

WHAT IS THE IMSS?

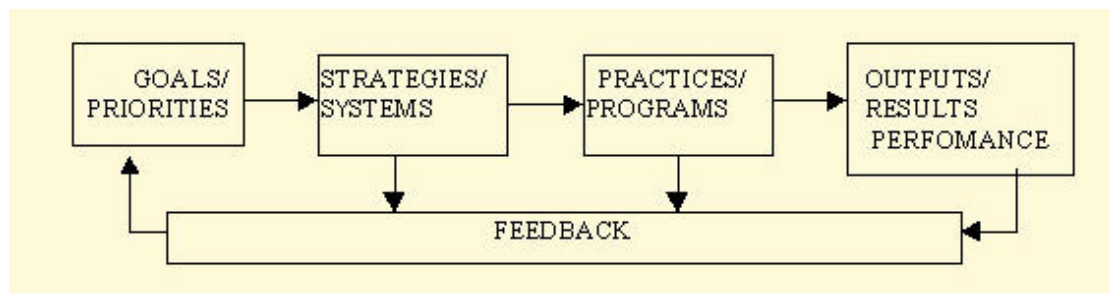
The "International Manufacturing Strategy Survey" (IMSS) is a cooperative research network of business schools and assembly manufacturing firms, providing a common database for the study of manufacturing management strategies and practices on both a global and national scale.

The network was originally set up in 1992 by a group of 20 world-class business schools and 600 major companies from the assembly manufacturing sector. The Network's first round in 1992/1994, was headed by the London Business School (Great Britain) and Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden). The second round, 1996/1998 has been headed by the London Business School (Great Britain), California State University (USA), and Instituto de Empresa (Spain).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Because it provides a complete, global and up-to-date source of direct information on trends in manufacturing management strategies and practices in the assembly manufacturing sector.

THE IMSS UNDERLYING MODEL (Our competitive advantage)



It also provides the possibility of effecting comparative analyses on the areas comprising the underlying model.

Nowadays, manufacturing strategies and practices are developed at ever increasing speed, and this is due to a number of reasons. First, the globalization of competition increases pressure on national industries, challenging the competitive skills of the companies. Second, the existence of different technological and organizational practices increases the possibility of achieving greater flexibility, efficient production costs and high quality products. The desire and ability to introduce these practices are of vital importance for a nation's competitiveness. Third, new social and environmental demands make traditional forms of organization and technologies obsolete in no time at all.

To summarize, manufacturing companies are confronting numerous major challenges, which require different solutions, depending on their respective national and international circumstances. We must therefore understand the nature and suitability of these solutions, for each specific situation.

AT PRESENT, THE IMSS:

... CONTINUES TO BE AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

The IMSS continues to be an international cooperative research network, involving more than 20 leading business schools from countries in Western and Eastern Europe, North and South America, the Pacific Rim, and over 600 companies, economically important in their respective countries and belonging to the assembly manufacturing sector (ISIC 38).

... IS FOCUSED ON THE ASSEMBLY INDUSTRY

Companies from this sector have been chosen for three main reasons:

- . Due to their considerable financial and competitive strengths, these companies are sensitive and able to adopt a variety of advanced manufacturing practices and be among the first to bring in technological advances.

- . The large added value of their outputs affects and is affected by social and economic national capabilities.

- . It is easy to compare them with their counterparts in other countries.

The sub-sectors involved in the study are as follows:

ISIC	Definition
381	Manufacture of metal products, except machinery and equipment
382	Manufacture of machinery except electrical.
383	Manufacture of electrical equipment apparatus, appliances and supplies.
384	Manufacture of transportation equipment
385	Manufacture of professional and scientific and measuring and controlling equipment not classified elsewhere, and of photographic and optical goods.

... AIMS TO

- . Conceptualize and identify those manufacturing management policies and practices which best achieve the strategic objectives of the companies.

- . Create the possibility of performing comparative analyses of manufacturing strategies in the assembly industry at national and international levels, and of studying a series of specific hypotheses in the same context.

- . Establish criteria for the introduction of the best practices as well as their level of transferability and adaptability to different environments.

- . Enable participating companies to make their own comparative analyses, using their sectorial, national and international benchmarks.

- . Encourage communication between participating companies and schools on a national level, with regard to specific manufacturing management aspects which directly affect these companies.

... COVERS SUBJECTS RELATED TO:

The subjects covered by the IMSS focus on understanding market strategies and priorities of the business units, how company strategies can be applied to manufacturing objectives, manufacturing practices, and present and future areas for improvements in manufacturing.

The study is divided into the following sections:

- . Strategic objectives and costs of the Business Unit, exploring strategies, markets, main forms of competing and structure-related costs.

- . Current manufacturing practices and their integration, exploring companies' manufacturing organizations in aspects such as facilities, capacity, technology, processes, degree of integration with suppliers and customers, staffing, planning and control systems, quality and product development.

- . Past and future manufacturing programs and activities, focused on the use and results of activities such as JIT, TQM, BPR, CAM, etc.

- . Assessment of manufacturing function performance, reflecting performance levels and improvements achieved in the course of time.

... IS CARRIED OUT EVERY 4 YEARS.

The IMSS is carried out every 4 years, which is the length of time within which a company is normally able to assess the results of introducing a new strategy.

... DEVELOPS A DATA BANK.

Directly:

Through their own research teams, the participating Business Schools are responsible for contacting and polling most important companies which belong to the aforementioned sectors in their respective countries. Information collected forms the national database. One of the schools on the network then consolidates all the information from each national database. The global data is carefully processed and then passed on to the research teams of each participating country. These teams then return the results of the study to the participating companies.

Through Internet:

Any company which fulfils the requisites for becoming a network member, and is interested in participating in the project, is assigned to a business school in its area (See the "joining us" option). Once the initial information provided by the company has been verified, the latter is given a password to enable it to complete the questionnaire. The completed questionnaire is then sent to the data processing centre. Once the company's information has been registered, it is then given automatic access to the benefits of the study.

... IS NON PROFIT-MAKING.

As this is a cooperative undertaking, the participating schools provide the financial support for the study in their respective countries. The schools do not, therefore, make any charge to the network or the companies for any service, and the companies do not pay to participate in the project or to receive the project

results.

... RESPECTS THE CONFIDENTIAL NATURE OF INFORMATION PROVIDED

The information provided by companies for the network is treated in strict confidence. Each country designates codes to its participating companies before any information is processed and consolidated. Data is presented in aggregate form, and access to individual answers is not possible.