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Commentary

*1. Some inconsistencies in the usage of "outcome"*
*in PMI 2021, and some suggested amendments*
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# A two-part commentary on "outcomes" in PMI 2021, 7th Ed.

## 1. Some inconsistencies in the usage of "outcomes" in PMI 2021, and some suggested amendments [1]

### By Alan Stretton

### INTRODUCTION

#### Increasing discussions on outcomes and benefits in the project mgt, literature

In earlier articles in this journal I have quoted from Pells 2021c, who includes a note on an increasing focus on project outcomes and benefits in the project management literature in the past decade or so.

> 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.

#### Stated aspirations of a stronger focus on outcomes in PMI 2021

The 7th Edition of *The Standard for Project Management and A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMI 2021) includes, in its own words, the following stated aspiration to focus more on outcomes rather than deliverables. (Both quotes are from the Preface, p. x).

> …..a stronger focus on outcomes rather than deliverables.

> …..to focus more on intended outcomes rather than deliverables

I will be labelling such outcomes as "post-delivery outcomes" in this series, for reasons which will become apparent shortly.

The above stated aspiration led me to look more closely into how PMI 2021 has gone about increasing its focus on outcomes in what is essentially a completely new document. PMI 2021 has four major sectors
- Preface
- The Standard for Project Management
- A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK Guide)
- Appendices (5), Glossary and Index

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I found some sixty six outcomes-related entries in the Standard and PMBOK Guide sectors, which will shortly be set down in full in Figures 2 and 4. This article will identify five categories of "outcomes" – only one of which qualifies as "post-delivery" – and discuss the frequencies of their inclusion in various sections of both the major sectors.

The results suggest that some terminological and allied modifications would appear to be warrented to help overcome many current inconsistencies – some of which can be quite confusing. These are mainly associated with a lack of clear definition of what type of outcomes are being discussed in the various contexts being discussed in PMI 2021. This first article will focus on these inconsistencies, and suggest some approaches to clarifying them.

(The second article of this commentary will discuss some outright contradictions in outcomes-related entries in PMI 2021, and some more complicated consequences.)

## OVERVIEWS OF OUTCOMES-RELATED ENTRIES IN PMI 2021

### Overall frequencies of outcomes-related entries in the major sectors of PMI 2021

I first sought to identlfy all the distinct entries I could find in this document which referred directly or indirectly to outcomes. As already noted, I found sixty six such entries. Figure 1 shows the major sectors and sections of PMI 2021, and records the number of outcomes-related entries found in each. I cannot claim that these entries are fully comprehensive, but believe that they are reasonably complete, and representative.

| Sector | Section | No. of entries | Detailed in |
|---|---|---|---|
| PREFACE | | 3 | Figure 2 |
| STANDARD | Introduction | 3 | Figure 2 |
| STANDARD | A system for value delivery | 8 | Figure 2 |
| STANDARD | Project management principles | 18 | Figure 2 |
| PMBOK GUIDE | 1. Introduction | | |
| PMBOK GUIDE | 2. Project Performance Domains | 37 | Figure 4 |
| PMBOK GUIDE | 3. Tailoring | | |
| PMBOK GUIDE | 4. Models, Methods, and Artifacts | | |

*Figure 1. The frequency of occurrence of outcomes-related entries in PMI 2021*

### All identified output-related entries are detailed in the following Figures 2 and 4

As indicated in the right of Figure 1, I have quoted each outcomes-related entry in detail in Figures 2 and 4, which follow shortly. It will also be seen that I have also given each of these entries an alphabetic-and-number tag to help later referencing – P for Preface, S for Standard, and G for Guide (PMBOK), together with sequential numbering.

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## VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS OF THE NATURE OF OUTCOMES

### The Standard's descriptor of "outcomes" allows different meanings and usages

The second entry in the Standard gives the following definition/descriptor of "outcome"

| | |
|---|---|
| **S2** | ✓ **Outcome:** An end result or consequence of a process or project. Outcomes can include outputs and artefacts, but have a broader intent by focusing on the benefits and value that the project was undertaken to deliver (PMI 2021:S4) |

This definition/descriptor could be called a common usage one, which allows for several different meanings and/or usages of the descriptor "outcomes". These differences are reflected in the contents of PMI 2021, and it took me some time to develop the following categorisation, which I hope reflects these different types of usages reasonably well.

### A categorisation of different usages of the descriptor "outcomes" in PMI 2021

After a good deal of trial and error, I settled on the following five-type categorisation of different usages of the descriptor outcomes in PMI 2021.

- ✓ *"Post-delivery outcomes"*
- # *"Which type of outcome?" category*
- ➤ *"Post-outcome results"*
- ❖ *"Deliverables/outputs"*
- ✚ *"Pre-delivery results"*

I have used different types of bullet points to help with future referencing of the large number of outcome-related entries in this document. Some of these entries could be assigned to more than one category, but I have chosen just one in each case to avoid further complicating an already crowded scenario. The above types of categories are described as follows.

### ✓ *"Post-delivery outcomes"*

As already quoted, the last part of the very first entry in the Preface (P1) indicates an intention to focus on post-delivery outcomes.

| | |
|---|---|
| **P1** | ✓ Transformed organizational models have yielded new project work and team structures, the need for a broad range of approaches to project and product delivery, and a stronger focus on outcomes rather than deliverables. (PMI 2021:Px) |

This aspiration to focus more strongly on post-delivery outcomes is also directly stated in entries P2 and P3 in the Preface, and in S16 and S28 in the Standerd, as shown in Figure 2. It is also fairly directly implied in some other entries, via their contexts.

I identified nine entries of this type in the Standard. This is out of a total of twenty nine entries in this sector of PMI 2021, so that this type of entry is less frequent than one might reasonably have expected from the aspiration exampled in P1.

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(At this point it is acknowledged that, in many contexts, there can be intermediate users achieving intermediate post-delivery outcomes, prior to end users achieving end outcomes. This complicates matters – but, to avoid this further complication, I will restrict discussion of post-delivery outcomes to their end outcomes version.)

Returning to the relatively low frequency of post-delivery outcome entries, this might be attributed, at least in part, to the following type of "rogue" category.

### # *"Which type of outcome?" category*

This category is exampled by seven entries in the Standard, in which the types of outcome being discussed are unclear or uncertain – i.e. where the outcome type is not specified, and associated discussions give no clear indication of its nature. As intimated above, the intended category for some of these might well have been "post-delivery" – but there are also several other categories of outcomes, to which we now turn.

### ➢ *"Post-outcome results"*

There are six entries in the Standard concerned with ultimate benefits and/or value, and which follow the achievement of end outcomes, and labelled as "Post-outcome results". Most of these types of entry make direct links with customers and end users, who are all too seldom accorded the prominence that their importance warrants. (This comment not only applies to PMI 2021, but also to the project management literature at large). They are particularly relevant in the context of post-delivery outcomes from project activities, and the importance of their roles will be particularly highlighted in the second article.

### ❖ *"Deliverables/outputs"*

There are seven entries of this type in the Standard. It is noted that this type of outcome is specifically included in the definition/descriptor of "outcome" in S2 above. I have used the double-barrelled descriptor because deliverables and outputs are used interchangeably – e.g. the former is used in P1 and P2, and the latter in P3 and S2.

### ✚ *"Pre-delivery results"*

This type of outcome is concerned with intermediate project operational goals prior to project delivery. These types of entry do not appear in the Standard sector of PMI 2021, but, as will be seen shortly, are very prominent indeed in the PMBOK Guide section.

We now move on to look at the incidences of these various categories of output types in both the Standard and the PMBOK Guide. We start with the former (plus the Preface). Figure 2 lists all the outcomes-related entries identified in the Preface and Standard.

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## OUTCOMES-RELATED ENTRIES IN THE PMI 2021 PREFACE AND STANDARD

### Detailed listings of outcomes-related entries in the Preface and Standard

| SECTION | SUBSECTION | | QUOTATIONS |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PMI 2021 PREFACE** | **Sustaining the relevance of the PMBOK Guide** | P1 | ✓ Transformed organizational models have yielded new project work and team structures, the need for a broad range of approaches to project and product delivery, and a stronger focus on outcomes rather than deliverables    (PMI 2021:Px) |
| | **Summary of changes** | P2 | ✓ Therefore this edition shifts to a principle-based standard to support effective project management and to focus more on intended outcomes rather than deliverables    (PMI 2021:Px) |
| | | P3 | ✓ *The Standard for Project Management* and the *PMBOK Guide* emphasize that projects do not simply produce outputs, but more importantly, enable those outputs to drive outcomes that ultimately deliver value to the organization and its stakeholders    (PMI 2021:Pxi) |
| **PMI 2021 STANDARD** | *INTRODUCTION* | | |
| | **Purpose of *The Standard for Project Management*** | S1 | ✓ The Standard for Project Management provides a basis for understanding project management and how it enables extended outcomes    (PMI 2021:S3). |
| | **Key terms and concepts** | S2 | ✓ **Outcome:** An end result or consequence of a process or project. Outcomes can include outputs and artefacts, but have a broader intent by focusing on the benefits and value that the project was undertaken to deliver.    (PMI 2021:S4) |
| | **Audience for this standard** | S3 | # [Those who] are responsible or accountable for delivering project outcomes. (PMI 2021:S5) |
| | A SYSTEM OF VALUE DELIVERY | | |
| | **Creating value** | S4 | ➤ The components of a value delivery system create deliverables, which are used to produce outcomes. An outcome is the end result or consequence of a process or a project. The outcomes create benefits, which are the gains realized by the organization. Benefits, in turn, create value, which is something of worth, importance, or usefulness.    (PMI 2021:S10) |
| | **Organisational governance systems** | S5 | ❖ Governance systems provide an integrated structure for evaluating changes, issues and risks …… This includes …. deliverables produced by projects    (PMI 2021:S12) |
| | **Functions associated with projects** | S6 | ➤ Regardless of how projects are coordinated, the collective effort of the project team delivers the outcomes, benefits, and value. The project team may be supported by additional functions depending on the deliverables, industry, organization and other variables.    (PMI 2021:S13) |
| | | S7 | ✓ …….other functions may be necessary to enable project deliverables that produce the desired outcomes.    (PMI 2021:S13) |
| | | S8 | ➤ The customer and end user are not always synonymous. For the purpose of this standard, the customer is defined as the individual or group who has requested or is funding the project. The end user is the individual or group who will experience the direct use of the project deliverable.    (PMI 2021:S13) |
| | | S9 | ➤ Projects need clear directions from customers and end users regarding project requirements, outcomes, and expectations. … In some projects, a representative of the customer or client participates in the project team. The customer and end user input and feedback needs are determined by the nature of the project and the guidance or direction required.    (PMI 2021:S14) |
| | **The project environment** | S10 | ❖ The goal is to maximise the value of the project deliverable.    (PMI 2021:S15) |
| | **Product management considerations** | S11 | ❖ Programs and projects with deliverables that include products use a tailored and integrated approach that incorporates all of the relevant bodies of knowledge and their related practices, methods, and artefacts. .    (PMI 2021:S20) |

**Figure 2. Outcomes-related entries in the Preface and Standard sections of PMI 2021: Sheet 1 of 2**

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| SECTION | SUBSECTION | QUOTATIONS | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PMI 2021 STANDARD (continued)** | **PROJECT MGT. PRINCIPLES** | | |
| | Be diligent/respectful/caring stewards | | |
| | **Create a collaborative project team environment** | S12 | #  By fostering inclusive and collaborative environments, knowledge and expertise are more freely exchanged, which in turn enable better project outcomes.  (PMI 2021:S29) |
| | | S13 | #  Regardless of who is accountable or responsible for specific project work, a collaborative project team takes collective ownership of the project outcomes.  (PMI 2021:S30) |
| | **Effectively engage with stakeholders** | S14 | #  Stakeholder engagements also enable opportunities for stronger project performance and outcomes ….  (PMI 2021:S33) |
| | **Focus on value** | S15 | ➤  Value, including outcomes from the perspective of the customer or end user, is  the ultimate success indicator and driver of projects. Value focuses on the outcomes of the deliverables.  (    PMI 2021:S34) |
| | | S16 | ✓  To support value realization from projects, project teams shift focus from deliverables to the intended outcomes. Doing so allows project teams to deliver on the vision or purpose of the projects, rather than simply creating a specific deliverable.  (PMI |
| | | S17 | ✓  While the deliverable may support the intended project outcome, it may not fully achieve the vision or purpose of the project. For example, customers may want a specific software solution ….The software is  the output of the project, but the software itself does not enable  the productivity outcome …  In this case, adding a new deliverable of training and coaching  on the use of the software can enable a better productivity outcome.  (PMI 2021:S36) |
| | | S18 | ✓  By working with organizational leaders who are responsible for putting project deliverables into use, project leaders can make sure that the deliverables are positioned to realize the planned outcomes.  (PMI 2021:S36) |
| | **Recognise, evaluate, respond to system interactions** | S19 | ❖  The project may also have subsystems that are required to integrate effectively to deliver the intended outcome. For example, when individual project teams develop separate components of a deliverable, all components should integrate effectively.  (PMI 2021:S37) |
| | | S20 | ❖  Ability to adjust to the changing needs of the end user, sponsor, or customer of the project deliverables.  (PMI 2021:S39) |
| | | S21 | ✓  Project teams should think beyond the end of the project to the operational state of the project's deliverable, so that intended outcomes are realized.  (PMI  2021:S38) |
| | | S22 | ✓  Use of integrated methods, artefacts and practices so there is a common understanding of project work, deliverables and outcomes  (PMI 2021:S39) |
| | **Demonstrate leadership behaviours** | S23 | #  Effective leadership promotes project success and contributes to positive project outcomes  (PMI 2021:S40) |
| | **Tailor based on context** | S24 | #  Project success is based on adapting to the unique context of the project to determine the most appropriate methods of producing the desired outcomes.  (PMI  2021:S44) |
| | **Build quality into process/outputs** | S25 | ❖  Quality focuses on meeting acceptance criteria for deliverables  (PMI 2021:S47) |
| | **Navigate complexity** | S26 | ❖  Being vigilant for indications of complexity allows project teams to adapt their approaches and plans to navigte potential disruption in effective project delivery  PMI 2021:S52) |
| | **Optimise risk responses** | S27 | #  Continually evaluate exposure to risk, both opportunities and threats, to maximize positive impacts and minimize negative impacts to the project and its  outcomes. (PMI  2021:S53) |
| | **Embrace adaptability and resiliency** | S28 | ✓  A focus on outcomes rather than outputs facilitates adaptability  (PMI  2021:S55) |
| | **Enable change to achieve the envisioned future** | S29 | ➤  Prepare those impacted for the adoption and sustainment of new and different behaviours and processes required for the transition from the current state to the intended future state created by the project outcomes.  (PMI 2021:S58) |

*Figure 2. Outcomes-related entries" in the Preface and Standard sections of PMI 2021: Sheet 2 of 2*

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## Cumulated frequencies of various outcome-related entries in the Standard

The number of the various types of outcome-related entries in each of the sections of the Standard, as detailed in Figure 2, are summarised in Figure 3.

| | Introduction | Value delivery | PM principles | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✓ Post-delivery outcomes | 2 | 1 | 6 | 9 |
| # Which type of outcome? | 1 | 0 | 6 | 7 |
| ➢ Post-outcome results | 0 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| ❖ Deliverables/ outputs | 0 | 3 | 4 | 7 |
| ✦ Pre-delivery results | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 3 | 8 | 18 | 29 |

*Figure 3. Frequencies of outcomes-related entries in the Standard section of PMI 2021*

## The numbers do not appear to reflect a strong focus on post-delivery outcomes

As noted above, the nine post-delivery outcomes entries out of a total of 29 outcome-related entries in the Standard appear to me to be somewhat lower than might reasonably have been expected, in light of the increased focus intention stated in P1. Perhaps the "Which type of outcome?" entries might have added a few more, if their natures were known – but at best the combined numbers would still amount to only about a half of the total entries. But perhaps my expectations are unrealistic.

## There is minimal information on who contributes what to post-delivery outcomes

Also in relation to the nine "post-delivery outcomes" entries in the Standard, there is virtually no substantive information about what participating entities, including project management, actually do to contribute to the achievement of such outcomes. The lack of information on "how" is a major shortfall in the actualities relating to the aspiration for "a stronger focus on outcomes".

There is also a lack of information on "who" is involved in achieving broader/end outcomes. There is no direct mention of the users of project outputs, and their roles in achieving outcomes.

This neglect of users is not confined to PMI 2021 – it also applies more widely to the project management literature at large. All too often this leaves the impression that project management has a more active role in achieving outcomes than is actually the case in practice in most application areas. These considerations will be discussed in more detail in the second article of this series..

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**Suggestions about clarifying some usages of "outcomes" in the Standard**

▪ *Categorise the different types of meanings/usages of "outcomes"*

I found it necessary to make my own categorisation of the different meanings and/or usages of the descriptor "outcomes" to help undertake this analysis. I therefore suggest that authors of any revision to PMI 2021 undertake their own categorisation – and amend the definition/descriptor of "outcome" (as shown in S2) accordingly.

▪ *Ensure that the type of outcome being discussed is always identified*

It may seem a trifle pedantic, but I believe that the type of outcome being discussed should always be specified. This is because many readers are likely to have different perceptions about the nature of outcomes, so that specific descriptors will help avoid the type of confusion I first had in reading some sections of PMI 2021.

**OUTCOMES-RELATED ENTRIES IN PMBOK GUIDE - PERFORMANCE DOMAINS**

**Introduction to the Project Prformance Domains in the PMBOK Guide**

Outcomes-related entries in the PMBOK Guide are confined to its major section on Project Performance Domains. There are eight such domains, namely:

- Stakeholder performance domain
- Team performance domain
- Development approach and life cycle performance domain
- Planning performance domain
- Project work performance domain
- Delivery performance domain
- Measurement performance domain
- Uncertainty performance domain

There are substantial discussions in PMI 2021 about each of these performance domains, which are summarised in a concluding section in each domain entitled "Checking results". The basic format of each of these is shown later in Figure 6A. Each mainly comprises a two-column table. The left hand column is headed "Outcomes", summarising findings from the preceding detailed discussions. The right hand column is headed "Check", and summarises ways of checking for attainment of the "outcomes".

Overall, these "Checking results" tables are quite voluminous, and it has been a bit of a challenge to compact them into just the two pages which comprise Figure 4. I have retained the full descriptors of the "Outcomes", but have excluded details on the "Check" side of the tables for many of the "Pre-delivery results" outputs entries. I have also altered the order of presentation from the above list to facilitate the compaction. Finally, Figure 4 also includes a couple of relevant entries from the opening figure in each of the performance domains (whose format is shown later in Figure 7A) to help provide appropriate contexts for all the entries in this figure.

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## Detailed listings of outcomes-related entries in the Performance Domains

| Effective execution of this performance domain results in the following desired outcomes | | Outcomes | Check |
|---|---|---|---|
| **STAKEHOLDER Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G15 Table 2-2) | G1 | A productive working relationship with stakeholders throughout the project | Productive working relationships with stakeholders can be observed. However the movement of stakeholders along a continuum of engagement can indicate the relative level of satisfaction with the project |
| | G2 | Stakeholder agreement with project objectives | A significant number of changes or modifications to the project and product requirements in addition to the scope may indicate stakeholders are not engaged or aligned with the project objectives |
| | G3 | ❖ Stakeholders who are project beneficiaries are supportive and satisfied. Stakeholders who oppose the project or its deliverables do not negatively impact project results | Stakeholder behaviour can indicate whether project beneficiaries are satisfied and supportive of the project or whether they oppose it. Surveys, interviews, and focus groups are also effective ways to determine if stakeholders are satisfied and supportive or if they oppose the project and its deliverables. ….. . …… |
| **TEAM Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G31 Table 2-3) | G4 | ✓ Shared ownership | All project team members know the vision and objectives. The project team owns the deliverables and outcomes of The project |
| | G5 | A high performing team | The project team trusts each other and collaborates. The project team adapts to changing situations and is resilient in the face of challenges. The project team feels empowered, and empowers and recognised members of the project team |
| | G6 | Applicable leadership and other interpersonal skills are demonstrated by all project team members | Project team members apply critical thinking and interpersonal skills. Project team member leadership styles are appropriate to the project context and environment. …… |
| **DEVELOPMENT APPROACH AND LIFE CYCLE Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G50 Table 2-5) | G7 | ❖ Development approaches that are consistent with project deliverables | The development approach to deliverables [predictive,hybrid or adaptive] reflects the product variables and is appropriate given the project and organisational variables |
| | G8 | A project life cycle consisting of phases that connect the delivery of business and stakeholder value from the project | Project work from launch to close is represented in the project phases. Phases include appropriate end criteria. |
| | G9 | ❖ Project life cycle phases that facilitate the delivery cadence and development approach required to product the project deliverables | The cadence for development, testing, and deploying is represented in the life cycle phases. Projects with multiple deliverables that have different delivery cadences and development methods are represented by overlapping phases of phase repetitions, as necessary |
| **DELIVERY Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G92 Table 2-8) | G10 | ❖ Projects contribute to business objectives and advancement of strategy | The business plan and the organisational strategic plan, along with the project authorising documents, demonstrate that the project deliverables and business objectives are aligned |
| | G11 | # Projects deliver the outcomes they were initiated to deliver | The business case and underlying data indicate the project is still on track to realise the intended outcomes |
| | G12 | # Project benefits are realised in the time frame in which they were planned | The benefits realisation plan, business case, and/or schedule indicate that the financial metrics and scheduled deliveries are being achieved as planned |
| | G13 | The project team has a clear understanding of requirements | In predictive development, little change in the initial requirements reflects understanding. In projects where requirements are evolving a clear understanding of requirements may not take place until well into the project. |
| | G14 | ❖ Stakeholders accept and are satisfied with project deliverables | Interviews, observation, and end user feedback indicate stakeholder satisfaction with deliverables. Levels of complaints and returns can also be used to indicate satisfaction |

*Figure 4. Outcomes-related entries in the Project Performance Domains: Sheet 1 of 2*

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| Effective execution of this performance domain results in the following desired outcomes | Outcomes | | Check |
|---|---|---|---|
| **PLANNING Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G68 Table 2-6) | G15 | ✦ The project progresses in an organised, coordinated, and deliberate manner | A performance review of project results against the project baselines and other measurement metrics demonstrate that the project is progressing as planned. Performance variances are within thresholds |
| | G16 | # There is a holistic approach to delivering the project outcomes | The delivery schedule, funding, resource availability, procurement etc., demonstrate that the project is planned in a holistic manner, with no gaps or areas of misalignment. |
| | G17 | ✓ Existing information is elaborated to produce the deliverables and outcomes for which the project was undertaken | Initial information about deliverables and requirements compared to current information demonstrates appropriate elaboration. Current information compared to the business case indicate the project will produce the deliverables and outcomes it was undertaken to deliver. |
| | G18 | ✦ Time spent planning is appropriated for the situation | |
| | G19 | ✦ Planning information is sufficient to manage stakeholder expectations | |
| | G20 | ✦ There is a process for adaptation of plans throughout the project, ….. | |
| **PROJECT WORK Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G79 Table 2-7) | G21 | ✦ Efficient and effective project performance | |
| | G22 | ✦ Project processes appropriate for project & environment | |
| | G23 | ✦ Appropriate communications with stakeholders | |
| | G24 | ✦ Efficient management of physical resources | |
| | G25 | ✦ Effective ,management of procurements | |
| | G26 | ✦ Improved team capability due to continuous learning and process improvement | |
| **MEASUREMENT Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G115 Table 2-9) | G27 | ✦ A reasonable understanding of the state of the project | |
| | G28 | ✦ Actionable data to facilitate decision making | |
| | G29 | ✦ Timely and appropriate actions to keep project performance on track | |
| | G30 | ✦ Achieving targets and generating business value by making informed and timely decisions based on reliable forecasts and evaluations | |
| **UNCERTAINTY Performance Domain** (Adapted from PMI 2021:G129 Table 2-10) | G31 | ✦ An awareness of the environment in which projects occur, | |
| | G32 | ✦ Proactively exploring and responding to uncertainty | |
| | G33 | ✦ An awareness of the interdependencies of multiple variables | |
| | G34 | ✦ The capacity to anticipate threats and opportunities ……. | |
| | G35 | ✦ Project delivery with little or no negative impact from unseen .. | |
| | G36 | # Realised opportunities to improve project performance and outcomes | Teams use established mechanisms to identify and leverage opportunities |
| | G37 | ✦ Cost and schedule reserves used effectively to maintain alignment with project objectives | |

**Figure 4. Outcomes-related entries in the Project Performance Domains: Sheet 2 of 2**

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## Frequencies of various outcome-related entries in the Performance Domains

The number of the various types of outcome-related entries in each of the Project Performanc Domains, as detailed in Figure 4, are summarised in Figure 5.

| PROJECT PERFORMANCE DOMAIN | Stakeholders | Team | Development approach | Planning | Project work | Delivery | Measurement | Uncertainty | TOTALS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ✛ Pre-delivery results | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 26 |
| ❖ Deliverables/ outputs | 1 | | 2 | | | 2 | | | 5 |
| ✓ Post-delivery outcome | | 1 | | 1 | | | | | 2 |
| # Which type of outcome? | | | | 1 | | 2 | | 1 | 4 |
| ➢ Post-outcome results | | | | | | | | | |
| **Totals** | 3 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 7 | 37 |

*Figure 5. Frequencies of outcomes-related entries in the Project Performance Domain section of the PMBOK Guide in PMI 2021*

## These numbers clearly indicate a dominant concern with pre-delivery results

Out of a total of 37 entries in the eight Project Performance Domains in the PMBOK Guide, there are 26 entries with a "Pre-delivery results" focus, plus five in which the focus is on "Deliverables/outcomes". Their combined total of 31 comprises 84% of the total entries.

This dominance is very obviously inconsistent with the stated aspirations of a stronger focus on outcomes in PMI 2021 as noted in the Introduction. It certainly indicates a need to modify, or qualify, some of the relevant statements in the Preface, and elsewhere, accordingly.

## Suggestions for fixing some inconsistencies re the Project Performance Domains

It is first noted that earlier suggestions about clarifying certain usages of the descriptor "outcomes" in the Standard, also apply to the Project Performance Domains – i.e. continuing with a categorisation of different types of meanings/usages of "outcomes", and ensuring that the type of outcome being discussed is always clearly specified.

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However, there are more specific suggestions to be made in relation to the meanings/usages of outcomes in the Project Performance Domains.

This enquiry is not disputing PMI's decision to focus on pre-delivery and deliverables results in its discussions of the eight Project Performance Domains, However, it does argue that the headings which include "outcomes" in both the opening figure and final table for each domain could be seen as potentially confusing – and certainly completely inconsistent with the aspirational statements in the Preface, as already discussed. Initially, I certainly found these usages of "outcomes" rather off-putting. This has led me to suggest the following quite straightforward amendments to help avoid confusion.

▪ ***Amend some of the wording in the "Checking Results" table for each Domain***

The current format of the final table for each of the eight Project Performance Domains is along the following lines

---

**2.x.y CHECKING RESULTS [or MEASURING OUTCOMES in one Domain]**

   Table 2-z identifies the outcomes on the left and ways of checking them on the right

**Table 2-z Checking Outcomes – [Particular] Performance Domain**

| Outcomes | Check |
|----------|-------|
|          |       |

---

*Figure 6a. Current format of headings for the final table in each Project Performance Domain*

Potential confusion with the meaning of "outcomes" in this context can be avoided in quite a straightforward way. The heading of the final table for each domain (except for one) – i.e. "Checking Results" – itself suggests that we can simply substitute the descriptor "results" for "outcomes" in ensuing sub-headings etc, as shown in Figure 6b.

---

**2.x.y CHECKING RESULTS**

   Table 2-z identifies the results on the left and ways of checking them on the right

**Table 2-z Checking Results – [Particular] Performance Domain**

| Results | Check |
|---------|-------|
|         |       |

---

*Figure 6b. Suggested amendments to the "Checking Results" section of each performance domain*

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▪ *Amend corresponding wording in the initial figure for each Peformance Domain*

The current format of the final table for each of the eight Project Performance Domains is along the following lines.

| [PARTICULAR] PERFORMANCE DOMAIN | |
|---|---|
| **The [Particular] Performance Domain addresses activities and functions associated with** ............ | Effective execution of this performance domain results in the following desired outcomes<br><br>➢  ……….. |

*Figure 7a. Current format of headings for the initial figure in each Project Performance Domain*

A corresponding amendment fo the initial figure which would replace "outcomes" with "results" would entail some rephrasing in the right hand text box – perhaps along the lines suggested in Figure 7b below.

| [PARTICULAR] PERFORMANCE DOMAIN | |
|---|---|
| **The [Particular] Performance Domain addresses activities and functions associated with** ............ | **Effective execution of this performance domain has the following desired results.**<br><br>➢  ……….. |

*Figure 7b. Suggested amendment to the initial figure in each Project Performance Domain*

If these amendments were undertaken, an appropriate note would need to be added in the Preface, and also to the description quoted at the beginning of this subsection.

## SUMMARY/DISCUSSION

This article first noted that, in recent years, there have been increasing discussions on outcomes and benefits in the project management literature. This also appears to be reflected in PMI 2021, whose Preface includes stated aspirations to focus more strongly on outcomes, rather than on deliverables.

It was first noted that some sixty six outcomes-related entries in the Standard and PMBOK Guide had been identified – as later detailed in Figures 2 and 4 respectively, The overall frequencies of their occurrence in the various sections of PMI 2021 were first summarised in Figure 1. After observing that the descriptor of "outcomes" in the Standard allows for different meanings and/or usages, we went on to develop a five-type categorisation of different usages of the descriptor "outcomes" in PMI 2021..

Looking at the Standard in more detail, we first presented a detailed listings of all the outcomes-related entries found in the Preface and Standard. We then summarised the frequencies of the various outcome-related entries in sections of the Standard.

It was noted that these frequencies did not appear to reflect a strong(er) focus on post-delivery outcomes, and that this does not accord with the stated aspiration of PMI 2021.

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Some suggestions about clarifying certain usages of the descriptor "outcomes" in any revision of the Standard were then offered. The two key suggestion were:

- Categorise the different types of meanings/usages of "outcomes" (perhaps broadly along the lines suggested in this article).
- Ensure that the type of outcome being discussed is always identified

Turning to the PMBOK Guide sector, we started with a somewhat compacted, but none-the-less very detailed, presentation of the multitudinous outcomes-related entries in the eight component Project Performance Domains. The following summary of the frequencies of the various outcome-related entries clearly indicated that this section of the Guide was primarily concerned with pre-delivery and deliverables results. Indeed, only two entries out of thirty seven were related to post-delivery outcomes.

We then offered two additional suggestions for dealing with some terminological inconsistencies specific to the Project Performance Domains, in the following areas.

- Amend some of the wording in the "Checking Results" table for each Domain
- Amend corresponding wording in the initial figure for each Performance Domain

In terms of numbers of entries in both the Standard and the PMBOK Guide, it was noted that the frequency of citing of post-delivery outcomes was quite low in the former, and very low in the latter – a situation which does not appear to be in accord with the stated aspiration of PMI 2021 to focus more on post-delivery outcomes than on deliverables.

This evidently suggests a need to amend such aspirational-related entries accordingly. However, there will be a good deal more to say about such outcomes in the second article of this two-part commentary, so that it would seem best to postpone suggestions for any corresponding changes to aspiration-related entries until its conclusion.
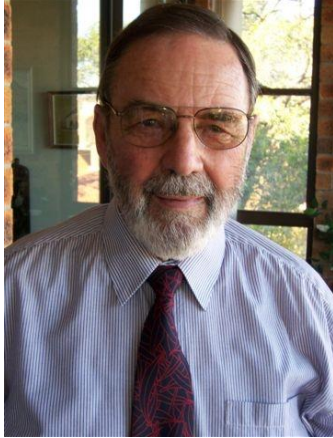
The second article will address some contradictory entries in relation to post-delivery outcomes, and some suggested approaches to handling these. These will include discussions on the roles of users of project outputs, and of project management, in achieving post-delivery outcomes.

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## About the Author

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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 250+ professional articles and papers.  Alan can be contacted at alanailene@bigpond.com.au.

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