

Further thoughts on Pells' 2021 suggestion for broader, more comprehensive life cycle models for program/project management¹

By Alan Stretton

INTRODUCTION

This article looks further at Pells 2021 series of editorials entitled “Project management needs a higher purpose”, and particularly at a major section in the third editorial (Pells 2021c) on “Doing the right projects”, in which he suggests that this could be enhanced by extensions into a broader life cycle model for program/project management (PPM). The following quotation from his discussions is the main topic of ensuing discussions.

The identification and selection of projects represent the front end of a broader, more comprehensive lifecycle model for program/project management. On the back end, post project, the focus in the last ten years has been on project outcomes and benefits, ultimately the critical determinants of project success.
(Pells 2021c)

These “further thoughts” explore some issues that occurred to me in exploring possibilities for extending both the “front end” and “back end of potential broader life cycles for PPM.

This article first looks at a question raised by Dalcher 2019 about “Whose life cycle is it anyway?”, and briefly discusses various types of life cycles, most of which are more “sequences” than “cycles” – including the project life cycle (PLC). However, whatever “PLC” model is chosen, we need a framework for discussing its potential expansion into “front end” and “back end” contexts. To do this, we first turn to the next contextual level – that of the organisation undertaking the projects – which will be represented by two forms of an organisational strategic and operations management framework.

We will first look at the “front end”, in the context of a linear organisational strategic management model. We discuss the role of some project-related supplier organisations which have extended their PLCs into this zone, and which then have the capability to help owner organisations with strategic support services, including project identification and/ or selection. However, comparatively few organisations elect to do this, which may suggest that partnering with specialist strategic management service providers could be more practical than extending the broad scope of most PLCs to include the “front end”.

We then turn to the context of the “back end”, in which we first transpose the linear organisational strategic management model into a recursive format, and then add an organisation operations management sector. This sector will include examples of users converting project outputs to outcomes, and note that it is the users of project outputs

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who are ultimately responsible for achieving outcomes and benefits, and not PPM. However, PPM can, and does, quite often help users achieve their outcomes.

These circumstances are then seen to suggest that partnering with users of project outputs appears to be a much more practical way for PPM to contribute at the “back end”, than trying to broadly extend the scope of its PLCs into this sector.

We conclude discussions on extending the PLC to the “front” and “back” ends by compacting and augmenting an earlier figure, and then identifying pre-project, project, and post-project zones, thus summarising some of the contextual aspects of the above.

Finally, we return to another related theme in Pells 2021c section on “Doing the right projects”, namely his belief that “The impact on the environment and society must be considered – for ALL projects”. In response to this, I venture to represent the compacted recursive organisational management model within very broad stakeholder and environmental levels, using a model I developed in Stretton 2022g.

WHAT TYPE OF (LIFE CYCLE) MODEL(S) COULD BE CONSIDERED?

The question as to what type of model we could be considering in the context of possible extensions to life cycles might seem a slightly off-beat way to start these discussions, but it is not a totally trivial question. There are two relevant attributes to be considered.

Project, or project management, or product, or product mgt. life cycle, or other?

Dalcher 2019 asks the question “Whose life cycle is it anyway?”, and expanded on it as follows (his emphases).

In project management we often refer to project life cycles (Dalcher, 2015), but within the great scheme of things, are we talking about **project** life cycles, **project management** life cycles, **product** life cycles, **product management** life cycles, or **project spans**?

This is one attribute which needs to be clarified in discussing life cycle-related models. Another is whether “life cycle” is an appropriate descriptor.

Project or product life cycles, or sequences?

Dalcher 2019 also asks the question, “Where is the cycle in the (project management) life cycle?” This is a question which has been often asked by many of us in the project management business. Dalcher makes the point that,

There is no cycle in the prevailing models as applied within project management – so why don't we rename is the project life sequence?

Morris 2013:150 makes a similar point.

Most people use the term 'the project-life cycle' but really it is the product development life-cycle, that is, the product development sequence, In fact, it could be argued that it is often not really a cycle at all

In relation to the above boxed quotation from Pells 2021c, if the "life cycle" is to include identification and selection of projects at the front end, and/or outcomes and benefits at the back end, it would appear to me that *product* might be more appropriate than *project* to cover these broader activities, particularly the back end.

However, irrespective the type and labelling of what I will simply call the "PLC" model in following discussions, we are going to need a framework for discussing the "front end" and "back end" contexts into which Pells suggests the PLC might be expanded – as now discussed.

REPRESENTING BROADER CONTEXTS FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE LIFE CYCLE (PLC) MODELS

If we are to look at broader, more comprehensive PLC models, as suggested by Pells 2021c, we will need to be able to represent their associated broader contexts. It appears to be generally agreed that the most immediate broader context for projects is that of the organisations within which the projects are undertaken. In recent years I have developed two such overlapping models, one of which is more front-end focused, and the other more concerned with the back end.

Front end context: An organisational strategic management model

Until recent times I have been primarily concerned with front end contexts. Over the years I have developed a five-stage organisational strategic management framework, in which the first two stages are essentially pre-project (front end) activities. The next two stages include the development and execution of projects and related strategic work. The fifth stage represents achieving strategic objectives – essentially in summary form.

Back end context: An organisation strategic and operations management model

More recently, I have been focusing on post-project activities, and particular the roles of users, user groups and user organisations in converting project outputs into outcomes. This has been represented by adding an organisational operations management sector to the strategic management sector, which essentially expands on the "achieving strategic objectives" stage of the latter.

The following will look at each of these two contexts in more detail, and at possibilities for extending the PLC into these zones.

FRONT-END CONTEXT IN AN ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC MGT. MODEL

PLCs within a basic linear organisational strategic management model

I first developed a basic linear organisational strategic management framework in Stretton 2017k and 2017l. An updated version of this framework is shown in Figure 1, together with an abbreviated version of its project life cycle components from the latter .

A BASIC ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODEL				
1. Establish/ re- establish org. strategic objectives	2. Develop strategic initiative options, evaluate, choose best	3. Elaborate/consolidate strategic initiatives	4. Execute strategic initiatives	5. Achieve organisational strategic objectives.
Establish and shape both deliberate and emergent strategic objectives; Confirm desired outcomes/ benefits	Develop alternative strategic initiatives to achieve strategic outcomes / benefits; Evaluate alternatives; Choose the best	Elaborate and define chosen strategic initiatives; Confirm feasibilities; Prioritise and consolidate	Execute strategic initiative component projects/programs	Achieve strategic outcomes and realise benefits
	Project Incubation	Feasibility Phase	Execution Phase	H-over
	PROJECT PLANNING AND EXECUTION			

Figure 1: A basic linear organisational strategic management framework, and project components

Projects are represented as components of strategic initiatives in this model

It will be noted that I have elected to use “strategic initiatives” rather than “projects” in the basic organisational strategic management model. The former are well described by Cooke-Davies 2016:259, as follows.

[A strategic initiative is] ‘a project, portfolio of projects, other discrete programme or series of actions undertaken to implement or continue the execution of a strategy, or that is otherwise essential for the successful implementation or execution of a strategy’.

The main reason for using “strategic initiatives” rather than “projects” is because, as indicated in the above quotation from Cooke-Davies, strategic initiatives cover not only projects, but also other associated components that are needed to successfully implement organisational strategy, and which I normally attempt to provide for.

Representing the PLC in this organisational strategic management model

The front end in this organisational strategic management model comprises the first two stages of a five-stage sequence. Figure 1 shows a project incubation phase in this sector, but this is a notional representation rather than a substantive one. Amongst other things, Stage 2 includes Pells’ “identification and selection of projects”, which is not part of the scope of traditional PLCs, whose substantive components are directly associated with Stages 3 and 4 of the strategic management sequence The hand-over is again a notional representation.

Some project-related supplier organisations help owner organisations with strategic support services, including project identification and/or selection

As I have discussed in many previous articles, there are several types of project supplier organisations that offer an extended range of strategic support services. The latter include Front End Loading (FEL), Client Needs Determination (CND), and more

recently many types of Agile approaches, which involve helping client organisations identify and/or select the “right” projects for their strategic initiatives.

In effect, these strategic support service organisations have elected to extend the scope of their PLCs into the front end

As far as I can tell, these types of organisations have elected to extend their own PLC scope to include various types of strategic support services. I worked for over a quarter of a century with a project-based organisation that did this (Civil & Civic). We had many project managers who were willing and able to acquire the additional skills needed to perform successfully in an increasingly wide range of such front end activities. For many of us, this was one of the most attractive manifestations of the way things were done in that organisation.

However, comparatively few organisations elect to extend their PLCs this way

Continuing with Civil & Civic’s project managers, I also noted that we had many other project managers who were much more comfortable staying with the more traditional PLC development-and-execution phases.

At an organisation and industry level, although Civil & Civic was widely regarded as being the top performer in the Australian building industry over most of that period, few competitors attempted to follow us extending the scope of their PLCs into the front end domain. Indeed, the majority remained operating in the execution-and-delivery-only phase, with still not that many in the combined development-plus-execution phases.

Now, the point about this is that we need to have large numbers of organisation that specialise in traditional PLC areas, and continue to focus their efforts in these domains,

Therefore, the way I see it, by all means encourage project-based organisations to extend the range of their PLC activities into the front end. However, this would appear to be an attractive option for only comparatively few such organisations.

Partnering with strategic management service providers appears to be more practical than extending the broad scope of PLCs to include the front end

As I have indicated in previous articles, FEL, CND and Agile services are typically undertaken in more of a partnering than contractual mode, for the rather simple reason that, by their very nature, they involve a kind of joint venturing to achieve an optimum result – a type of arrangement which can also be reasonably described as a partnering.

On the other hand, extending the scope of the PLC to include these types of activities as mainstream PLC components would not appear to me to be as attractive, or as practical, as adopting the above sort of partnering arrangement.

There seems to me to be a good case for both parties to stick to their respective types of knitting.

BACK END CONTEXT IN AN ORGANISATION STRATEGIC-AND-OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT MODEL

Transposing the strategic management model from linear to recursive format

As discussed above, the project components of Figure 1 are essentially linear, rather than cyclical as suggested in the commonly used descriptor “project life cycle”. However, organisational strategic management sequences are not linear. They are recursive, and more recently I have found it necessary to transpose the above linear model to a recursive format to better represent attendant factors, particularly emergent factors associated with our increasingly dynamic environment.

The following basic recursive organisational strategic management model was first presented in Stretton 2020l.



Figure 2. A basic recursive representation of organisational strategic management

The first five stages of this representation are the same as those shown in the linear format in Figure 1. However, I found it necessary to add a sixth stage to represent the recursive nature of organisational strategic management – a text box labelled “6. Ongoing strategic reviews and responses”. The alternative dashed connection between Stages 6 and 2 in Figure 2 provides for those strategic responses that do not require any work in re-establishing organisational strategic objectives.

I have coloured Stages 3 and 4 in light turquoise, to indicate that these include the conventional PLC phases.

In Stretton 2021k made two very significant additions to the above model – an organisation operations management sector, plus some specific examples of users converting three broad types of deliverables to outcomes in that sector – as now discussed.

Adding an organisation operations management sector, plus examples of users converting three broad types of deliverables to outcomes in that sector

In Stretton 2021k I first added a specific Operations Management sector to the Strategic Management sector, in what might be seen as one type of “hybrid” project-related model, to borrow a descriptor from Dalcher 2019, in which he talks of a “Hybrid world”. This addition then allowed me to show examples of users converting three broad types of strategic initiative/project deliverables to outcomes in the new sector.

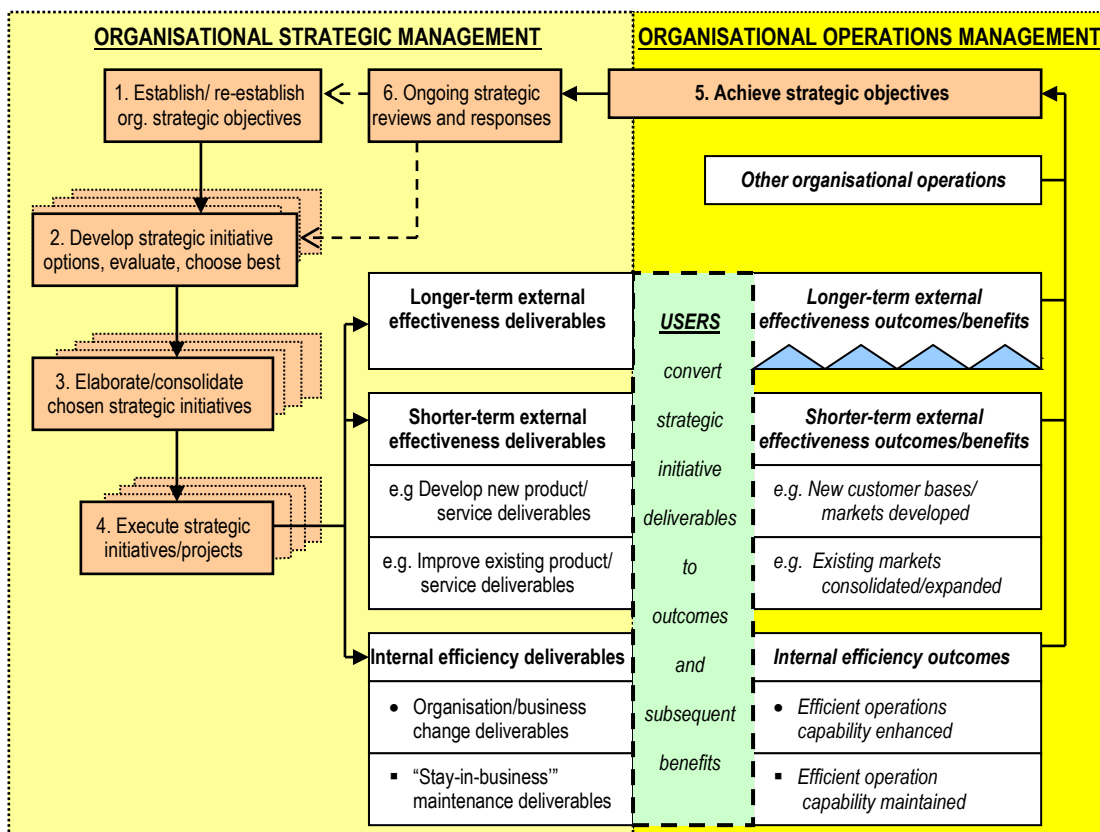


Figure 3: Consolidating examples of deliverables, users, and outcome/benefits of three groupings of strategic initiatives/projects in the organisational strategic-and-operations management model

In later articles I developed the “users” components of this figure somewhat further, including Stretton 2021i,n and Stretton 2022c,d.

Users of project outputs are responsible for achieving outcomes and benefits

The role of such users is largely ignored in the project management literature, yet is a crucial consideration in discussing modern aspirations to link project management directly with the achievement of outcomes. This is a very substantial topic in its own right, which I propose to address, at least in part, in a later issue of this journal.

Program/project management is seldom responsible for achieving outcomes or benefits

In relation to program/project management (PPM) responsibilities for outcomes and benefits, the conclusions from the articles listed just above can be broadly summarised as follows.

PPM is not normally responsible for

- achievement of outcomes in customer organisations;
- achievement of external operational outcomes within its own organisation;
- achievement of internal product/service development outcomes
- realisation of benefits in any contexts

Responsibilities for the above lie with the users of the project outputs, and/or of outcomes in the case of realising benefits.

PPM is sometimes responsible for

- achievement of internal operational efficiency outcomes in its own organisation, This can happen where there are multitudinous internal users, and no responsible user representative has been designated.

PPM can sometime help users of project outputs in achieving outcomes in

- shorter-term external operational contexts
- internal product/service development contexts
- internal operational efficiency contexts

However, the users are ultimately responsible for achieving these outcomes.

The extent of PPM helping users achieve outcomes can be quite substantial

Whilst I do not have any hard statistics, there is plenty of evidence that PPM can, and does, help users in their work of achieving outcomes on quite substantial scales in certain types of contexts.

In the context of supplying project management services to external clients, Civil & Civic was usually actively pursued helping the client organisation achieve its outcomes, even if there was no formal contractual obligation to do so. This made sense for both parties – the best outcome for the client, and a reputational outcome for Civil & Civic. And all such helping activities rather naturally tend to be very much like partnerships, or similar.

Partnering with users of project outputs appears to be much more practical than trying to broadly extend the scope of PLCs to the back end

On the basis of the above, it does not seem to be a practical proposition to try and extend the scope of the project life cycle for projects at large into this post-project zone. Here again, the many cases where PPM can help users achieve outcomes can be conveniently represented as a form of partnership between PPM and users, because this is basically what it is in practice.

REPRESENTING THE ABOVE CONTEXTS IN THREE PROJECT-RELATED ZONES

Compacting Figure 3, and adding provision for customers

In Stretton 2021n I abbreviated and compacted the materials in Figure 3 above rather dramatically into the format shown below. I have added specific provision for customers in the operations management sector, as they contribute so directly to the owner organisation's outcomes and benefits. This compacted version is shown in Figure 4.

Identifying pre-project, project, and post-project zones

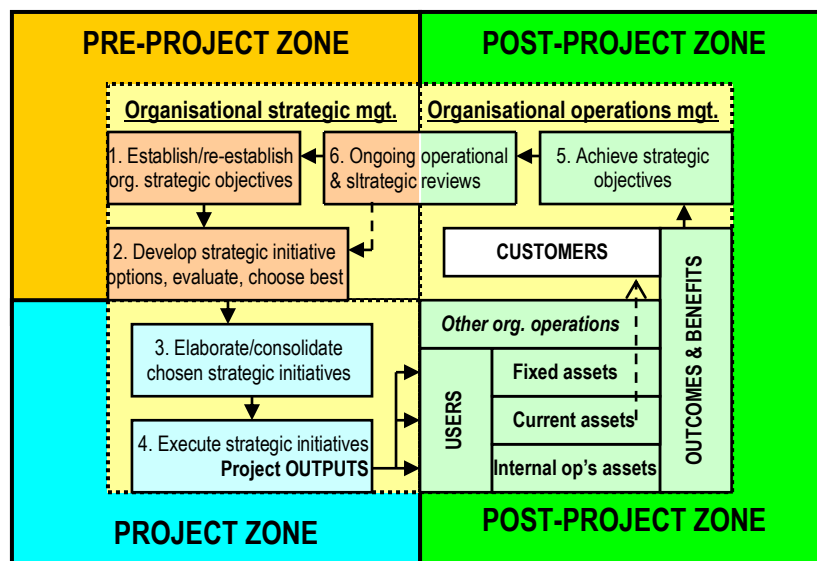


Figure 4. Ascribing project-related zones to the compacted recursive organisational mgt. model

I noted in Stretton 2021n that this seems to me to be rather a useful way to represent these three broad zones, as it helps show where projects normally stand in the broader context of their contribution to achieving organisational strategic objectives.

This also appears to be an appropriate diagram to summarise the contextual aspects of the above discussions on the PLC and how it relates to the pre-project front end activities, and the post-project back end activities.

ADDING BROADER ENVIRONMENTAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Representing the compacted recursive organisational management model within broader stakeholder and environmental levels

In a section in Pells 2021c section on “Doing the right projects”, he extended his discussions beyond the above life cycle model for PPM into broader contextual issue, including the following.

I believe “doing the right project” must go beyond corporate strategic alignment. The impact on the environment and society must be considered – for ALL projects.

In response to this, I now venture to represent the compacted recursive organisational management model within very broad stakeholder and environmental levels, using a model I developed in Stretton 2022g, as follows.

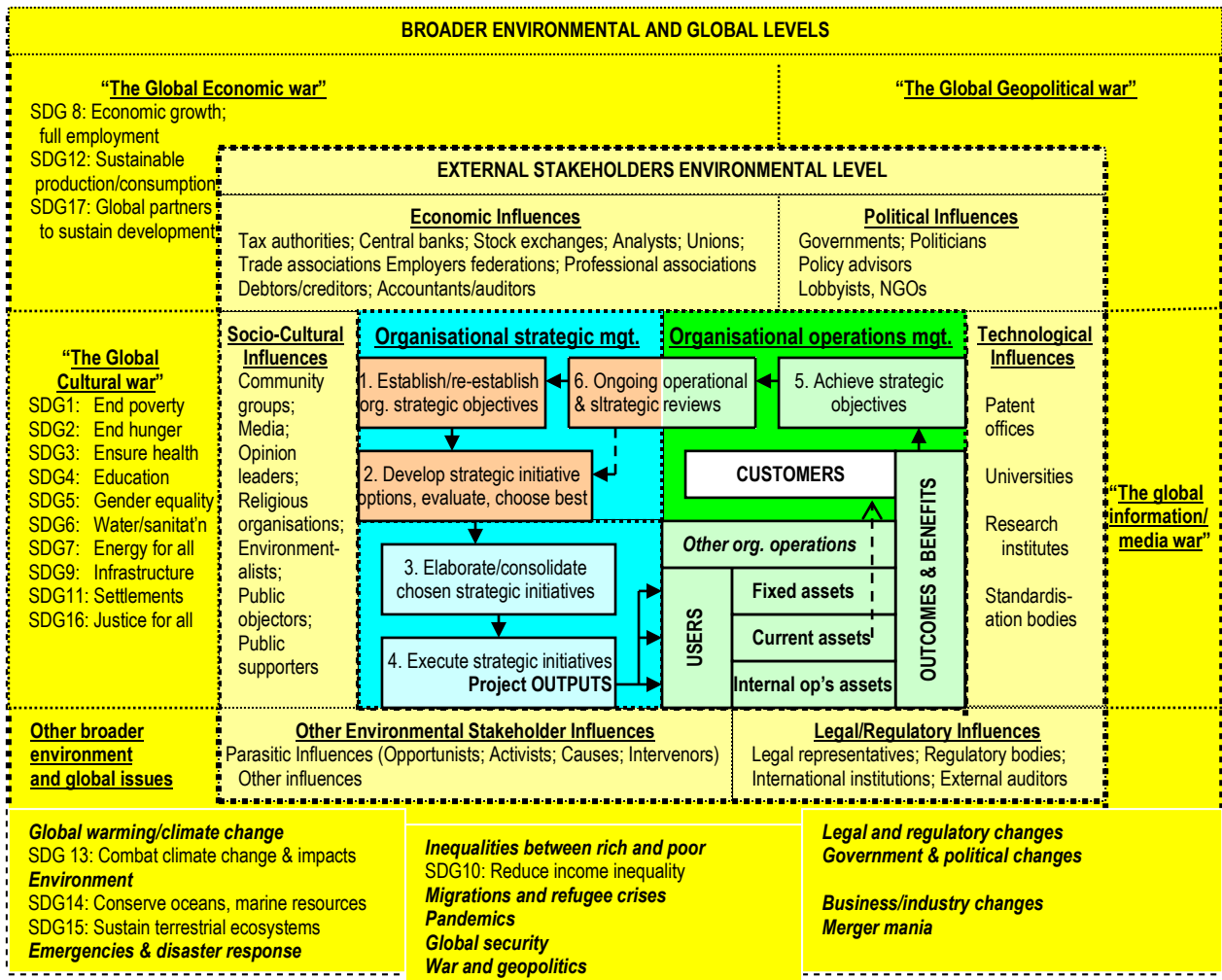


Figure 5. Representing the compacted recursive organisational management model within much broader stakeholder and environmental levels

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION

This article has been largely concerned with Pells' 2021 suggestion for broader, more comprehensive life cycle models (PLCs) for program/project management (PPM). In particular, it has looked at potential PLC extensions into “the identification and selection of projects” at the “front end”, and into “project outcomes and benefits” at the “back end”.

We first looked at a question raised by Dalcher 2019 about “Whose life cycle is it anyway?”, and briefly discusses various types of life cycles – e.g. project, project management, product, product management, etc.). It was also noted that most of these are more “sequences” than “cycles”. However, whatever “PLC” model is chosen, it needs a framework for discussing its potential expansion into “front end” and “back end” contexts. We turned to the next level – that of the organisation undertaking the projects – which was represented by two forms of an organisational strategic and operations management framework.

We then looked at the “front end” in the context of a linear organisational strategic management model, and discussed the role of some project-related supplier organisations which help owner organisations with strategic support services, including project identification and/ or selection. In effect, these strategic support service organisations have elected to extend the scope of their PLCs into the “front end”. However, it was also noted that, for whatever reasons, comparatively few organisations elect to extend their PLCs this way. On balance, it was concluded that partnering with specialist strategic management service providers appears to be more practical than extending the broad scope of most PLCs to include the “front end”.

We then turned to the context of the “back end”. We first transposed the linear organisational strategic management model into a recursive format, and then added an organisation operations management sector, which included examples of users converting three broad types of deliverables to outcomes. It was emphasised that it is the users of project outputs who are ultimately responsible for achieving outcomes and benefits, and that, although it may sometimes be in a position to help users do this, program/project management is only very seldom actually responsible for either result. In these circumstances, it was concluded that partnering with users of project outputs appears to be a much more practical way of contributing than trying to broadly extend the scope of PLCs to the “back end”.

We then concluded discussions on extending the PLC to the “front” and “back” ends by compacting and augmenting an earlier figure, and then identifying pre-project, project, and post-project zones, thus summarising some of the contextual aspects of the above.

Finally, we returned to another related theme in Pells 2021c section on “Doing the right projects”, namely his belief that “The impact on the environment and society must be considered – for ALL projects”. In response to this, I ventured to represent the compacted recursive organisational management model within very broad stakeholder and environmental levels, using a model I developed in Stretton 2022g.

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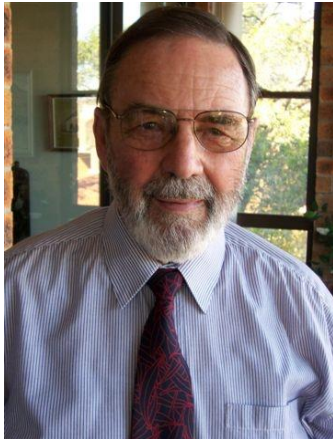
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Alan Stretton is one of the pioneers of modern project management. He is currently a member of the Faculty Corps for the University of Management & Technology (UMT), USA. In 2006 he retired from a position as Adjunct Professor of Project Management 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 240 professional articles and papers. Alan can be contacted at alanilene@bigpond.com.au.

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