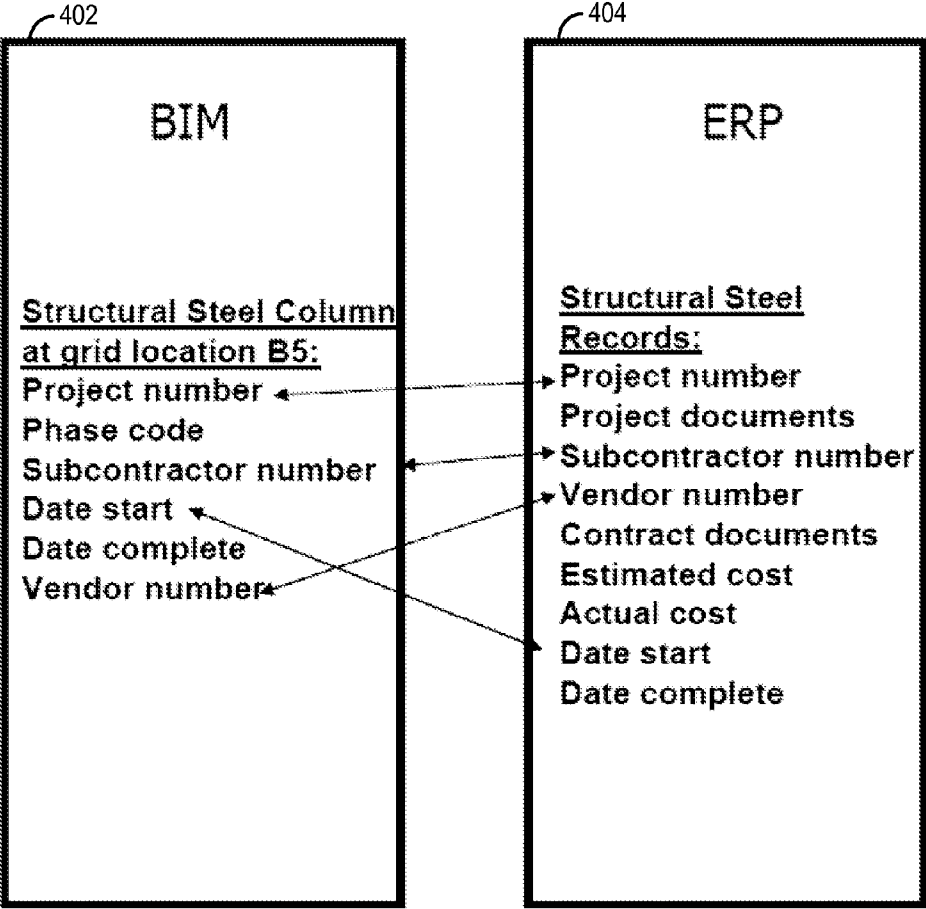
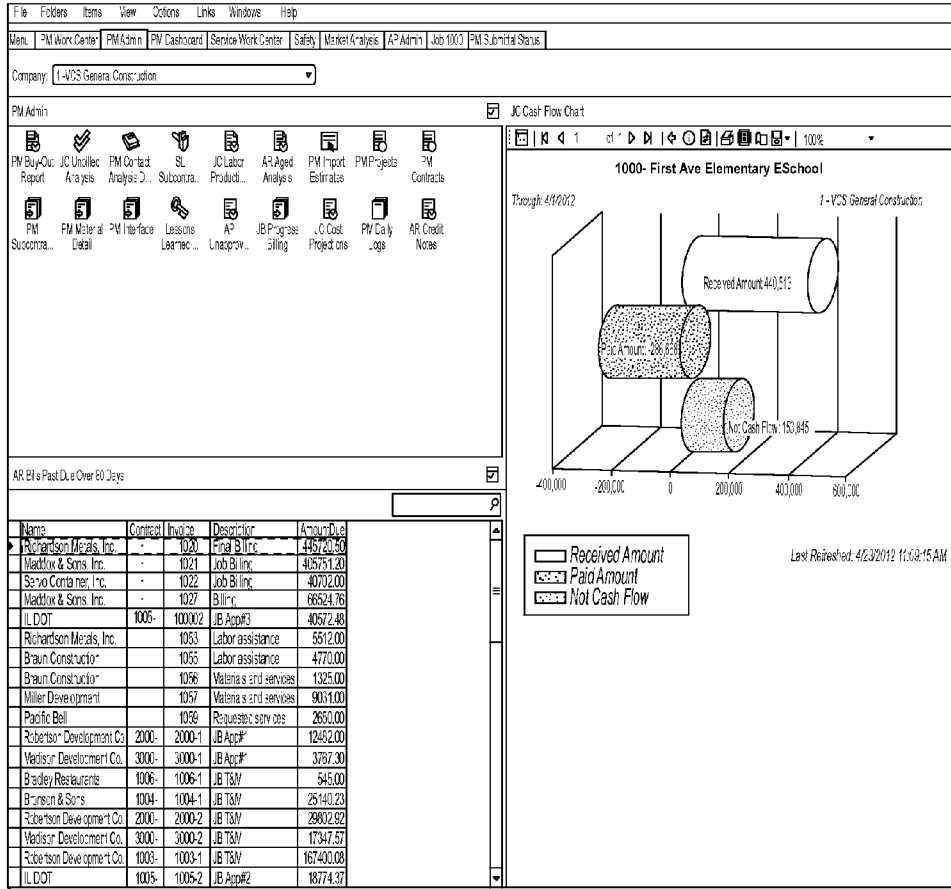
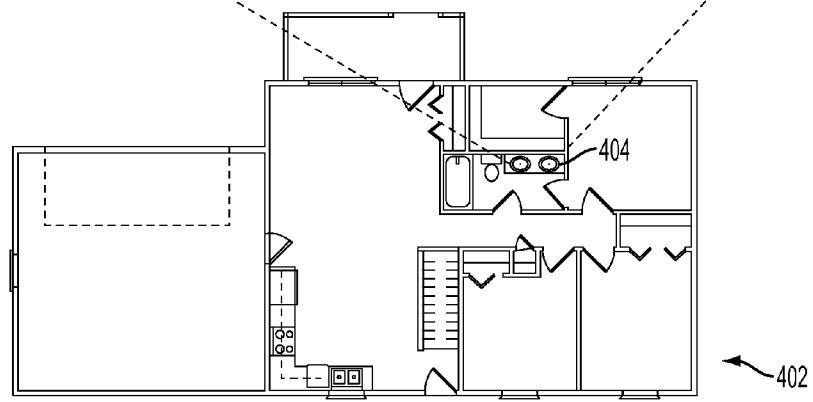


FIG. 4



406



402

FIG. 5

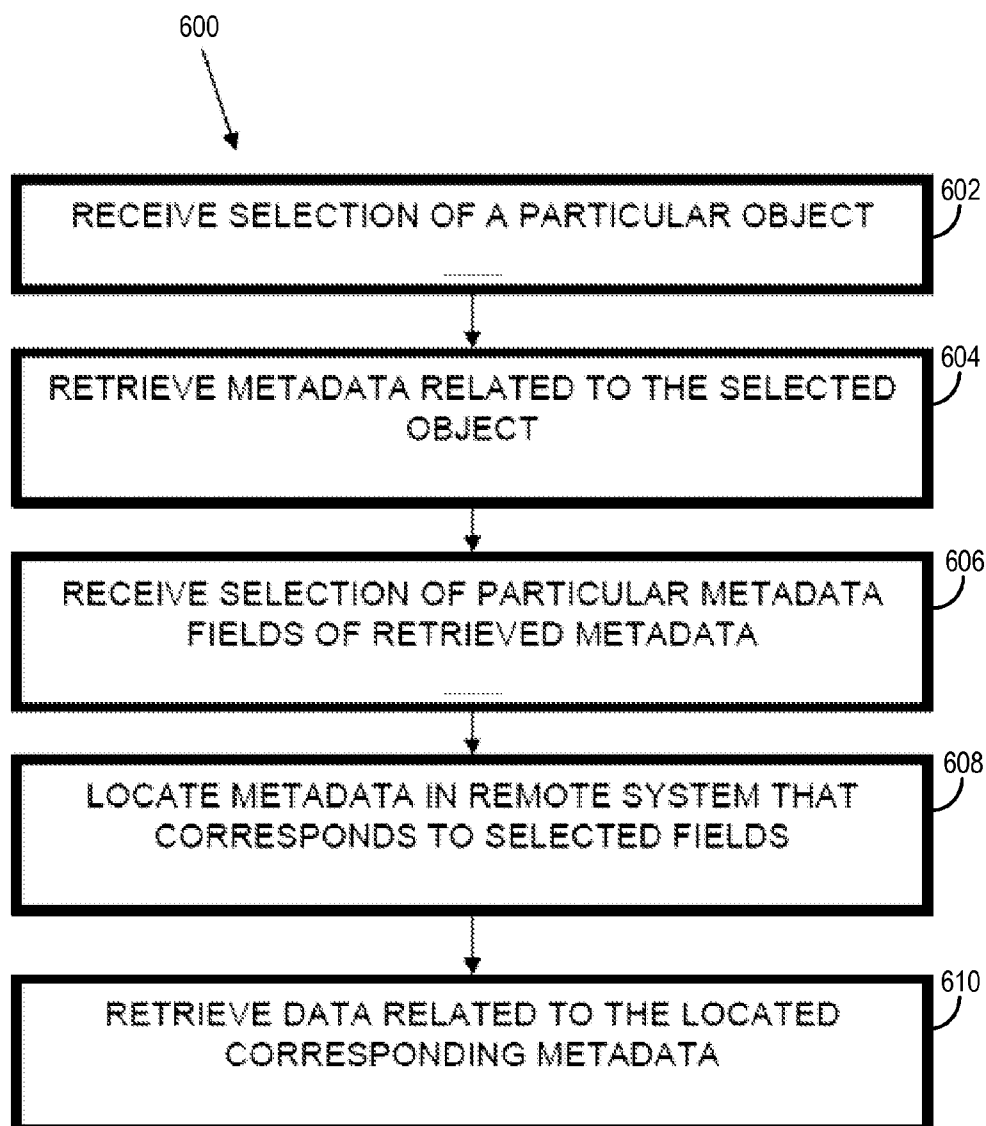
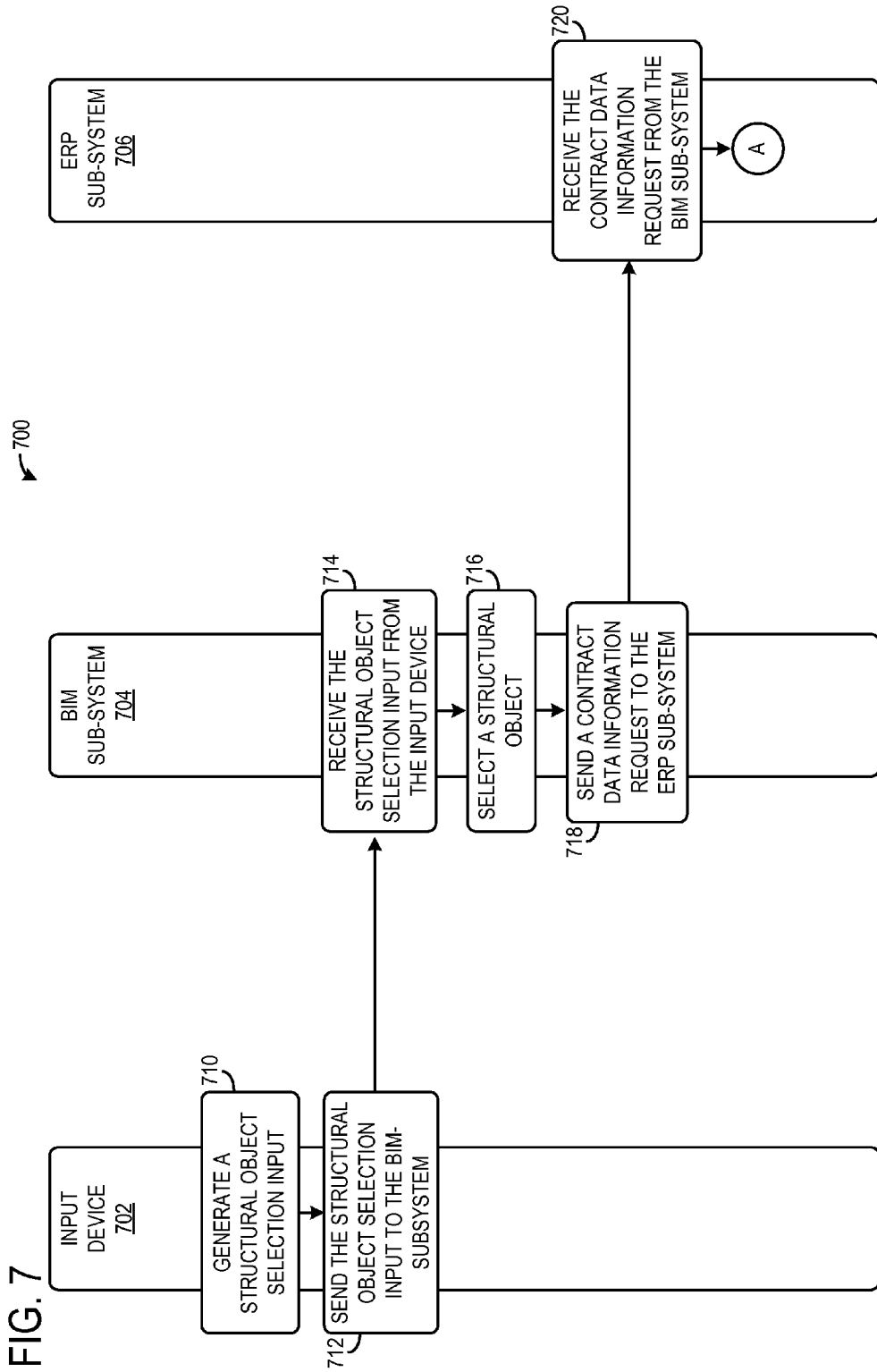


FIG. 6



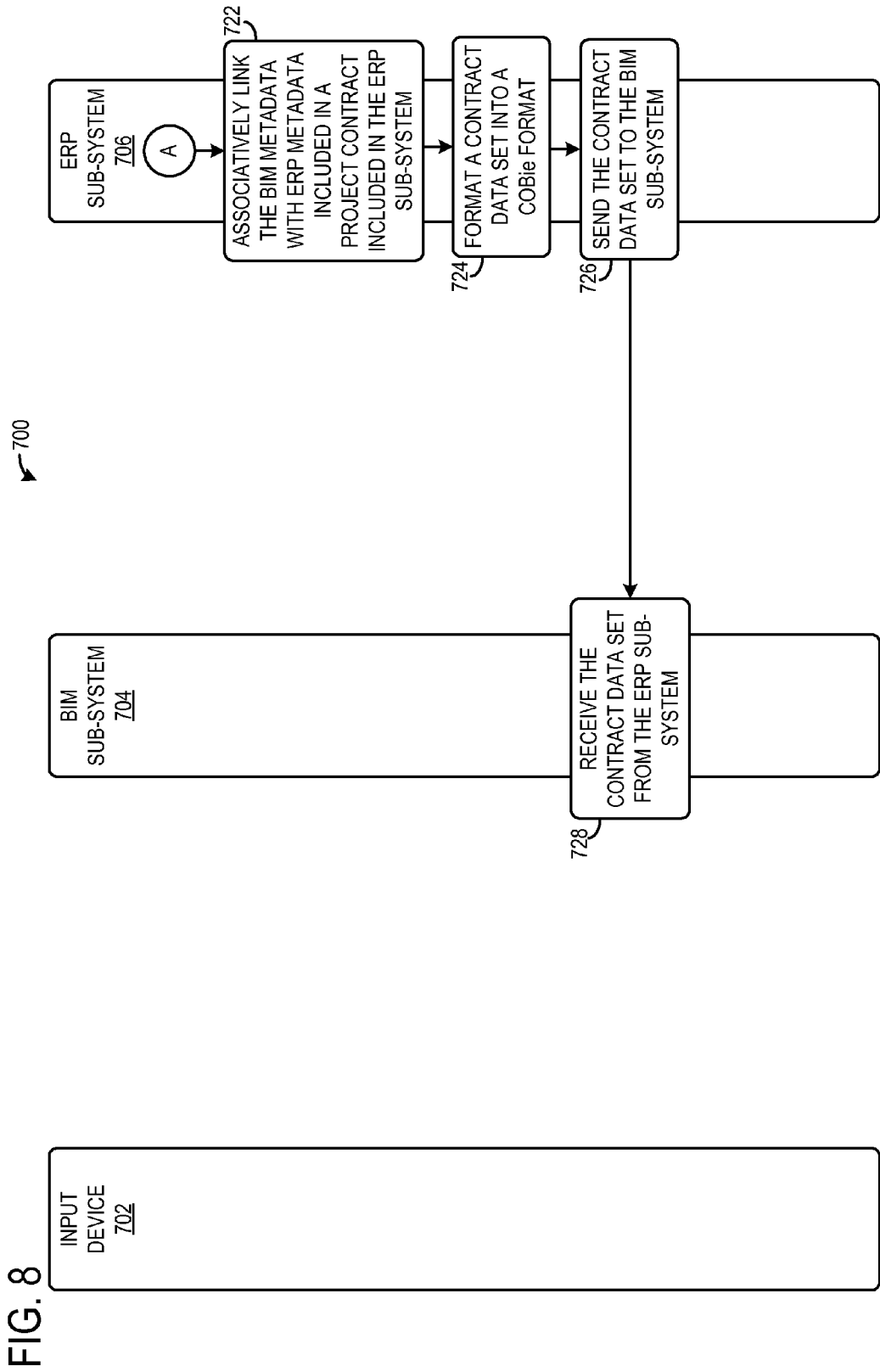
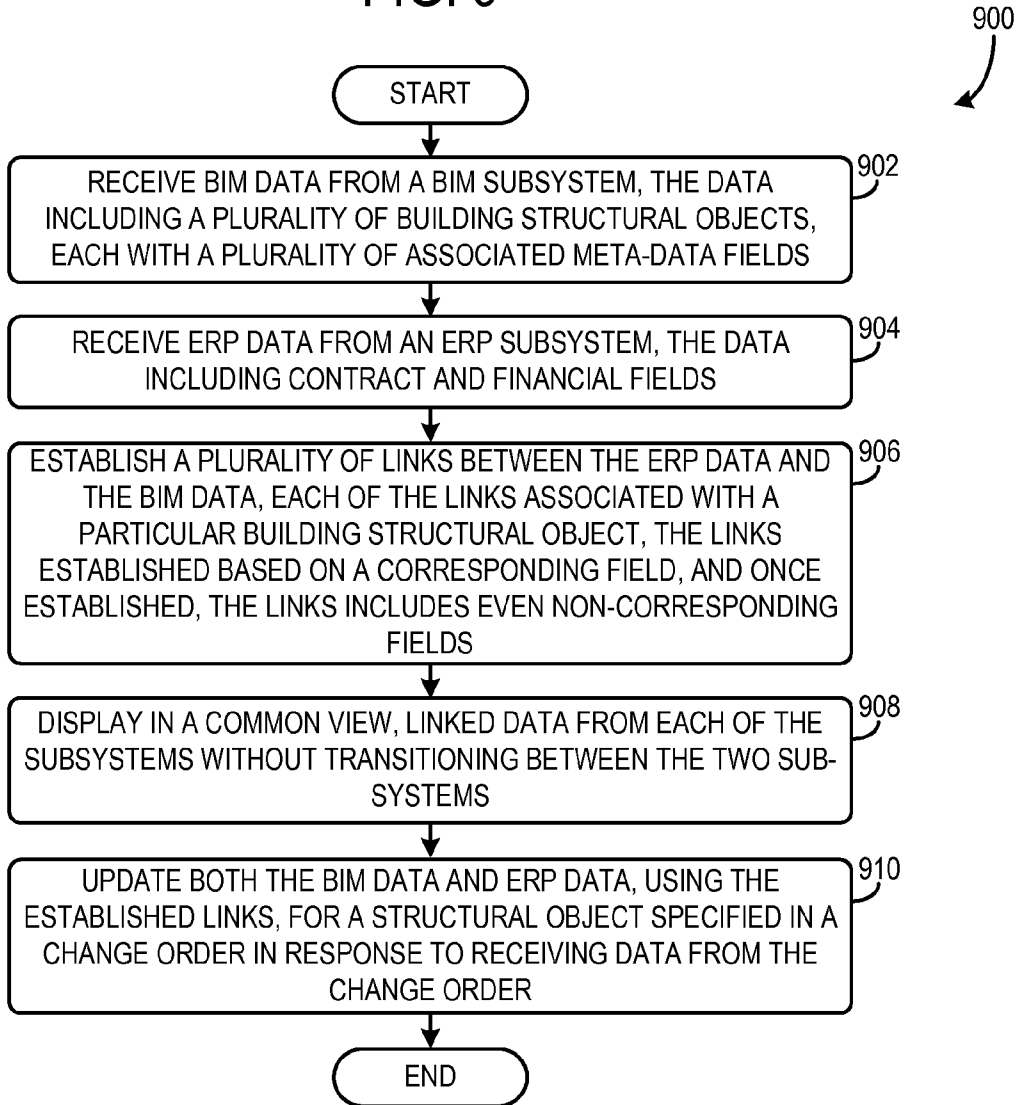


FIG. 9



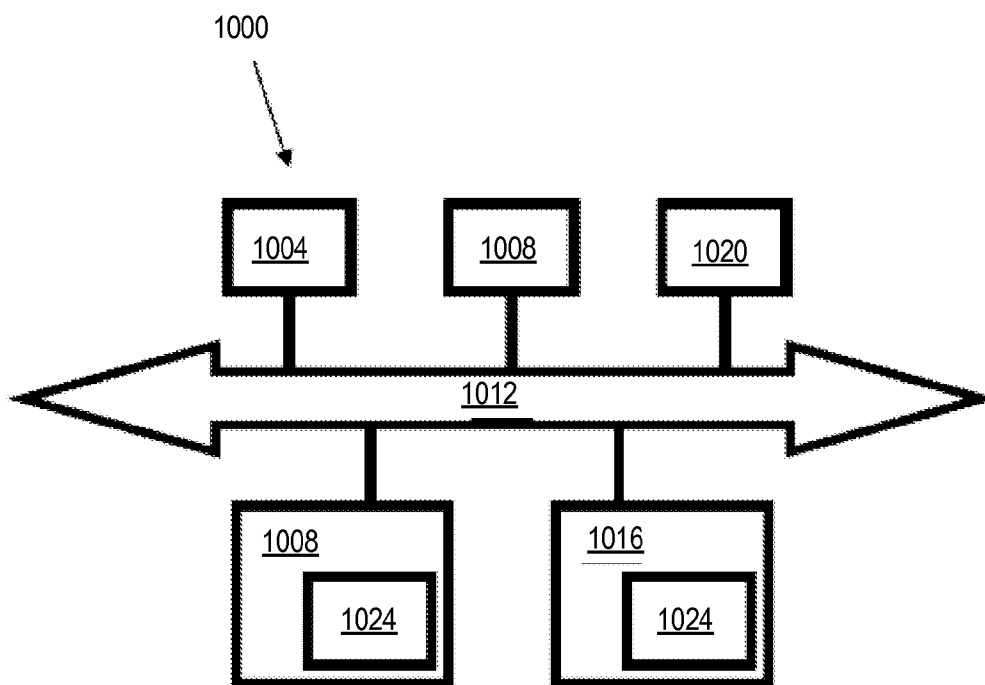


FIG. 10

SYSTEM AND METHOD LINKING BUILDING INFORMATION MODELING AND ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. provisional patent application, Ser. No. 61/661,170, entitled "LINKING BUILDING INFORMATION MODELING AND ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING", filed on Jun. 18, 2012, the entire disclosure of which is herein incorporated by reference.

FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates generally to the technical field of data processing, and more particularly, to linking Building Information Modeling ("BIM") and Enterprise Resource Planning ("ERP").

BACKGROUND

[0003] The background description provided herein is for the purpose of generally presenting the context of the disclosure. Work of the presently named inventors, to the extent it is described in this background section, as well as aspects of the description that may not otherwise qualify as prior art at the time of filing, are neither expressly nor impliedly admitted as prior art against the present disclosure.

[0004] A construction project may involve collaboration between architects, engineers and contractors, all of whom may be directly or indirectly in the employ of an owner or other managing party. The architects and engineers may design buildings or other structures (e.g., by creating plans and/or models) that will serve their intended function, be structurally and mechanically sound, be safe, comply with various rules and regulations (also referred to as "code"), and meet the needs of the project owner. Contractors may construct the building or other structure based on models and/or designs provided by the architects and/or engineers. Contractors may include one or more general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers or other vendors, service providers, and so forth. In some cases, a "construction company" may include a general contractor and one or more subcontractors or suppliers in privity with the general contractor.

[0005] A construction project may be bifurcated between architects and engineers on the one hand, and the contractors on the other. Architects and engineers may be more specialized than contractors, and may tend to focus primarily on their designs and engineering specifications. On the other hand, the construction of the project may be perceived as fungible. Assuming an equivalent basis of training and experience, multiple construction companies may be capable of executing a project design nearly identically. While a project design may vary based on an individual architect's interpretation of owner needs, the construction of the project design may be similar from one contractor to the next. What distinguishes one group of contractors from another is how the work will be done. This may be defined in project contract documents. Project contract documents may precisely describe how the contractor will deliver the constructed designs to the owner. They may be highly specific to an individual general contractor and his/her negotiations with an owner. Project contract documents may describe, among other things, timelines, deliverables, budgets, and payment rates for the deliverables.

Given the separate domains in which they function, architects and engineers on the one hand, and contractors on the other, have developed different systems and methods to manage their domains.

[0006] Many architects and engineers utilize computers with sophisticated drafting programs. Drafting programs rapidly evolving from representing two-dimensional ("2D") figures like squares, ovals, and trapezoids to representing of three-dimensional ("3D") volumes like columns, slabs, and tubes. Such 2D or 3D drafting programs may be referred to as "Building Information Modeling," or "BIM." BIM programs may provide architects and engineers with a library of volumes and/or objects from which they may develop a particular design for the project.

[0007] Many contractors also employ sophisticated systems, referred to as Enterprise Resource Planning ("ERP") systems, to manage project communications, contract documents, and job costs to increase the productivity and accountability of their businesses. ERP sub-systems may provide various parties such as business owners, managers, and partners access to job cost data, contract documents and financial data.

[0008] During the management of a mid-sized construction project, the average general contractor might interact with hundreds or even thousands of subcontractors and other vendors, via tens of thousands of project and contract documents. The manual search to identify all of the pertinent documents, contracts, and data associated with a particular element of a project drawing or model may be time-consuming and/or inefficient.

[0009] In spite of the sophistication of the separate BIM and ERP sub-systems, a gap remains between the project model of the architect or engineer and the project contract of the contractor. In prior systems, there is not a link or association between project models and contract documents/financial performance data, or vice versa. Instead, an interested party may waste time manually looking up contracts pertinent to a particular portion of the project models, or by paging through the drawings for which a particular vendor has subcontracted. For example, a project manager (e.g., of a general contractor) may wish to learn more about the specifics of the contracts associated with a particular structure as described in the construction project models. To better understand the performance requirements associated with this particular structure, the project manager may first identify the structure using the BIM sub-system. The project manager must then switch from the BIM sub-system to the ERP sub-system (or to project contract notebooks in scenarios where there is no ERP sub-system) so that the project manager can look up the contracts associated with the particular structure. It is through this investigative process that the project manager can find relevant project documents (requests for information, submittals, etc.) and contracts (initial contract, pending and approved change orders, etc.) associated with the structure of interest.

SUMMARY

[0010] An electronic construction collaboration system for managing a construction project is provided. The electronic construction collaboration system includes an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) sub-system including a contract engine configured to generate at least one project contract including a contract data set and ERP metadata corresponding to Building Information Modeling (BIM) metadata

included in a structural object of a construction project model in a BIM sub-system and an interconnection engine configured to associatively link the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata and send the contract data set to the BIM sub-system in response to associatively linking the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata.

[0011] Associatively linking metadata in the BIM and ERP sub-systems and utilizing this correlation to share data between the systems increases workflow efficiency by decreasing the time needed to search for information separate sub-systems, such as contract data sets. As a result, a user's productivity is increased thereby increasing the amount of work that can be accomplished in a given amount of time and increasing their earning potential. It will be appreciated that the system may be utilized by a wide range of professionals in the construction field such as contractors, engineers, architects, etc., thereby enabling contractors and engineers and/or architects to seamlessly share information, if desired.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] Embodiments will be readily understood by the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. To facilitate this description, like reference numerals designate like structural elements. Embodiments are illustrated by way of example and not by way of limitation in the figures of the accompanying drawings.

[0013] FIG. 1 schematically illustrates an example construction project;

[0014] FIG. 2 shows a schematic depiction of an electronic construction collaboration system;

[0015] FIG. 3 schematically illustrates example computing devices that may be used as interfaces to Building Information Modeling ("BIM") and Enterprise Resource Planning

[0016] ("ERP") sub-systems in the system shown in FIG. 2;

[0017] FIG. 4 schematically illustrates example BIM and ERP objects, metadata associated with those objects, and links between the metadata of objects across the BIM and ERP sub-systems;

[0018] FIG. 5 schematically depicts an example of contractual and/or other ERP related information a user might see when they select an object in a BIM sub-system;

[0019] FIG. 6 schematically depicts an example method that may be implemented on a computing device associate with a BIM or ERP sub-system;

[0020] FIGS. 7 and 8 depict a method for managing a construction project;

[0021] FIG. 9 depicts another method for managing a construction project; and

[0022] FIG. 10 schematically depicts an example computing device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] An electronic construction collaboration system for managing digital data related to one or more constructions projects is described herein. The system bridges a communication gap between a Building Information Modeling (BIM) sub-system and an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) sub-system. Specifically, metadata included in the BIM sub-system is mapped to metadata included in the ERP sub-system and data related to the linked metadata may be exchanged between the two sub-systems based on the metadata mapping. The exchanged data may include structural object data, such

as dimensional data defining the features and location of the object, and contract data, such as contract documents, cost data, labor hour data, equipment hour data. As a result, users of the system, such as architects, engineers, and/or contractors, may quickly be provided with pertinent project data without undue searching or interactive switching between the sub-systems. Consequently, the productivity of the users may be increased.

[0024] Referring now to FIG. 1, an example project **100** may include various entities working together. Architects and engineers, as noted in the background, may create project models and building plans, and adjust those plans to comply with various codes and regulations. In various embodiments, architects and engineers may include civic personnel (e.g., from the government and/or community organizations).

[0025] Contractors may be engaged to execute the plans and models provided by the architects and engineers. As noted above, contractors may include subcontractors, vendors, suppliers and any other entities that are in contractual relationship with another contractor entity to execute a portion of a project or to supply a good or service related to the project.

[0026] Referring to FIG. 2, an electronic construction collaboration system **200** is depicted. The electronic construction collaboration system **200** may be used by a variety of professionals such as architects, engineers, contractors, etc. The system may enable the aforementioned professionals to efficiently manage one or more constructions projects, such as projects for constructing buildings, roads, bridges, canals, dams, etc.

[0027] The electronic construction collaboration system **200** includes a BIM sub-system **202**. The BIM sub-system **202** is configured to provide dimensional rendering (e.g., 2-D rendering, 3-D rendering) of a construction model for the professionals discussed above such as architects and engineers. Additionally, contractors may also utilize the BIM sub-system **202** due to the communications bridge established between the sub-systems in the electronic construction collaboration system **200**, discussed in greater detail herein.

[0028] The BIM sub-system **202** may include a plurality of engines for implementing various functionalities. Additionally, the BIM sub-system **202** may include one or more computing devices having code stored in memory executable by a processor to implement the aforementioned functionality. Therefore, the BIM sub-system may include and execute one or more application programs via one or more hardware components.

[0029] The engines may include a model engine **204** configured to generate a construction project model **206**. The model engine **204** may be executed by programs such as Autodesk, CypeCAD, Vico Office Suite, etc. The construction project model **206** may include at least one structural object **208**. However, it will be appreciated that in some examples, the construction project model **206** may include a plurality of structural objects. In such an example, the structural objects may be parametrically defined with regard to other structural objects in the construction project model. That is to say that the structural objects may be defined as parameters and relations to other objects, so that if a related object is amended, dependent ones may also change. The construction project model **206** may be any suitable model such as a building, bridge, road, canal, dam, etc.

[0030] The structural object **208** may include form data **210** defining the contours, size, and other geometric features of

the object. The structural object **208** may further include location data **212** defining the location of the object. The structural object **208** may also include BIM metadata **214**. The BIM metadata **214** may include one or more of material data, vendor data, project number data, project phase data, a subcontract number, project schedule data, and cost data. The aforementioned types of data may each correspond to a different data field. Additionally, the model engine **204** may also be configured to enable the user to manipulate the structural objects, augment the structural objects, delete one or more of the structural objects, etc.

[0031] The BIM sub-system **202** further includes a BIM interconnection engine **216** configured communicatively link the BIM sub-system **202** to an ERP sub-system **218**. Specifically, digital metadata independent of graphical rendering of the BIM sub-system may be linked with digital metadata in the ERP sub-system via the interconnection engine. In this way, electronic communication between the two sub-systems is established. The BIM interconnection engine **216** is depicted as a separate component from the model engine **204**. However in some examples, the interconnection engine **216** may be integrated into the model engine **204**.

[0032] The ERP sub-system **218** is included in the electronic construction collaboration system **200**. The ERP sub-system **218** also includes a plurality of engines configured to implement various computing functionalities. The ERP sub-system **218** may include one or more computing devices having code stored in memory executable by a processor to implement the aforementioned functionality. Therefore, the ERP sub-system may include and execute one or more application programs via one or more hardware components. Specifically, the ERP sub-system **218** includes a contract engine **220** configured to generate and/or manage (e.g., augment, delete, and/or overwrite data in the contract) a project contract **222**. It will be appreciated that the ERP sub-system **218** may include a plurality of project contracts related to different aspects of the construction project. Furthermore, the project contract **222** may be delineated into contract elements associated with different aspects of the construction project.

[0033] The project contract **222** further includes a contract data set **224**. The contract data set **224** includes contract documents, cost data, labor hour data, and/or equipment hour data. The contract data set **224** therefore may include one or more files, data structures, etc. The project contract **222** further includes ERP metadata **228**. The ERP metadata **228** may be associated with the contract data set **224**. The ERP metadata **228** may include one or more of material data, vendor data, project number data, project phase data, a subcontract number, project schedule data, and cost data. The aforementioned types of data may each correspond to a different data field.

[0034] The ERP sub-system **218** further includes an ERP interconnection engine **226** configured to communicatively link the ERP sub-system **218** to the BIM sub-system **202**. It will be appreciated that both the ERP interconnection engine **226** and the BIM interconnection engine **216** may work in combination to provide this functionality, in some examples.

[0035] The ERP interconnection engine **226** and the BIM interconnection engine **216** may both be configured to associatively link the BIM metadata **214** and the ERP metadata **228**.

[0036] Specifically, corresponding metadata fields in the BIM metadata and the ERP metadata may be associatively linked (e.g., mapped) to one another indicated at arrow **230**.

The metadata may be mapped via a manual selection process, in one example. For instance, a user of the system may manually select linked metadata fields. Additionally or alternatively, the metadata in the BIM sub-system and the ERP sub-system may be configured to comply with a similar standard and a one to one correlation, a one to two correlation, etc., may be drawn between metadata fields in the sub-systems. Still further in one example, a parser or an arranging process may be used to automatically link metadata fields in the sub-systems. For instance, design software may be used to look up a project identification number in the BIM sub-system and map metadata associated with the project ID to metadata associated with an identical project ID in the ERP sub-system. Thus, in one example the ERP metadata **228** may include a first data field corresponding to a second data field in the BIM metadata **214**. In such an example, the first data field in the ERP metadata is associatively linked with a plurality of data fields in the BIM metadata. Thus, the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata may not have a one to one correspondence. Further in one example, the interconnection engines (**216** and **226**) may be configured to establish a plurality of links between ERP metadata and BIM metadata, each of the links may be associated with a particular building structural object. The links may be established based on a corresponding field, and once established, the links may include non-corresponding fields.

[0037] It will be appreciated that the mapping may be automatically implemented by the electronic construction collaboration system **200**, in one example. However, in other examples, certain actions in the system may trigger the associative linking. For instance, receiving a structural object selection input **232** from an input device **234** may trigger the associative linking. The input device **234** may be any suitable input device such as a trackpad, a mouse, a keyboard, a touch screen, etc. The input device **234** may be included in the BIM sub-system **202**, in some examples. Additionally or alternatively, actions performed in the ERP sub-system **218** may also trigger the associative linking of the BIM metadata **214** and the ERP metadata **228**. Specifically, receiving a project contract selection input **236** from an input device **238** may trigger the associative linking. The input device **238** may be any suitable input device such as a trackpad, a mouse, a keyboard, a touch screen, etc. The input device **238** may be included in the ERP sub-system **218**, in some examples.

[0038] The associative linking of the BIM metadata **214** may trigger (e.g., automatically trigger) data transfer between the BIM sub-system **202** and the ERP sub-system **218** or vice-versa. Specifically, in one example the BIM sub-system **202** may receive a duplicate of the contract data set **224** sent from the ERP sub-system **218** in response to the associative linking of the metadata indicated at arrow **240**. In another example, the BIM sub-system **202** may receive a selected portion of the elements included in the contract data set **224** sent from the ERP sub-system **218**. The portion of elements sent to the BIM sub-system **202** by the ERP sub-system **218** may be determined based on the type of metadata that is communicatively linked. In another example, the ERP sub-system **218** may receive a duplicate of the location data **212** and/or the form data **210** sent from the BIM sub-system **202** in response to associatively linking the metadata, indicated at arrows **242**. In this way, metadata associatively linked by the two sub-systems may trigger the sharing of relevant data between the two sub-systems. As a result, a user's productiv-

ity may be increased via a decrease in wasted time spent searching for pertinent information stored within different sub-systems.

[0039] The BIM interconnection engine **216** and/or the ERP interconnection engine **226** may be configured to format the contract data into Construction Operations Building Information Exchange (COBie) format prior to sending the contract data. COBie is a data format which may be useful for operations and maintenance information. Therefore, the COBie format may help provide a continuity of information and provide more effective metadata mapping. In one example, the COBie format includes a type of extensible markup language (XML) format.

[0040] The BIM sub-system **202** may be in electronic communication with a display **250** enabling a user to view graphical data generated in the sub-system. Therefore, the structural object **208** as well as the contract data set **224** may be presented on a graphical user interface (GUI) in the display. Likewise, the BIM sub-system **202** may be in electronic communication with a display **250**, indicated via arrow **252**. It will be appreciated that in some examples, the display **250** may be integrated into the BIM sub-system **202**. Likewise, the ERP sub-system **218** may be in electronic communication with a display **260** enabling a user to view graphical data generated in the sub-system. Therefore, the contract data set **224** as well as the structural object **208** may be presented on the display **260**. Additionally, the display **260** may be integrated into the BIM sub-system **202**, in some examples. Further, in some examples, the BIM sub-system **202** may be remotely located from the ERP sub-system **218**. Furthermore, it will be appreciated that each separate sub-system may include one or more hardware components, devices, etc., which may be colocated or remotely located. Moreover, the ERP sub-system **218** and the BIM sub-system **202** may be in electronic communication via a network **270** (e.g., the Internet, a LAN network, etc.).

[0041] FIG. 3 shows an example use case scenario of the electronic construction collaboration system **200** shown in FIG. 2. Therefore, the devices, components, elements, etc., shown in FIG. 3 may be included in the system shown in FIG. 2. An architect or engineer may utilize a BIM computing device **300** configured with or having access to BIM sub-system **302** to create and/or modify project plans and models. As previously discussed the BIM sub-system may include software. In various embodiments, BIM sub-system **302** may be used to create a two-dimensional (“2D”) or three-dimensional (“3D”) drawing or model of a structure or building to be constructed as part of a project. 2D and 3D BIM drawings and/or models may include a plurality of objects. Each object may correspond to a particular structure within the overall model. BIM users may manipulate these objects in various ways. For instance, in some embodiments, a user may use a mouse, keyboard, light pen and/or other input devices to interact with a graphical user interface (“GUI”) depicted on one or more displays of BIM computing device **300**.

[0042] A contractor (e.g., general contractors, subcontractors, suppliers, vendors, etc.) may use an ERP computing device **304** configured with or having access to ERP sub-system **306** to perform its role in a project. As previously discussed, the ERP sub-system may include software. For instance, a general contractor may utilize ERP computing device **304** to view and/or edit contract data and/or other more general project data, such as costs, completion status, safety incidences, change orders, and so forth.

[0043] While BIM computing device **300** is shown as a desktop computing device and ERP computing device **304** is shown as a laptop computing device, this is not meant to be limiting. Either of these computing devices, or any other computing device or system described herein, may be any type of computing device, including but not limited to a desktop computer, a laptop computer, a mobile phone, a tablet computing device, a personal digital assistance (“PDA”), a “dummy” terminal, a server, etc.

[0044] BIM sub-system **302** and ERP sub-system **306** are shown as blocks in FIG. 3 to indicate that they may be implemented in various forms. In some embodiments, local computing devices such as BIM computing device **300** and ERP computing device **304** may execute client programs that may be configured to connect to corresponding server programs executing on BIM/ERP server computers. In some such embodiments, BIM/ERP clients installed on computing devices such as BIM computing device **300** or ERP computing device **304** may store and retrieve data from a remote database (not shown), e.g., controlled by an BIM and/or ERP server.

[0045] BIM and ERP sub-systems may enable users to create, modify, and/or delete various objects. In various embodiments, these objects may be accompanied by metadata, which may describe various aspects of the objects. Examples of metadata are shown in FIG. 4. On the left, metadata for an example BIM sub-system **402** object, in this case a “structural steel column at grid location B5,” may include but is not limited to: date start, date complete, project number, phase code, subcontract number, and vendor number. Similarly, on the right, metadata for an example ERP sub-system **404** record, in this case “structural steel records,” may include but is not limited to: project number, project documents, vendor number, contract documents, estimated cost, actual cost, date start, and date complete. This metadata is provided as an example, and is not meant to be limiting in any way. Various other metadata (not shown) may additionally or alternatively be related to a component such as a structural steel column or structural steel records.

[0046] In various embodiments, objects that may correspond or relate to each other in real life may be classified and/or characterized differently in a BIM sub-system **402** versus an ERP sub-system **404**, shown in FIG. 4. For instance, in FIG. 4, the arrows indicate that a number of metadata fields associated with each object may correspond or otherwise relate to each other. These relationships may be usable to link the BIM sub-system **402** and ERP sub-system **404**, so that a user may interact with one sub-system to view data from both sub-systems. For example, a user of BIM sub-system **402** may be able to select the structural steel column at grid location B5 and request, from ERP sub-system **404**, contractual documents or other data that is pertinent to the selected structural column or all structural columns in a project.

[0047] A number of metadata fields may be linked across BIM and ERP sub-systems. For example, both the “structural steel column at grid location B5” object of BIM sub-system **402** and the “structural steel records” of ERP sub-system **404** have “project number” fields. If the values of these objects’ project number fields are the same, that may suggest that, at the very least, the BIM object and the ERP records relate to the same project. Additionally, both the BIM object and the ERP records in FIG. 3 have “vendor number” fields. If the vendor number for both objects and records is the same, that may further suggest that a single vendor was responsible for

or at least involved with both the object and the associated records. In various embodiments, a user of BIM sub-system 402 could utilize a combination of the project number and vendor number fields to identify and view ERP records and data about pertinent BIM objects (e.g., contracts and other data related to the same project and vendor). Associated fields may further include a project identification number field, a vendor field, a construction phase/trade field, a project readiness field, a phase field, a delivery date field, a customer field, and/or an asset owner field. The project readiness field may include data that signifies if the project is complete or is pending. Furthermore, when a structural object is selected contract information as well as change order information may be displayed to a user of the BIM sub-system and/or the ERP sub-system. Change order data may be integrated into the system via the mapped metadata.

[0048] Additionally, time cards may be linked to a phase of construction in the ERP sub-system and therefore linked with associated metadata. In this way, time cards may be pulled (e.g., displayed to a user of the system) enabling payment and cost review by the user.

[0049] It should be understood that relationships between objects in BIM and records in ERP sub-systems, such as between the “structural steel column at grid location B5” of BIM sub-system 402 and the “structural steel records” of ERP sub-system 404, need not be one-to-one. A component in BIM sub-system 402 may correspond to more than one component in ERP sub-system 404, and vice versa. For example, an object in BIM sub-system 402 such as a structural steel column may correspond to multiple records (e.g., vendor, contract, etc.) in ERP sub-system 404 by virtue of shared metadata fields. As another example, a single contract in ERP sub-system 404 may relate to multiple individual objects in BIM sub-system 402, e.g., where a particular subcontractor is hired to build multiple structures.

[0050] Benefits of linking BIM sub-system 402 and ERP sub-system 404 via metadata may become clearer through an example. Assume a project manager is viewing an engineering drawing of a particular structural steel column in BIM sub-system 402, e.g., using BIM computing device 300 in FIG. 3. Assume also that the project manager wishes to view ongoing costs and contractual documents associated with the structural steel column. Rather than switching to ERP sub-system 404 (e.g., by moving to ERP computing device 304 in FIG. 3) and manually searching for contracts and other pertinent data related to the structural steel column, the project manager may simply direct BIM sub-system 402 to cross reference the metadata associated with the structural steel column in BIM sub-system 402 with corresponding metadata in the ERP sub-system 404. In this manner, the project manager may search for and retrieve project documents, contracts, and other data pertinent to the structural steel column from ERP sub-system 404, without transitioning between the two sub-systems.

[0051] Associations between metadata in BIM and ERP sub-systems are not limited to associations between objects in the architectural or engineering models like structural steel columns (BIM) and project documents or contracts (ERP). In various embodiments, associations may additionally or alternatively include an association between objects in a BIM sub-system and other data related and unrelated to an ERP sub-system, including but not limited to cost data, labor hours, equipment hours, change orders, and so forth.

[0052] In various embodiments, BIM sub-system 402, ERP sub-system 404, or both may be configured to cross reference with each other on user-selected metadata fields. For example, the project manager from the example above may refine the search results by specifying particular metadata to be linked from BIM sub-system 402 to ERP sub-system 404. For instance, the project manager could request only ERP components with the same project number and/or subcontractor number as the current BIM object, or even the same start and finish dates. In some cases, the more fields selected for cross reference, the narrower the results may be.

[0053] While the BIM and ERP sub-systems described herein remain separate (though linked via metadata), this is not meant to be limiting. In various embodiments, rather than separate BIM and ERP sub-systems simply being linked together using metadata, a single sub-system or application program may incorporate both BIM and ERP capabilities.

[0054] FIG. 5 depicts schematically one example of what a user of BIM computing device 300, shown in FIG. 3, might see on a display when the user selects a particular drawing or model feature (e.g., a bathroom fixture). In this example, a user may be viewing a building plan 502 and may have selected a particular feature, in this case, a dual sink 504. Selection of a feature in the drawing or model may cause another interface or window 506 to open. The other interface or window 506 may depict various BIM-related information about the selected feature, such as the entity installing it, materials involved, etc. Moreover, the other interface or window 506 may also display non-BIM related information (including but not limited to ERP-related information) about the selected feature, such as contracts related to the feature, amounts received and paid for the particular feature, cash flow relating to the feature, the entity (e.g., subcontractor) responsible for constructing the feature, information relating to that entity, any change order requests or approvals pertinent to that particular feature, information about materials used for the feature, and so forth.

[0055] FIG. 6 depicts an example method 600 that may be implemented by a computing device such as BIM computing device 300 and/or ERP computing device 304 in FIG. 3. Although the operations are depicted in a particular order, this is not meant to be limiting. One or more operations may be reordered, added and/or omitted without departing from the present disclosure.

[0056] At 602, input may be received, e.g., by BIM computing device 300 and/or ERP computing device 304, that indicates that a user has selected (e.g., has interest in) a particular object. For example, if the user is using a BIM sub-system (e.g., via BIM computing device 300), the user may select (e.g., using a mouse, light pin, etc.) a graphical or textual object corresponding to a component of a building or other structure, such as the dual sink described above. Likewise, if the user is using the ERP sub-system (e.g., via ERP computing device 304), the user may select a contract or other piece of data, e.g., using a mouse, keyboard, light pin, etc. In various embodiments, once selected, that object may become “active,” and the user may perform various actions on the object (e.g., depending on the user’s access credentials), such as modification, deletion, and so forth.

[0057] At 604, either upon selection of the object at 602 or responsive to an additional command from the user, metadata related to the selected object may be retrieved. For instance, if a user selects a “structural column” at BIM computing device 300, metadata relating to that object (e.g., shown in FIG. 3)

may be retrieved, e.g., from a database associated with a BIM sub-system. In various embodiments, the retrieved metadata may be displayed or made available for display to the user.

[0058] At 606, input may be received from the user indicating a selection of particular metadata fields, e.g., for cross reference into a remote system. (As used herein, a “remote system” may refer to the ERP sub-system from the perspective of the BIM sub-system, and to the BIM sub-system from the perspective of the ERP sub-system.) The user may select metadata fields for a variety of reasons. For example, the user may wish to know what other portions of a project are being handled by the same subcontractor as the currently-selected BIM object. Accordingly, the user may select the “subcontractor number” metadata field, for cross reference into the ERP sub-system.

[0059] At 608, metadata corresponding to the metadata retrieved at 604 and/or the metadata fields selected at 606 may be located in the remote system. If the user is using BIM computing device 300, the corresponding metadata may be retrieved from ERP computing device 304 and/or an ERP sub-system 306. If the user is using ERP computing device 304, the corresponding metadata may be retrieved from BIM computing device 300 and/or BIM sub-system 302.

[0060] At 610, data to which the metadata located at 608 is associated may be retrieved. For instance, BIM computing device 300 may retrieve contracts and other data associated with metadata received from ERP sub-system 306 and/or ERP computing device 304. Alternatively, ERP computing device 304 may retrieve BIM objects associated with metadata received from BIM sub-system 302 and/or BIM computing device 300. Continuing the example described above, BIM computing device 300 may receive, e.g., from ERP sub-system 306, contracts and other data with metadata that matches the metadata selected at 606 and/or that relates to metadata retrieved at 604. If at 606 the user of BIM computing device 300 selected particular metadata fields of interest, such as a subcontractor number, then the contracts or other data returned from (e.g., ERP sub-system 306), may include any contracts or other data having the same subcontractor number.

[0061] FIG. 7 shows a method 700 for managing a construction project in an in an electronic construction collaboration system. The method shows an input device 702, BIM sub-system 704, and ERP sub-system 706 executing the method. It will be appreciated that the input device 702 may be similar to the input device 234 shown in FIG. 2. Likewise, the BIM sub-system 704 may be similar to the BIM sub-system 202 shown in FIG. 2 and the ERP sub-system 706 may be similar to the ERP sub-system 218 shown in FIG. 2. Thus, the method may be implemented via the electronic construction collaboration system, sub-systems, components, elements, etc., shown in FIG. 2 or may be implemented via another suitable electronic construction collaboration system.

[0062] At 710 the method includes, at the input device 702, generating a structural object selection input. For instance, an object may be selected via a mouse click over an object in a graphical user interface. Next at 712 the method includes sending the structural object selection input from the input device 702 to the BIM sub-system 704. At 714 the method includes receiving the structural object selection input at the BIM sub-system 704 sent from the input device 702.

[0063] Next at 716 the method includes selecting a structural object in response to receiving the structural object

input, the structural object included in a construction project model in the BIM sub-system 704. BIM metadata included in the BIM sub-system included in the structural object. The BIM metadata may include material data, vendor data, project number data, project phase data, a subcontract number, project schedule data, and cost data. Additionally, the structural object may include form data and location data. As previously discussed, the metadata may be included in a metadata set having a plurality of data fields.

[0064] At 718 the method includes sending a contract data information request to the ERP sub-system from the BIM sub-system. The contract data information request may include BIM metadata. Next at 720 the method includes receiving the contract data information request from the BIM sub-system at the ERP sub-system. It will be appreciated that the contract data information request may be more generally referred to as an information request.

[0065] Referring to FIG. 8, at 722 the method includes associatively linking the BIM metadata with ERP metadata included in a project contract included in the ERP sub-system at the ERP sub-system. However, in other examples the associative linking may be implemented in the BIM sub-system. In this way, metadata in both the BIM and ERP sub-systems may be mapped to provide a communication bridge between the systems to increase the system’s efficiency. It will be appreciated that associatively linking metadata in the two sub-systems may include selecting a set of ERP metadata from a plurality of sets of ERP metadata, the set of metadata including at least one metadata field included in the BIM metadata. Each set of ERP metadata may be associated with a different project contract. In this way, relevant project contracts may be identified for subsequent transfer to the BIM sub-system and display by the BIM sub-system. Thus, a contractor, architect, engineer, etc., may view contracts related to the structural object via the BIM sub-system without switching systems. As previously discussed, the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata may include one or more of material data, vendor data, project number data, project phase data, a subcontract number, project schedule data, and cost data. It will be appreciated that the metadata may be independent of the graphical data rendered via a rendering model in the BIM sub-system.

[0066] Next at 724 the method includes formatting a contract data set into a COBie format. The COBie format may include a type of XML format. At 726 the method includes sending the contract data set from the ERP sub-system to the BIM sub-system. In this way, contract data may be automatically sent to the BIM sub-system, enabling a user of the BIM sub-system to not only interact with a project model but also access pertinent contract information associated with the contract model stored in the ERP sub-system.

[0067] FIG. 9 shows a method 900 for managing a construction project in an in an electronic construction collaboration system. The method 900 may be implemented via the electronic construction collaboration system, sub-systems, components, elements, etc., shown in FIG. 2 or may be implemented via another suitable electronic construction collaboration system.

[0068] At 902 the method includes receiving BIM data from a BIM subsystem, the data including a plurality of building structural objects, each with a plurality of associated meta-data fields.

[0069] Next at 904 the method includes receiving ERP data from an ERP subsystem, the data including contract and

financial fields. At **906** the method includes establishing a plurality of links between the ERP data and the BIM data, each of the links associated with a particular building structural object, the links established based on a corresponding field, and once established, the links includes even non-corresponding fields. In one example, the establishment of the links is prioritized based on a number of corresponding fields between the ERP data and the BIM data for the particular building structural object. In this way, pertinent data may be correspondingly linked. Further in one example, at least two corresponding fields are required to establish the links, the at least two fields including a project number and a vendor number. Therefore, it may be determined if a link is established based on the number of corresponding fields. Further in one example, the plurality of links are further established based on COBie-formatted data.

[0070] Next at **908** the method includes displaying in a common view, linked data from each of the subsystems without transitioning between the two sub-systems. In one example, the displaying includes, first displaying in the common view the linked data associated only with a selected structural object, and in response to an addition user selection from the common view, displaying, in the common view, data for a structural object other than the selected structural object, but with fields in common with the selected structural object. Further in such an example, the data for the structural object other than the selected structural object includes a common vendor or sub-contractor for the selected structural object and the structural object other than the selected structural object. Further in one example, the linked data displayed in the common view includes one or more of an entity installing a selected structural object, materials for the selected structural object, a shape of the selected structural object, dimensions of the selected structural object, a contract for construction of the selected structural object, cash flow related to the selected structural object, change orders for the selected structural object, labor hours for the selected structural object, equipment hours for the selected structural object, approvals for the selected structural object, or combinations thereof. In this way, users can easily view common data without undue searching and/or switching between sub-systems. Further in one example, the linked data displayed in the common view includes time cards for the selected structural object.

[0071] At **910** the method includes updating both the BIM data and ERP data, using the established links, for a structural object specified in a change order in response to receiving data from the change order.

[0072] FIG. 10 illustrates a computing system **1000** configured to practice all or selected aspects of the operations described above and shown in FIG. 6. It will be appreciated that the BIM and/or ERP subsystems shown in FIG. 2 may include one or more of the components shown in the computing system **1000**. As illustrated, computing system **1000** may include processor **1004**, memory **1008**, and bus **1012**, coupled to each other as shown. Additionally, computing system **1000** may include storage **1016** and one or more communication interfaces **1020**, e.g., a network interface card (NIC), or an antenna, coupled to each other, and the earlier described elements as shown.

[0073] Memory **1008** and storage **1016** may include, in particular, temporal and persistent copies of project logic **1024**, respectively. The project logic **1024** may include instructions that when executed by the processor **1004** result in the various techniques described herein being performed.

[0074] In various embodiments, the memory **1008** may include random access memory (RAM), dynamic RAM (“DRAM”), static RAM (“SRAM”), synchronous DRAM (“SDRAM”), dual data rate RAM (“DDRAM”), etc. In various embodiments, the processor **1004** may include one or more single-core processors, multiple-core processors, controllers, application-specific integrated circuits (“ASICs”), etc.

[0075] In various embodiments, storage **1016** may be a machine-accessible medium that includes integrated and/or peripheral storage devices, such as, but not limited to, disks and associated drives (e.g., magnetic, optical), universal serial bus (“USB”) storage devices and associated ports, a solid state drive (“SSD”), flash memory, read-only memory (“ROM”), nonvolatile semiconductor devices, etc.

[0076] In various embodiments, storage **1016** may be a storage resource physically part of the computing system **1000** or it may be accessible by, but not necessarily a part of, the computing system **1000**. For example, the storage **1016** may be accessed by the computing system **1000** over a network via the communication interface **1020**. In various embodiments, computing system **1000** may have more or less components, and/or different architectures.

[0077] Although certain embodiments have been illustrated and described herein for purposes of description, the application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the embodiments discussed herein. Therefore, it is manifestly intended that embodiments described herein be limited only by the claims.

[0078] Where the disclosure recites “a” or “a first” element or the equivalent thereof, such disclosure includes one or more such elements, neither requiring nor excluding two or more such elements. Further, ordinal indicators (e.g., first, second or third) for identified elements are used to distinguish between the elements, and do not indicate or imply a required or limited number of such elements, nor do they indicate a particular position or order of such elements unless otherwise specifically stated.

[0079] In the preceding detailed description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings which form a part hereof wherein like numerals designate like parts throughout, and in which is shown by way of illustration embodiments that may be practiced. It is to be understood that other embodiments may be utilized and structural or logical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. Therefore, the following detailed description is not to be taken in a limiting sense, and the scope of embodiments is defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.

[0080] In the description above various operations are described as multiple discrete actions or operations in turn, in a manner that is most helpful in understanding the claimed subject matter. However, the order of description should not be construed as to imply that these operations are necessarily order dependent. In particular, these operations may not be performed in the order of presentation. Operations described may be performed in a different order than the described embodiment. Various additional operations may be performed and/or described operations may be omitted in additional embodiments.

[0081] For the purposes of the present disclosure, the phrase “A and/or B” means (A), (B), or (A and B). For the purposes of the present disclosure, the phrase “A, B, and/or C” means (A), (B), (C), (A and B), (A and C), (B and C), or (A, B and C).

[0082] The description may use the phrases “in an embodiment,” or “in embodiments,” which may each refer to one or more of the same or different embodiments. Furthermore, the terms “comprising,” “including,” “having,” and the like, as used with respect to embodiments of the present disclosure, are synonymous.

1. A method, comprising:
 - receiving BIM data from a BIM subsystem, the data including a plurality of building structural objects, each with a plurality of associated meta-data fields;
 - receiving ERP data from an ERP subsystem, the data including contract and financial fields;
 - establishing a plurality of links between the ERP data and the BIM data, each of the links associated with a particular building structural object, the links established based on a corresponding field, and once established, the links includes even non-corresponding fields; and
 - displaying in a common view, linked data from each of the subsystems without transitioning between the two subsystems.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the establishment of the links is prioritized based on a number of corresponding fields between the ERP data and the BIM data for the particular building structural object.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the linked data displayed in the common view includes one or more of an entity installing a selected structural object, materials for the selected structural object, a shape of the selected structural object, dimensions of the selected structural object, a contract for construction of the selected structural object, cash flow related to the selected structural object, change orders for the selected structural object, labor hours for the selected structural object, equipment hours for the selected structural object, approvals for the selected structural object, or combinations thereof.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the linked data displayed in the common view includes time cards for the selected structural object.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein at least two corresponding fields are required to establish the links, the at least two fields including a project number and a vendor number.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the displaying includes, first displaying in the common view the linked data associated only with a selected structural object, and in response to an addition user selection from the common view, displaying, in the common view, data for a structural object other than the selected structural object, but with fields in common with the selected structural object.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein the data for the structural object other than the selected structural object includes a common vendor or sub-contractor for the selected structural object and the structural object other than the selected structural object.
8. The method of claim 1, further comprising updating both the BIM data and ERP data, using the established links, for a structural object specified in a change order in response to receiving data from the change order.
9. The method of claim 1, wherein the plurality of links are further established based on COBie-formatted data.
10. An electronic construction collaboration system for managing a construction project comprising:
 - an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) sub-system including;

- a contract engine configured to generate at least one project contract including a contract data set and ERP metadata; and
 - an interconnection engine configured to associatively link the ERP metadata with BIM metadata included in a structural object of a construction project model in a BIM sub-system and send the contract data set to the BIM sub-system in response to associatively linking the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata.
11. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 10, where the interconnection engine is further configured to format the contract data set into a Construction Operations Building Information Exchange (COBie) format prior to sending the contract data.
 12. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 11, where the COBie format includes a type of extensible markup language (XML) format.
 13. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 10, where the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata include one or more of material data, vendor data, project number data, project phase data, a subcontract number, project schedule data, and cost data.
 14. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 10, where the ERP metadata includes a first data field corresponding to a second data field in the BIM metadata.
 15. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 14, where the first data field in the ERP metadata is associatively linked with a plurality of data fields in the BIM metadata.
 16. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 14, where the first data field and the second data field are each included in separate data sets, the first data set including a different field than the second data set.
 17. The electronic construction collaboration system of claim 10, where the contract data set includes contract documents, cost data, labor hour data, equipment hour data.
 18. A method for managing a construction project in an electronic construction collaboration system, the method comprising:
 - receiving a structural object selection input from a BIM sub-system;
 - selecting a structural object in a construction project model executed via the BIM sub-system in response to receiving the structural object selection input, the structural object including BIM metadata;
 - sending a contract data information request to an ERP sub-system in the electronic construction collaboration system in response to selecting the structural object, the contract data information request including BIM metadata;
 - receiving the contract data information request from the ERP sub-system;
 - associatively linking the BIM metadata with ERP metadata the ERP metadata included in a project contract in the ERP sub-system based on the contract data information request; and
 - sending the contract data set in response to associatively linking the BIM metadata with the ERP metadata, the contract data set included in the project contract.
 19. The method of claim 18, where the ERP metadata and the BIM metadata include one or more of material data, vendor data, project number data, project phase data, a subcontract number, project schedule data, and cost data.

20. The method of claim 19, where the structural object is defined parametrically with regard to other structural objects in the construction project model.

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