Some implications of a changing world for the management of projects[1]

By Alan Stretton, PhD

ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with identifying a variety of changes and/or trends which have occurred in the world at large over the past couple of decades, and with charting the implications of these changes/ trends for the management of projects.

Much of this material comes from existing publications, particularly in the project management field, so that it appears to represent relatively recent "cause-and-effect" recognitions, which it is hoped may be useful in their own right.

A second purpose of this paper is to illustrate how these types of "cause-and-effect" charts may encourage and/or help people working in project management to develop their own insights into how their particular concerns in a continuing changing world could impact on the management of their projects.

INTRODUCTION

This paper has a quite a long pre-history. At the 1994 PMI Seminar/Symposium in Vancouver, the Standards Committee sponsored a working session on "Some implications of a changing world for the management of projects". I had drafted a cause-and-effect "road map" (perhaps a misnomer for such a draft document), which was the principal document for facilitating this working session. This initial road map was developed substantially from materials already in the project management literature about trends in project management, and partly from relevant materials in the more general literature (with of course my personal interpretations of both). The fifteen participants in this working session freely critiqued this road map, and brought up many issues which had not been covered. Overall, it proved to be a stimulating session.

Over the next few years, I further developed and expanded this road map into several precedence-type charts, which incorporate issues deriving from the working session, and further contributions from the project management and wider literatures. From time to time I discussed these materials with my mature aged students in the Master of Project Management (MPM) course at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), and benefited further from their input.

These efforts produced what appeared to me at the time (the late 1990s) to be potentially worthwhile contributions to the project management literature. However, for

[1] *Second Editions are previously published papers that have continued relevance in today's project management world, or which were originally published in conference proceedings or in a language other than English. This paper was originally published in the January 2011 edition of PM World Today; it is republished here with author's permission.*

reasons which I cannot recollect, I did not elect to publish them. I have now revisited these efforts, and have done some further reading of more recent relevant publications. Although my reading was far from exhaustive, it appeared to me that there has not been quite as much written in the past decade directly on cause-and-effect matters in project management as in the previous decade.

Certainly there was nothing to remotely compare (in either decade) with the detailed analysis of the last chapter of Morris 1994.

Consequently, I have updated a few elements in these road maps, and added some materials from more recent publications. However, much of the material is essentially unchanged, and as will be seen in the more detailed references, material from Morris 1994 figures prominently.

THE BROAD LAYOUT OF THESE CHARTS

There are several well developed methods for exploring future possibilities, including scenarios, the Delphi technique, simulations, cross impact studies, and trend impact analysis. The approach taken in these papers broadly falls under the latter heading, mainly because changes/trends in the world have been discussed often enough in the literature at large, and because implications for the management of projects arising from these changes/trends have also been discussed to varying, although limited, degrees in the project management literature.

Changes/trends

I first looked at general changes and trends in the world at large, including those discussed in the project management literature listed in the appended references and bibliography, and in the more general publications about the future appended thereafter.

Some forty essentially current changes/trends emerged. These are shown in rounded rectangles in the following charts, and are grouped under the five broad headings of economic/market-place, technological, social/societal, political/legal, and project-related. The individual changes/trends are substantially inter-connected both within and between these headings, and I have attempted to depict key inter-dependencies in the form of precedence arrows on the charts. There are some redundancies in these charts, but I was not concerned about being a purist on this.

Implications for the management of projects

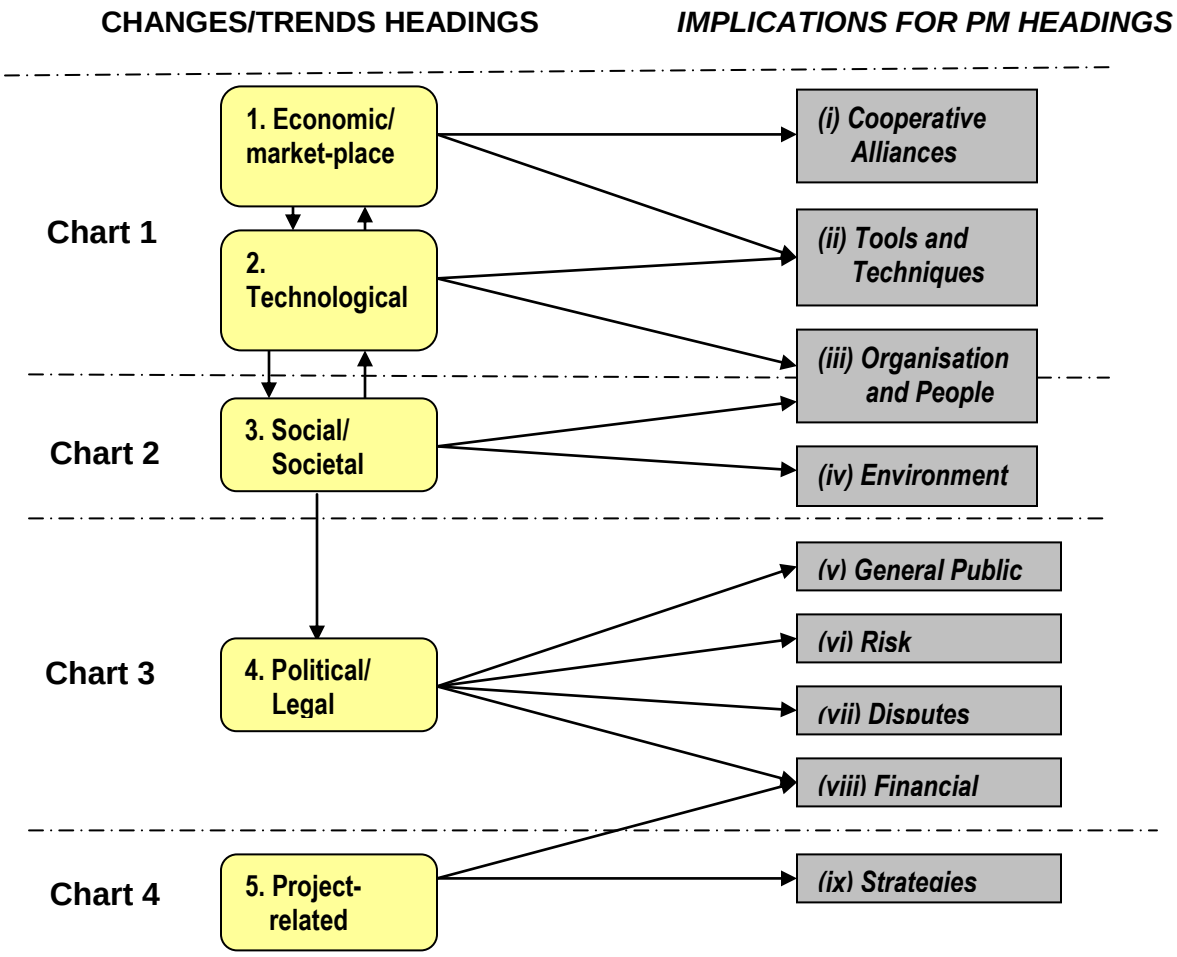
As already noted, by far the most detailed analysis of changes/trends and their implications for the management of projects I found is in the last chapter of Morris 1994. In the following charts, Morris's references are numbered [4]. The sources of some other implications are listed numerically in the references, and their reference numbers also shown in square brackets. There are also some implications which are not number-

referenced. These tend to be referred to quite widely in the project management literature, and do not appear to warrant specific references.

Some forty-odd implications are represented in the detailed charts, grouped under nine broad headings, namely cooperative alliances, tools and techniques, environment, organisation and people, environment, general public, risk, disputes, financial, and strategies. Interconnections between current trends and consequences both within and between the various headings are shown by precedence arrows.

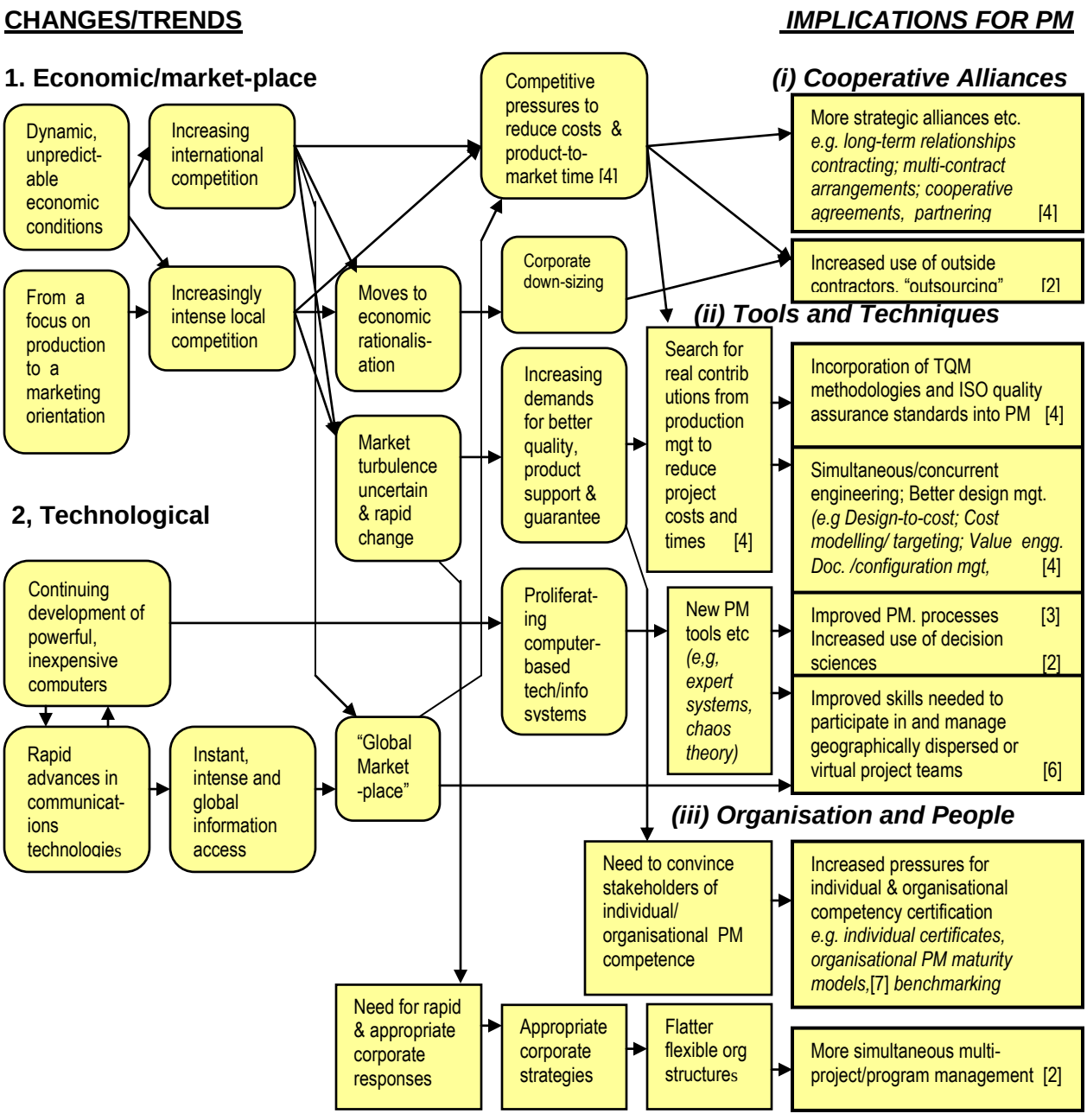
THE BASIC CHANGES-AND-IMPLICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The following shows the basic layout of the more detailed charts to follow.



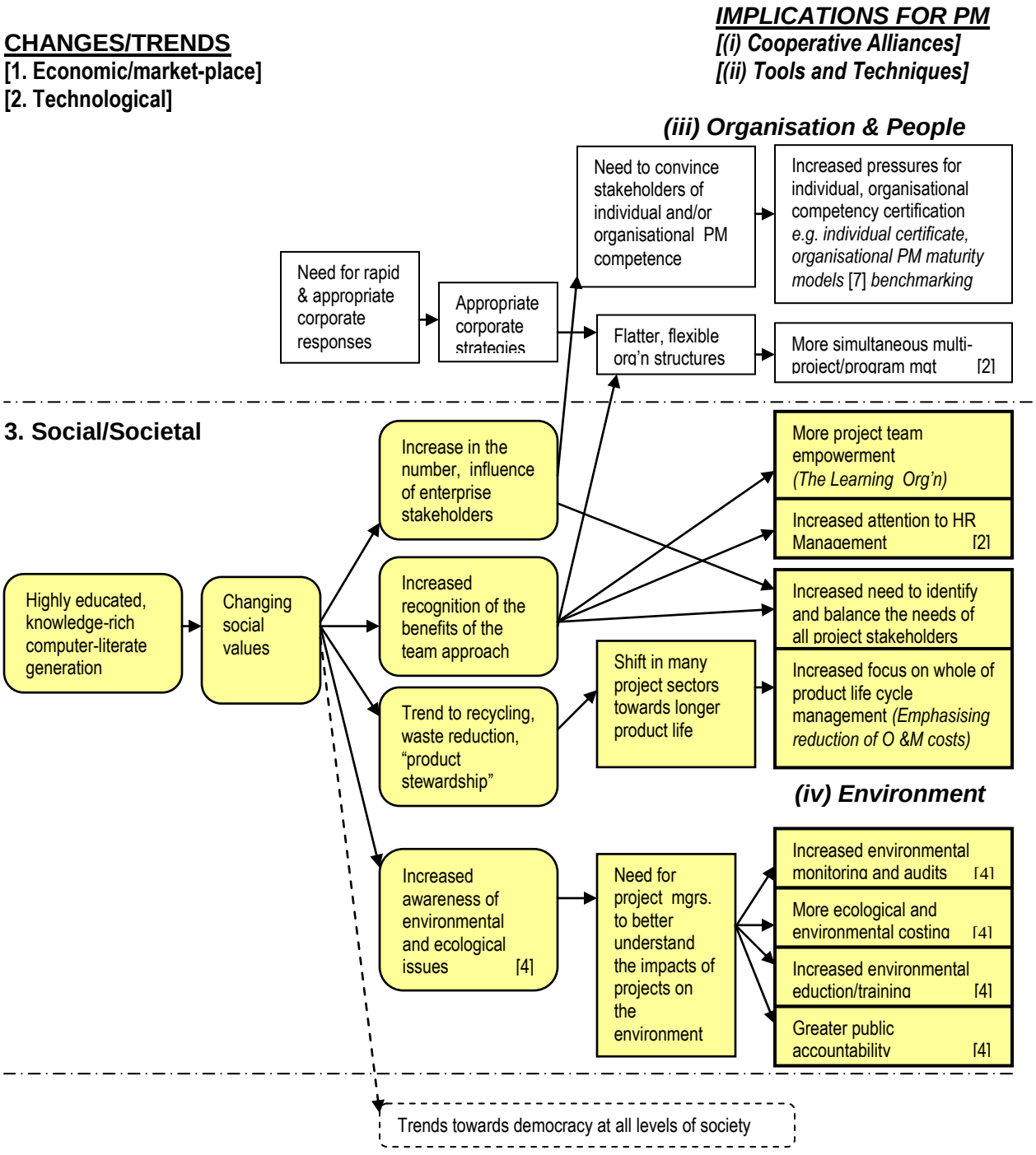
Details of each of the four charts appear in the following pages, with one chart to each page.

Chart 1: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF ECONOMIC/MARKET-PLACE AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PROJECT



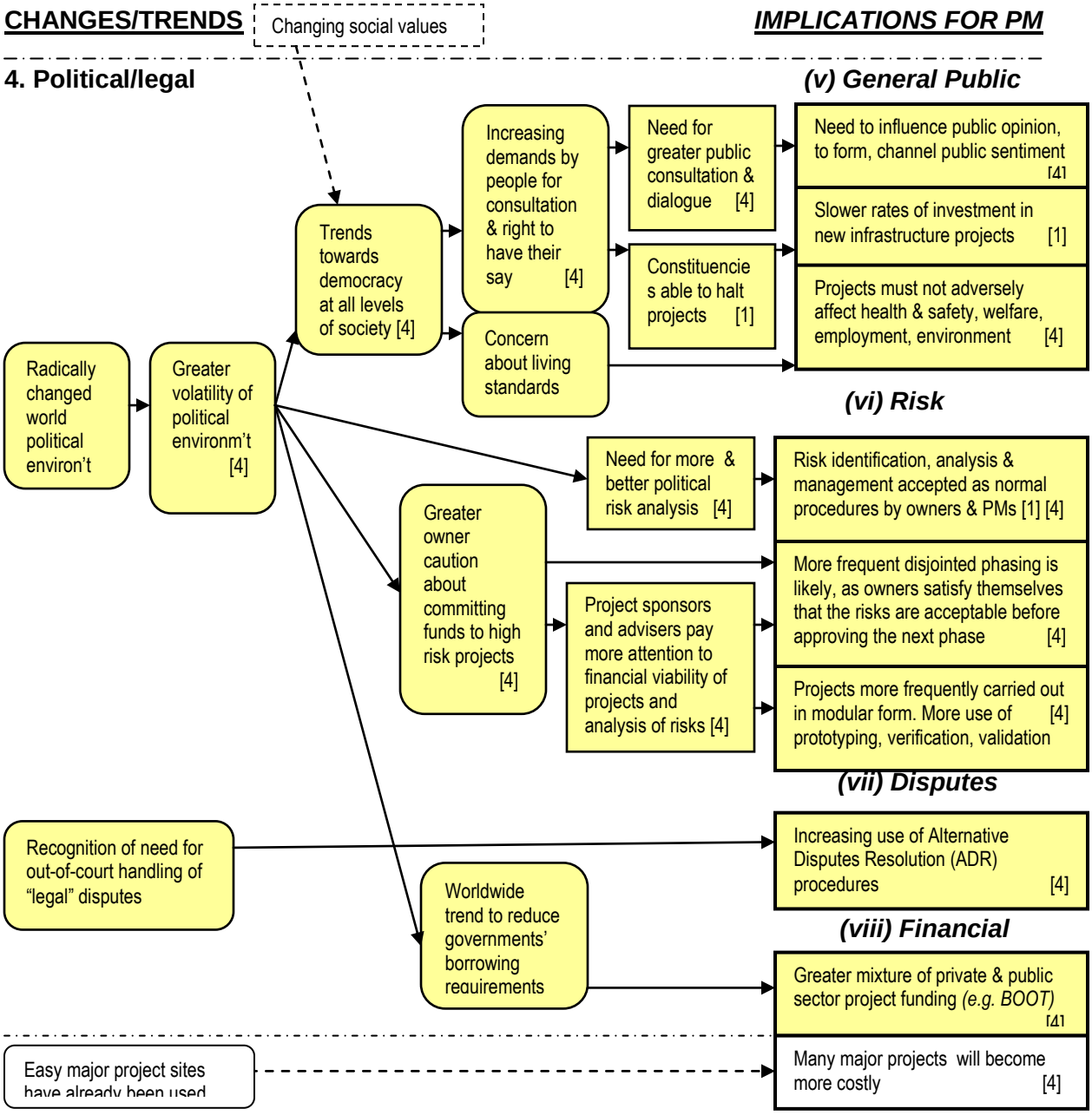
This more detailed chart traces some implications of economic/market-place and technological changes/trends in for the management of projects, in the contexts of cooperative alliances, tools and techniques, and organisation and people. Some aspects of these implications are already well advanced – e.g. outsourcing, individual certification, and multi-project/program management. Others are not so well advanced, but all are in evidence to some degree.

Chart 2: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL/SOCIETAL CHANGES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PROJECTS



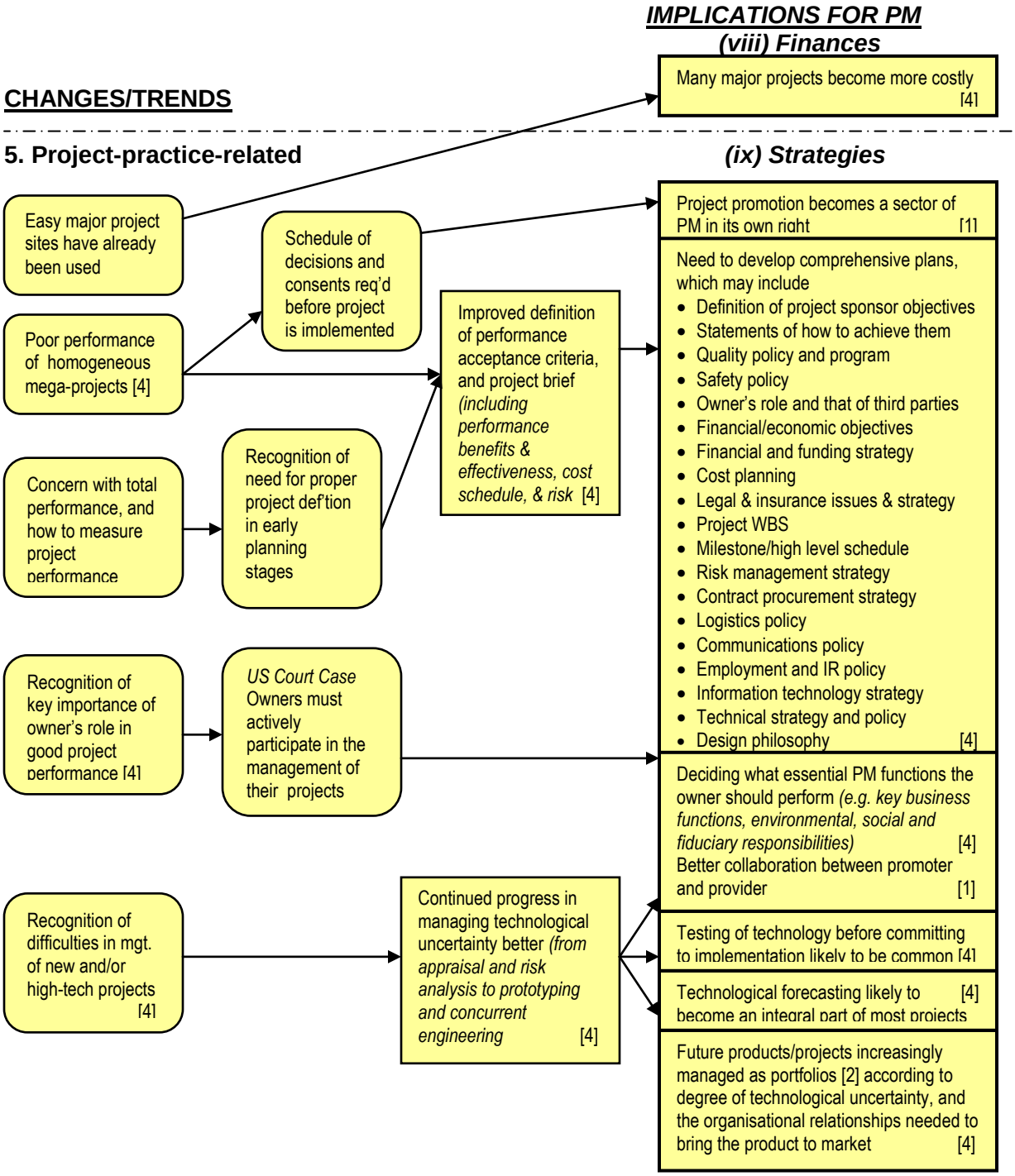
Social/societal changes/trends have substantial implications in the organisation and people context, including some already identified as consequences of economic/market-place and technological changes/trends, as is indicated above.

Chart 3: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICAL/LEGAL CHANGES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PROJECTS



Here we have overlaps with both preceding and following changes/trends.

Chart 4: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF PROJECT-PRACTICE-RELATED CHANGES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PROJECTS



As will be noted by the reference numbering, much of the material in this chart comes from Morris 1994. As applies in all cases, the interpretations of how various contributions from the literature fit into these charts are mine alone, with apologies to any authors I may have misinterpreted.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this paper has been to illustrate an approach to tracing how changes and/or trends in a changing world may impact on the management of projects, using mainly materials from earlier literature to highlight implications that are evident today.

It is emphasised that all the trends and consequences in these charts are things which we know about now. Neither the trends nor the consequences are claimed to be complete. On the contrary, one of the potential uses of the above framework, and more detailed charts, is to allow people to amend or add further trends, and to trace and identify new consequences. It is certainly hoped that some readers may be stimulated to do this.

No attempt has been made to introduce unknown "futures" into these charts. However, this framework offers the opportunity to add such materials to both trends and consequences, for those who wish to explore possibilities in a more futuristic way.

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Alan Stretton is one of the pioneers of modern project management. He is currently a member of the Faculty Corps for the University of Management & Technology (UMT), USA. In 2006 he retired from a position as Adjunct Professor of Project Management in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), Australia, which he joined in 1988 to develop and deliver a Master of Project Management program. Prior to joining UTS, Mr. Stretton worked in the building and construction industries in Australia, New Zealand and the USA for some 38 years, which included the project management of construction, R&D, introduction of information and control systems, internal management education programs and organizational change projects. He has degrees in Civil Engineering (BE, Tasmania) and Mathematics (MA, Oxford), and an honorary PhD in strategy, programme and project management (ESC, Lille, France). Alan was Chairman of the Standards (PMBOK) Committee of the Project Management Institute (PMI®) from late 1989 to early 1992. He held a similar position with the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM), and was elected a Life Fellow of AIPM in 1996. He was a member of the Core Working Group in the development of the Australian National Competency Standards for Project Management. He has published over 120 professional articles and papers. Alan can be contacted at alanailene@bigpond.com.au.