

# **Ongoing Odysseys in Project Management: Some experiential and allied influences on my perspectives and writings on project management<sup>1</sup>**

*(A Personal Story)*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This article is a broadly chronological outline of some of my personal career experiences and allied influences, and how these have affected my perspectives on project management (PM), and thence the nature and content of some of my more recent articles on this subject, most of which have appeared in this journal.

Some earlier sections of this article include discussions on various disciplines I was involved with relatively early in my career, such as civil engineering, general management, marketing management and organisational strategic planning. I will outline how some of these disciplines influenced my perceptions of, and later writings on, the (then) emerging discipline of project management.

In earlier times, project management was often described as “the accidental profession” – a descriptor which reflected the diverse disciplinary paths that most of my generation took in our journeys towards embracing project management as a distinct discipline. In the modern era, it is still widely acknowledged that the project management discipline draws on, and/or is influenced by, a multitude of practices from other disciplines. However, there tend to be few specific references to such practices in the PM literature. Indeed, many writers have commented that project management continues to be rather inwards looking and self-referential. One of my hopes for this article is that it might help promote greater recognition of many key contributions from a host of other disciplines.

Some of the later sections of this article are concerned with questions that arose out of differences between my experiences in project management and what was being written on the subject; plus discrepancies I have found within the project management literature itself. For example, some of my writings have been particularly concerned with differences for project management on internal projects in production-based Owner Organisations, versus project management on external customer projects in project-based Supplier Organisations; and on tendencies in the PM literature to focus on the former. This also overlaps with some of my other writings on tendencies in the literature to ignore the key roles of users of project outputs in achieving broader outcomes and

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realising benefits. These writings ventured some suggestions to help address each of these concerns, which are summarised in this article.

The final section of this article looks at a couple of possible extensions of project management, under the heading of futures for project management.

## **INITIAL EXPERIENCES IN CIVIL ENGINEERING DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION**

I graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering (BE) from the University of Tasmania in 1948, and an MA (in mathematics) from Oxford University in 1951. I found that I was not cut out to pursue mathematics as a career. However, I had enjoyed field construction work with Tasmania's Hydro-Electric Commission before and after my first graduation, so decided to pursue civil engineering in Australia. I initially worked some six years with the newly created Snowy Mountains Authority, mainly in construction sectors, followed by two years each with consulting engineering and construction contracting organisations.

### **Some initial experiential preferences and perspectives**

These can be summarised as follows.

- I found that I preferred construction practice to the design discipline
- I preferred direct involvement in construction over supervising construction by others, but I found the construction contractor tender environment unattractive, partly due to
  - the uncertainty and inefficiency of traditional construction tendering practices
  - frustration and waste due to poor constructability of many design features

This led to my joining Civil & Civic (C&C) in late 1961. That organisation was in the process of rapidly expanding with its integrated design-and-construct building services. It also had more holistic perspectives of the role of project-based Supplier Organisations in the building and construction industries than any I had previously experienced, as will be discussed in more detail shortly.

At this stage it should be recorded that, in Australia in the 1950s, the descriptor project management was never heard in the construction industry. However, as we shall see, this was to change during the 1960s.

Undoubtedly the above early experiences in engineering and construction have influenced my perspectives and later writings on project management. However, I have not identified any prominent specific links between these early experiences and my later project management articles, so would class any such influences as somewhat indirect.

## **EXTENSIONS OF PROJECT SERVICES FROM TENDERING INTO FRONT ENDS**

### **Adding design-and-construct services to competitive construction-only tendering**

As already noted, by the time I joined Civil & Civic in late 1961, that organisation had made substantial progress in delivering design-and-construct services in the building industry in NSW, whilst still remaining active in the tendering sector. I discussed these circumstances in some detail in Stretton 2024g, focusing particularly on adding value to the client in the design phase, and the role of Project Control Groups (PCGs), a joint governance mechanism, which also facilitated appropriate client involvement in helping optimise the design.

### **Adding client needs determination, and other strategic initiative support services**

That article went on to discuss how Civil & Civic then extended the range of its services back towards the “front end”, first with a service we called Client Needs Determination (CND). This descriptor is a slight misnomer, as it really involved helping the client organisation clarify and evaluate its specific strategic needs, investigate its strategic initiative options, choose the best option, and then the “right” component project(s) to best facilitate satisfaction of the strategic needs. I also discussed the growing demand for these strategic initiative support services at the time (1960s through the 1980s).

### **Adding organisational strategic planning support services**

A further extension of this Civil & Civic service was into broader organisational strategic planning support services, which were sometimes initiated when CND activities indicated that a review of the client organisation’s overall longer-term strategic plans was warranted. These services involved helping the client organisation upgrade its broader organisational strategic objectives, and/or determine the best choices/mix of more specific strategic initiatives to achieve the broader objectives.

It should be emphasised that these C&C services are those it provided as a Supplier Organisation (SO). However, C&C was not alone in providing such extended services.

### **Equivalent “front end” services provided by EPC organisations on major projects**

Up to this point we have restricted examples to the Civil & Civic context. However, we were comparatively small fry compared with equivalent strategic initiative support services and strategic planning services undertaken by EPC (Engineering, Procurement, Construction) organisations such as Fluor and Bechtel in the much more prominent sector of large complex construction projects and mega-projects.

### **Front End Loading (FEL) strategic initiative support services**

I have discussed EPC contributions in this area in the form of Front End Loading (FEL) in many recent articles in this journal – most recently in Stretton 2022a, in which I quoted the FEL descriptor in Morris 2013:60 as follows.

IPA [Independent Project Analysis], the oil, gas and minerals project benchmarking company, coined the useful term ‘Front-End Loading’: ...(FEL) is a tool for determining

which is the “right” project to meet the needs of business. The FEL tool assesses the level of definition of a number of critical items that are used to determine what, if any, asset should be built to meet a particular business need.

As this descriptor indicates, there are strong commonalities between Front-End Loading and Civil & Civic’s Client Needs Determination. In particular, both are very directly concerned with helping clients with strategic initiative support services.

### ***Pre-FEL organisational strategic planning support services***

Many EPC organisations have also been undertaking substantial pre-FEL services over very many years. The two types of services offered in this group are much the same as those offered by C&C, namely helping client organisations establish their broader organisational strategic objectives, and helping them determine the best choices/mix of strategic initiative to achieve these objectives.

### **Influence on my perspectives and later writings on project management**

First, it should be acknowledged that there are some domains in which project management involvement in certain front-end activities has long been common practice, albeit to varying degrees. Additionally, in the past couple of decades, approaches such as Agile have facilitated further specialised types of front-end involvement by project management. However, there are still some domains where the latter is relatively rare, such as the construction industry.

I have written well over a dozen articles on increased involvement by project management in the front end of projects – most recently Stretton 2024j. My main motivation has been that I had seen at first hand, and over many years, how Civil & Civic’s extended services added so much value to its customers, as well as extending the experience of the members of C&C’s relevant project management teams.

Another factor which emerged later (in Stretton 2018a) was an indication that up to 50% of causes of project failure reported in the literature relate to early strategic/project stages/phases, and particular the incubation and feasibility phases of potential and chosen projects. These are phases in which project managers are all too seldom involved, but where their involvement has the potential to markedly reduce failures.

Further, although I have usually been advocating such extended involvement in the context of project-based Supplier Organisations (SOs) in provided services to external customers, I have also suggested that internal projects could often benefit from earlier project management involvement at the front end.

**RELATING PROJECTS TO AN ORG. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

**Project front ends naturally relate to an organisation’s strategic plans & initiatives**

Projects are widely represented as major means of helping organisations attain their strategic objectives. They are therefore intimately linked with an organisation’s strategic management. We have just seen examples of C&C and some EPC organisations providing services in helping organisations develop strategic plans and/or strategic initiatives. But the close association between projects and organisational strategic management goes much further than these examples.

In discussing how these, and the other stages, of project management services relate to an organisation’s strategy, I have found it helpful to relate all these services to two basic organisational strategic management framework models – to which we now turn.

**A basic linear organisational strategic management framework used in my writings**

I first developed the early versions of the following basic linear framework in two articles in this journal in late 2017 (Stretton 2017k, l), which were particularly influenced by a paper of Mintzberg & Walters 1985. I followed up these initial articles with a series of five articles in 2018 (Stretton 2018d to 2018h), which referenced quite a wide range of articles by various authors on organisational strategic management.

I should also record here my own experience in this domain as secretary to the Lend Lease Group Development Committee – i.e. its top-level strategic planning group – from 1965 to 1972. This hands-on experience has given me some measure of confidence in developing and using these basic organisational strategic management frameworks.

This linear framework appeared to be particularly appropriate when discussing individual strategic initiatives and their component projects. The most recent version of this framework was summarised in Stretton 2024j, in the top sections of Figure 1 below. The lower sections show how the various levels of project management services relate to the components of the organisational strategic management framework.

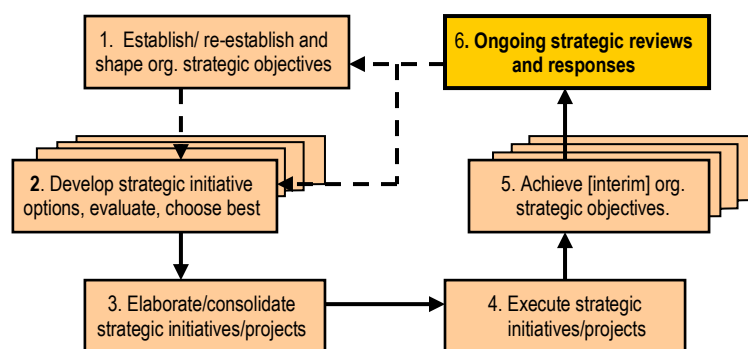
A BASIC ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK				
1. Establish/ re-establish and shape org. strategic objectives	2. Develop strategic initiative options, evaluate, choose best	3. Elaborate/consolidate strategic initiatives/projects	4. Execute strategic initiatives/projects	5. Achieve strategic objectives.
<b>Add helping client organisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Establish its organisational strategic objectives</li><li>Determine best choices/mix of Strategies to achieve objectives</li></ul>	<b>Add helping client org'n</b> Evaluate specific strategic initiative options, identify the best, incl. the "right" projects	Add development of front end Pre-execution project phases <b>PROJECT DEVELOPMENT + EXECUTION/DELIVERY</b>	<b>EXECUTION/DELIVERY</b>	<b>POST-DELIVERY</b> Assistance to client where practicable
		<b>ADDED STRATEGIC INITIATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES</b>		
<b>ADDED STRATEGIC PLANNING SUPPORT SERVICES</b>				

**Figure 1. A basic linear organisational strategic management framework, and corresponding types of project-related services**

## **A basic recursive organisational strategic management framework**

In late 2020 I also developed a recursive organisational strategic management model. This is based on the linear model but has added “Ongoing strategic reviews and responses” in a recursive feedback mode, as shown in Figure 2.

Essentially this model recognises that managing broad organisational strategic objectives is an ongoing task, and that the broader objectives need to be modified from time to time depending on a variety of factors – including feedback from outcomes of individual strategic initiatives.



**Figure 2. A basic recursive organisational strategic management framework**

I have used these frameworks extensively in the past few years to help illustrate where project management stands in the contexts of organisational strategic management.

Both strategic management and project management are linked with general management in a variety of ways. We now look at the latter connection in a little more detail.

## **PROJECT MANAGEMENT & GENERAL MANAGEMENT ARE CLOSELY RELATED**

### **Many operational links between project management and general management**

There can be innumerable types of operational links between project management and general management. In the context of supplying project-related services to external customers, the main links are likely to be via the kind of customer organisational strategic management stages depicted in Figure 1. In the case of internal projects concerned with improving the organisation’s working efficiency or similar, operational links are generally more immediate – particularly with production-based organisations which operate in matrix-type formats.

However, there is another more intimate type of relationship between project management and general management which does not always get the degree of recognition that its importance would appear to warrant, and to which we now turn.



## **Many general management skills are also integral components of project mgt.**

*General management provides the foundation for building project management skills and is often essential for the project manager. On any given project, skill in any number of general management areas may be required. General management literature documents these skills, and their application is fundamentally the same on a project. (PMI 2004:15)*

This quotation indicates that the importance of general management in the management of projects is widely acknowledged. However, its treatment in the project management literature is uneven. Overall, some aspects of general management are quite well covered, but others not so well, or hardly at all.

It is also implied in the above quotation that project managers can access the general management literature to fill in gaps in their knowledge and skills in this domain. However, this is easier said than done. The general management literature is voluminous, and it is not necessarily easy to quickly access relevant materials.

I have a particular personal interest in the interplay of project management and general management, because my introduction of management as a discipline came via general management. In 1963, Lend Lease purchased the L.A. Allen “Profession of Management” program, which was essentially a general management (GM) program (as set down in Allen 1964). We ran this program in-house in all the Lend Lease subsidiary companies until well into the 1980s. Initially I was a presenter of this program in Civil & Civic, but from 1965 to 1972, I was also responsible for overall management of the entire Lend Lease program.

Now, it should be noted that, at least up to the early 1960s, the concept of management as a distinctive discipline had not yet found its way into the Australian building and construction industries. It was therefore a major revelation to engineers like me, and to many other types of professionals in Civil & Civic, to recognise that our jobs also had specifically identifiable management components.

This also became important when I started to look into project management as a discipline in its own right. With the above background, I rather naturally tended to view project management through a general-management-biased lens. As more project management literature became available, it appeared to me that general management was far from being adequately represented in the project management literature, particularly in its bodies of knowledge and the like. I therefore decided to write some articles on this topic, as now briefly discussed.

## **Notes on some of my articles on general management in PM contexts**

I initially discussed connections between project management and general management (GM) in *PM World Today* (Stretton 2010h, 2011g). These articles included discussion of how Turner 1993 related the basic GM functions of planning, organising, implementing,

controlling and leading to stages of the project management life-cycle. However, it was also noted that there was little detailed discussion by other authors, nor in PM standards, of how PM and general management were linked.

This was the background for a series of seven articles I wrote in the PMWJ in 2015. In these I divided the basic GM functions into planning, organising, leading, staffing and implementing/controlling, and discussed the relevance of each, and their component activities, to the management of projects (starting with Stretton 2015g).

More recently, in Stretton 2024h, I commented on the extent to which general management topics are being covered in the highly revised 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the PMBOK Guide (PMI 2021). My finding was that the coverage was now much more extensive, notably in Section 4 of that document. However, the models in Section 4 are relatively sophisticated, and many of the more basic general management knowledge and skills that are also needed for effective project management are still not adequately covered in the PM literature.

I am not sure how this gap could be effectively filled – but believe project management would benefit substantially if a much broader coverage of these basic general management functions could be achieved.

## **REPRESENTING KEY ROLES OF CUSTOMERS/USERS IN ACHIEVING OUTCOMES**

### **Extended front-end services necessitate a primary focus on customer needs**

In the earlier discussions on extensions of project services from tendering into front ends, we started with competitive construction-only tendering services. With this type of service, the focus of the SO is usually confined to producing the project as efficiently as possible. This type of focus is often described as a “production orientation”. Relations with the customer tend to be via an intermediary, and therefore somewhat indirect – and all too often include adversarial elements.

However, when the project services are extended into the more front-end areas of design, client needs determination and other strategic initiative support, and organisational strategic planning supports services, the paramount importance of effective working relationships with the customers becomes self-evident. In these situations, the nature of the project-related service is then entirely dependent on what emerges from interactions with the customer, the establishment of the customer’s needs, and thence the nature of the services, and associated projects, to best satisfy these needs. The primary initial focus is on the customers and their needs – which is often described as a “customer orientation”.

The Civil & Civic people involved in these front-end services had no real choice other than to develop such customer orientations – in which, judging from results, they were substantially successful.



## **Marketing education programs in LLC/C&C consolidated customer orientation**

By 1965, an internally generated marketing education program had been developed (in Lend Lease Homes, if I remember correctly), and was run in all Lend Lease companies on a regular basis. It was strongly embraced by Civil & Civic, where it added a structured background to help consolidate and strengthen the already well-developed customer orientation of people in the company, and particularly the many project people involved in its expanding front-end services.

## **Customers and users are not always identical: Project services focus on end users**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Edition of PMI's *The Standard for Project Management and A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* distinguishes between customers and end users, as follows (PMI 2021:S13).

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.

The majority of my discussions have been about customer projects undertaken by project-based Supplier Organisations. Therefore the end users (whom I usually simply describe as *users*) will normally be parties within the customer organisation. For this reason I most often have the end users in mind when discussing customers of project-related services.

## **Notes on some of my articles on the importance of customer/user roles**

As will be discussed a little later on, the project management literature is more oriented to discussing project management of internal projects in production-based Owner Organisations (OOs) rather than external customer projects in project-based Supplier Organisations (SOs). A consequence is a comparative neglect of the important role of customers in project processes in the latter context. This is the background for several of my articles on the subject, most recently in Stretton 2024c, which looked at some ways of classifying project management customers, particularly in relation to how their interests and/or needs can be properly recognised and incorporated into relevant project processes. This followed Stretton 2024b, which was a more generalised article on adding a genuine customer focus to the dominant project-product focus in most of project management.

These articles also overlap several other articles which are more specifically concerned with acknowledging and including the essential roles of end users of project outputs in converting the latter to outcomes – a major topic to which we now turn.

### **C&C's extended services included helping customers' users achieve outcomes**

As discussed above, Civil & Civic provided extended project-related services to customer organisations. In doing so, it was also concerned with actively helping users in the customer organisation achieve their desired outcomes (except for most execution/delivery-only services). On some occasions, this post-delivery service was included in the contractual arrangements with the customer. But, even when there was no contractual obligation, C&C took the view that it should actively help customers achieve their outcomes whenever it could. For example, Stretton 2024g discussed how the company went about providing this kind of help to customers in the domain of new or expanded hospital facilities.

In providing this post-delivery service, C&C was inevitably helping individuals or groups from within the customer organisation who were directly using the project outputs/deliverables to help achieve the relevant outcomes – i.e. the users. In these contexts, the end users are clearly responsible for the achievement of these outcomes. As just discussed, the delivering project management team can sometimes help the users, but in these SO/external customer contexts, the PM team cannot be held responsible for achieving the final outcomes.

However, there are some sectors of project management practice where the delivering project management team can be, and often is, held responsible for achieving the final outcomes – e.g. many projects undertaken within an organisation to improve its operational efficiency, or allied purposes. There are substantial materials in the literature on such projects, where responsibility for outcomes (and sometimes benefits realisation as well) are vested in the delivering project management team. However, it should be emphasised that this applies only in some project management contexts.

### **The role of users of project outputs in achieving outcomes is under-represented**

It would seem to be somewhat obvious that users of project outputs should feature prominently in those sections of the literature that discuss the achievement of outcomes. Yet users are most certainly under-represented. As Dalcher 2015 put it in an article entitled "For whose benefit? Reclaiming the role of users in projects":

Why do we develop projects? Project development and delivery typically result in the creation of new assets and capabilities. Yet, to what extent do we shape the delivery process to reflect the needs and aspirations of the ultimate users?

Answering the question is not easy: Perusing the bodies of knowledge reveals very little about users and their role in projects. ....

Dalcher made the above observations in 2015. Have things changed significantly since then? As far as I can ascertain, there has been little, if any, change. This has prompted me to write several articles on the subject.

## **Notes on some of my articles on the roles of users in project management**

I published four articles in this journal in 2021 which explored ways in which users could be incorporated into organisational strategic-and-operational frameworks, starting with Stretton 2021k. These were followed by three further articles in 2022, and then a two-part commentary on “outcomes” in PMI 2021, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. in 2023, which suggested practical ways of including users in appropriate sections of this extensive standard.

Returning to differences in responsibilities for achieving outcomes. I discussed these in some detail in Stretton 2025a, mainly in the context of differences in typical projects undertaken in Supplier Organisations versus those in Owner Organisations. These differences are additional to very substantial operational differences for PMs in project development and execution stages - differences which I will discuss in more detail in the next major section.

## **SOME ISSUES RE THE EMERGENCE OF A PROJECT MANAGEMENT DISCIPLINE**

### **A note on early days in the emergence of project management in Australia**

As noted earlier, in the first ten years of my hands-on experience (the 1950s), no-one in the Australian construction industry spoke of management as a distinctive discipline, let alone project management in this context. In the earlier 1960s newly developed network planning techniques such as the Critical Path Method (CPM) and the Precedence Diagramming Method (PDM) were being increasingly adopted in the industry – and indeed, at the time, many Australians regarded these techniques as being synonymous with project management. It was not until later in the 1960s that a broader understanding of the nature of the project management began to emerge.

In the case of Civil & Civic, we instituted the use of CPM, and then PDM, from early 1962 – but they were simply regarded as planning and control techniques. As discussed earlier, the management component of our work was first seen in the context of our internal general management education program. It was only towards the end of the 1960s that factors particular to project management came to be more fully recognised, and internal processes which were particular to the C&C operational context began to be developed and promulgated.

### **A personal search for a broader basic project management framework**

At a personal level, having been intensively involved with delivering and managing the internal general management education program for some years, I became interested in looking for a broader framework specific to the emerging project management discipline. However, the first two “classic” books on project management that I came across (Cleland & King 1968; Kerzner 1979) did not provide frameworks that were consistent with the C&C experience in providing project management services to external customers. For example, both books appeared to be mainly concerned with project management in matrix-type organisations, which was simply not relevant to our situation.

At a broader level, both books implied that project management had evolved out of the “systems” movement – which simply did not accord with our experience of the way project management was developing in the Australian construction industry.

My search for a more comprehensive project management framework was eventually rejuvenated by early editions of PMI’s Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) in the later 1980s. This led to my getting involved quite intensively with PMI in developing a new edition of the PMBOK, which I describe in a little more detail in a later section of this article.

In the meantime, the difference between the Cleland & King/Kerzner approaches and our own experiences with project management in project-based supplier organisations led to exploring a different aspect of the emerging project management discipline, as follows.

### **Emerging recognition of differences between PM of external client projects in Supplier Organisations (SOs) and internal projects in Owner Organisations (OOs)**

With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the above two “classic” books were primarily oriented towards project management of internal projects in what some have described as Owner Organisations (as defined below) and simply did not cover many of the issues which were specifically relevant to project management of external customer projects in the type of Supplier Organisation represented by Civil & Civic. In several previous articles in this journal I have described these two types of organisations as follows.

- **Project-based Supplier Organisations (SOs)** derive most (if not all) of their revenue and/or other benefits from creating & delivering projects/programs to external customers.
- **Production-based Owner Organisations (OOs)** derive most (if not all) of their revenue and/or benefits from producing and selling products and services. They utilize projects to create new, or improve existing, products and services; enter new markets; or otherwise improve or change their organisations.

Whilst it was becoming increasingly clear that there were very substantial differences in managing projects in SOs and OOs, it was only in comparatively recent times that I came to further investigate and write about the extent and importance of these differences.

### **More detailed identifications of very substantial differences for PM in SOs & OOs**

It was actually an article by Lehmann 2016 in this journal that prompted me to look more closely at the differences between managing customer projects in SOs and internal projects in OOs. Lehmann developed a table which showed ten different issues between the two types of organisations and their projects.

In Stretton 2017e I commented further on three of his issues and looked at some other differences for SO project managers compared with those in OOs. Stretton 2017h added

some discussion of differences in the range of general management-related skills needed for each in both organisational strategic and operational management.

Stretton 2024e essentially expanded on differences for PM in SOs and OOs in relation to three groups of attributes from earlier listing. Stretton 2024f explored differences in the context of nineteen “classical” management functions. These showed many differences for each function – some not so substantial, but others very substantial. Stretton 2024f also noted that all these previous comparisons still cover only some aspects of the differences between project management in OOs and SOs.

### **Misinterpretations due to lack of recognition of differences for PMs in SOs & OOs**

One of the reasons for my recent return to this subject was that one of my articles had been substantially misinterpreted, and I had reason to believe that this was because it had been viewed through an OO-coloured lens, whereas the article had been in the different SO-coloured spectrum.

I should add that this type of misinterpretation happens quite frequently, as a perusal of letters to the editor of PM World Journal over the years will affirm.

We could help avoid these types of misinterpretations in the following ways.

- The very substantial differences in project management between the two types of organisations should be much more widely acknowledged, and recognised
- Writers should always clearly identify whether they are discussing project management in the context of SOs, or OOs, or both, contexts. (I had failed to do so with the above article – and also, I have to confess, with many of my earlier articles.)

### **Case for more materials in the literature on the distinctive attributes of PM in SOs**

In addition to this need for recognition and direct acknowledgment of these differences for project management in the two types of organisations, there are associated issues which should be more broadly acknowledged.

### ***There appear be more project people practicing in SOs than in OOs***

Taggart 2015 contends that there are more project people practicing in SOs than in OOs. This contention is supported by Lehmann 2016, who surveyed some 246 project managers, and found that 51% of respondents worked on what he called ‘customer projects’ – i.e. with SOs – whilst 44% were on ‘internal projects’ – i.e. mainly with OOs – whilst the remaining 5% said that the setups of their projects didn’t fit either.

### ***SO projects may well exceed OO projects in magnitude, at least in dollar terms***

It was noted in Stretton 2024e that it is SOs, and not usually OOs, which deliver most of the outputs of environmental, social and infrastructure projects, as well as other longer-term assets. I have not seen any relevant comparative data, but it seems reasonable to suggest that the volume of projects delivered by SOs may far outweigh those delivered by OOs, almost certainly in terms of money value, and quite likely in other terms as well.

### ***Yet there remains a substantial orientation towards PM in OOs in the PM literature***

As I noted in Stretton 2024f, and elsewhere, it appears that the focus of the project management literature is primarily on owner organisations. As Taggart 2015 observed,

Conventionally, either directly or by implication, the project management bodies of knowledge focus on the role of the Owner Organization (OO).....

In these circumstances there appears to be a strong case for PM in SOs to be more widely represented in the PM literature.

## **INVOLVEMENT WITH FORMAL PM ASSOCIATIONS IN AUSTRALIA AND USA**

### **Involvement with Australia's Project Managers Forum, and AIPM**

The Project Managers Forum (PMF) was formed in Australia in 1976, and I was one of the members of the foundation committee. I was also the guest speaker at its first public meeting, on "A Participative Approach to Construction Planning and Control" (later published in Stretton 1977). Initially the PMF primarily acted as a forum for people to exchange experiences and opinions on network analysis techniques and the like, but it widened its horizons quite rapidly into broader aspects of project management in the 1980s. I participated in several discussion panels in this period. A history of PMF has been written by its founder and first chairman (Hovey 2010).

In 1989, the Project Managers Forum changed its name to the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM), with a new constitution specifically concerned with pursuing professionalisation issues along the lines of the Institution of Engineers, Australia, and the Project Managers Association in the UK. I became quite heavily involved with AIPM's professionalisation initiatives, particularly after its shift of emphasis from knowledge-based assessment of project managers to competency-based assessment, and the development of Competency Standards for project managers.

### **Involvement with the Project Management Institute and the PMBOK Guide**

As foreshadowed earlier in relation to a search for a broader basic project management framework, in 1987 I finally came across a framework that seemed to have such a broader perspective – namely a 1986 draft Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), and a 1987 approved version, published by the Project Management Institute



(PMI). This was a serious attempt to systematically codify current knowledge about project management.

This stimulated my interest, and prompted me to publish an article in The Australian Project Manager (the Journal of the Project Managers Forum) entitled "PMI's PMBOK: Can It Be Improved?" (Stretton 1988). This quickly found its way to the PMI in the USA, and attracted some comments, which prompted me to start visiting the USA to follow up on these.

As a result, I became actively involved with PMI at a workshop on the then existing PMBOK at its 1988 annual Seminar/ Symposium (S/S), and was the lead author in two subsequent assignments, which evidently attracted some attention. At the 1989 PMI S/S I was appointed Chair of Standards Committee, which included a brief to upgrade the existing PMBOK. Working on this exposed me to many project managers who were working in a hugely diverse range of contexts that were entirely new to me. In the event, I could not properly manage this upgrading program from Australia, and in early 1992 was able to resign in favour of Bill Duncan, who had already been doing the lion's share of the work. But I remained on the Standards Committee until 1996.

In both the above contexts I was on a steep learning curve, particularly in relation to the huge variety of PM contexts. This has led me to single out one particular topic which was common to both experiences, namely the fact that we were trying to develop context-free approaches to the multitude of diverse contexts in which projects are undertaken. There are some obvious difficulties in trying to develop "context-free" guidelines for a discipline that operates in such a wide variety of different contexts, and this led me to write some rather exploratory articles on the topic.

### **Notes on some of my articles on roles of PM in various different contexts**

After a couple of rather generalised earlier articles, I wrote a series of seven articles, starting with Stretton 2019e, which attempted to model a variety of contexts which impact on the management of projects. I have since updated some of my thinking, most recently in Stretton 2022i, which includes the following types of contexts - Project "dimensions"; Project types; Organisational strategic and operations management; Types of organisations; Operational domains; and External environmental influences. I am not at all sure of the value of the above contributions. Some of these contexts are already quite well covered in the literature, but some not so well. Hopefully the latter will be rectified, to the point where we have good coverage of most major contexts.

### **DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING NEW MPM COURSE AT UTS**

#### **MPM course was based on developing/executing appropriate project processes**

I joined the newly created (out of the NSW Institute of Technology) University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), on 1 January 1988, specifically to develop and deliver a Master of Project Management (MPM) course.

I had a strong conviction that describing an avocation by its functions, or by its tools and techniques, was not the most useful framework to educate people who essentially wanted an answer to the question, “I have just been given this project to manage. What steps do I now need to take to successfully progress the project, from start to finish, to achieve a successful delivery?” We therefore based the course on a series of generic processes, using a basic four-phase inception, design, implementation and handover framework which applies to a wide range of engineering projects. These had to be modified rather substantially for non-engineering type projects, as student teams tackled such projects in the three-type project case study which was at the core of this course.

### **A three-type project case study, with three student teams undertaking rotating contractor and client roles**

The case study involved three main inter-related sub-projects within an overall major business improvement project. These were a renewal of plant and equipment (P&E), a revised corporate information system (IT), and an organisation development initiative (OD). Three student teams were formed, and each undertook roles as project contractor, and as the client, for each of these three sub-projects, on a rotating basis.

They also undertook roles as upstream and downstream providers and recipients in progressing projects from one phase to the next.

These somewhat complex arrangements are described in more detail in Stretton 1994 and Healy et al 1994. This interactive team approach appeared to work particularly well, as students faced different types of projects, and project situations, and experienced them from different role perspectives.

### **The MPM course as a multi-layered shared learning experience**

Now, our students already had varying degrees of experience in project management practice – some just a few years, some twenty years or more – so that, cumulatively, each cohort had hundreds of years of experience. Additionally, the students invariably came from a wide spectrum of different domains of project management practice. So, a major component of this course turned out to be sharing experience, learning from one another, and modifying the framework within which the course was being conducted to accommodate important “new” experience.

I had found the initial process of developing the original framework with my academic and practitioner colleagues a great learning experience in its own right. But the later ongoing experience of sharing and learning with our students, and modifying the framework, accordingly, was even better – and very stimulating.

This, in turn, undoubtedly influenced my decision to accelerate my output of articles after leaving UTS, which I tended to see as an extension of this sharing and learning experience, albeit in a very different form.

But before discussing this in a little more detail, it should be recorded that Lynn Crawford eventually took over the leadership of the UTS project management programs, which she extended to include other levels of qualification. My involvement with the UTS courses progressively reduced to just a few guest appearances, before my formal retirement from UTS in 2006.

## **FROM WRITING OCCASIONAL ARTICLES TO WRITING REGULARLY**

I have written over 200 articles post-UTS. I did not set out writing them with any particular groups of topics in mind. The topics of many, if not most, of my articles have been prompted by other articles in the literature, including many in this journal. Very often, I have simply sought to share a slightly different (but hopefully useful) perspective on some of these topics.

As things turned out, I have often returned to certain themes and topics as new materials or thoughts emerged. Several of these have already been discussed above. Overall, I have also discussed many other topics, but in this concluding section will briefly discuss just two issues, each of which is further outside my direct experiential range than most of the previous topics discussed. These further issues are “project” success/failure criteria and data, and possible futures for project management.

### **Notes on some of my articles on “project” success/failure**

Over a decade ago I started trying to get my head around the many different ways in which this topic was treated in the project management literature. This resulted in my writing a series of six articles on this topic, starting with Stretton 2014j. In summary, these articles generated more questions than they did answers. Two issues were of particular concern. The first was the rather acute shortage of reliable data on project success/failure rates, both current, and over longer terms. The second, and associated, issue was profound differences in criteria used for establishing success/ failure in different application areas.

In spite of their relative paucity, there appeared to be sufficient data for me to venture three articles on this topic in 2018, which broadly indicated that up to 50% of causes of failure reported in the literature relate to early strategic/project stages/phases, and particular the incubation and feasibility phases of potential and chosen projects. These are phases in which project management is all too seldom involved, and therefore relevant failures cannot be reasonably regarded as failures by project management. Most recently, in Stretton 2023n, I also questioned whether “project success” is a realistic descriptor for outcomes successfully achieved by other participants at various stages of organisational strategic management processes.

These issues raise the broader question, “success for whom?” There appears to be substantial scope to establish more specific criteria, and supporting data, about what constitutes success/failure, and for whom, in relation to both project outputs, and subsequent outcomes and benefits realisation from project activities.

## **Notes on some of my articles on potential futures for project management**

My articles on this topic have been rather eclectic. For example, four relatively recent articles (Stretton 2021g,i & 2022f,g) were prompted by a four-part PMWJ editorial (Pells 2021) entitled “Project management needs a higher purpose!”, and responded to some particular issues raised in those editorials.

However, the following two contributions about futures for project management appear to me to be the more significant of the future-oriented issues I have written about.

- Extending project management specialist integrative services into new domains
- Partnering with key parties to help tackle broader societal/ environmental issues

### ***Extending project management specialist integrative services into new domains***

I have been advocating extending project management specialist integrative services into new domains for well over a decade now – most recently in Stretton 2023h. The broad thrust of my advocacy has been as follows.

Project managers necessarily develop substantial integration skills in the course of managing what are typically a multitude of both internal and external interfaces associated with their projects. Whilst general managers are also integrators, the intensity of integration management required in the more dynamic project environment is much greater than in general management.

In the world at large, increasing specialisation in avocations and disciplines is also bringing some adverse consequences which are not always effectively addressed – most notably, a lack of people with appropriate skills to integrate the work of ever-proliferating specialists, to achieve broader overall goals.

The need for such competent integrators too has long been recognised by a variety of people. These include Mintzberg 1979 with his “integrating managers” in certain contexts, and by Cetron & Davies 2010, who have used the descriptor “synthesists” for this role. I have suggested that the latter could be more appropriately labelled “integration managers”, and that project management is uniquely placed to add such a role to its longer-term aspirations.

This suggestion was also linked with another from PMI’s President Le Manh (Khelifi 2023) about possible longer-term movements from project managers to *change makers* (or *change managers*). Perhaps *integration management* could be seen as a subset.

### ***Partnering with key parties to help tackle broader societal/ environmental issues***

One of my responses to Pells 2021 advocated PM partnering with appropriate groups to tackle broad societal/ environmental issues (Stretton 2022f). The broad thrust of that article could be summarised as follows.

There are some PM writers who infer, directly or indirectly, that project management can and should make its own decisions about tackling societal and crises issues. However, the reality is that this very rarely happens. Decisions that initiate actions on societal or crises issues are habitually made by other parties, often in political contexts.

However, PM has the potential to add value to such decisions, particularly by contributing estimating, planning and implementation know-how. This suggests that PM is in a good position to participate directly in such decisions by partnering with societal-issue initiators and/or crises responders.

Pells 2021 discusses many partnering arrangements which have been made in philanthropic mode at a relatively modest level, including for example PMI's Education Foundation partnering with such organisations as Children International. However, forming such partnerships appears to be easier said than done, judging by the broad lack of awareness by many societal/ crises decision makers of the potential for appropriate help by partnering with project management.

However, more recently, Deanna Landers (in Khelifi 2024) has discussed the mission of Project Managers Without Borders (PMWB), which was acquired by PMI in early 2024.

As she says, PMWB “connects project professionals with not-for-profit organisations to help them achieve their missions more efficiently and effectively, by improving their project management maturity”. She also points out that it is “clearly a win-win to combine the efforts of PMWB with the huge membership and customer base of PMI”.

One can only hope that this may turn out to be an exemplar proving ground for a much broader increase in PM partnership arrangements with multitudinous key parties, to help tackle a wide range of local, national and international societal/ environmental issues.

## **SUMMARY/DISCUSSION**

In Figure 3 below, I have listed the nine particular experiential and allied influences discussed above, along with their sub-headings. On the right-hand side, I have identified eight groups of themes or topics I subsequently wrote about, which were broadly derived from, or influenced by, these experiential and allied factors.

There is some overlapping of these themes/topics in many of these articles, but all told they are key components of roughly two-thirds of all the articles I have published in this journal in the past decade. The other third comprises a substantial mix of themes/topics, including many which appear in more than one article – but none of them as frequently as the eight discussed in this article.

Regarding the latter, I regard three of them as themes, in the sense that they appear to me to cover somewhat basic issues which have not yet been fully resolved. These are



- Extending PM involvement into project front ends
- Representing the key roles of customers/users of project outputs in achieving outcomes
- Differences for PM in Supplier Organisations versus PM in Owner Organisations

The other five topics are more variable in their perceived importance, but the frequency with which they emerged in my articles certainly reflects substantial degrees of relevance for project management, at least from my own experience and/or perspective.

I believe it is important to accelerate broader recognitions of how the project management discipline and practices relate with other disciplines, and to other relevant entities in a rapidly changing world – so that it can adjust its perspective of its role, and coordinate with other disciplines, in helping maximize its contribution in changing environments, no matter what form these changes may take.

Hopefully, these accounts of how some of my own experiences and enquiries have influenced my perspectives and writings on project management may be found relevant by some current and future practitioners.

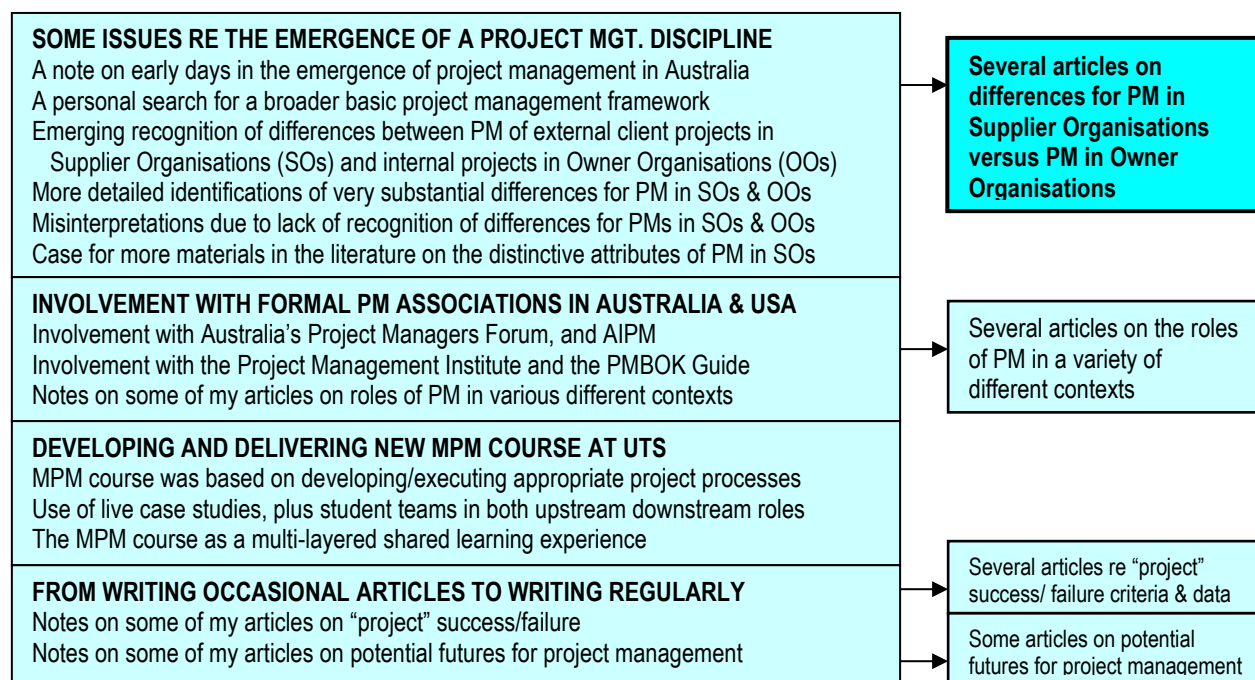
The following summary charting of the above concludes this article.

#### **SOME PERSONAL EXPERIENTIAL AND ALLIED INFLUENCES**

#### **EMERGENT THEMES/ TOPICS IN WRITINGS**

<b>INITIAL EXPERIENCES IN CIVIL ENGINEERING DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION</b> Some initial experiential preferences and perspectives	
<b>EXTENSIONS OF PROJECT SERVICES FROM TENDERING INTO FRONT ENDS</b> Adding design-and-construct services to competitive construction-only tendering Adding client needs determination, and other strategic initiative support services Adding broader organisational strategic planning support services Equivalent “front end” services provided by EPC organisations on major projects Influence on my perspectives and later writings on project management	Many articles on extending PM involvement into project/strategic front ends
<b>RELATING PROJECTS TO AN ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC MGT. FRAMEWORK</b> Project front ends naturally relate to an organisation’s strategic plans & initiatives A basic linear organisational strategic management framework used in my writings A basic recursive organisational strategic management framework	Many articles relate projects to an organisational strategic management framework
<b>PROJECT MANAGEMENT &amp; GENERAL MANAGEMENT ARE CLOSELY RELATED</b> Many operational links between project management and general management Many general management skills are also integral components of project mgt. Notes on some of my articles on general management in PM contexts	Several articles on the importance of general management in PM
<b>REPRESENTING KEY ROLES OF CUSTOMERS &amp; USERS IN ACHIEVING OUTCOMES</b> Extended front-end services necessitate a primary focus on customer needs Marketing education programs in LLC/C&C consolidated customer orientation Customers and users are not always identical: Project services focus on end users C&C’s extended services included helping customers’ users achieve outcomes The role of users of project outputs in achieving outcomes is under-represented Notes on some of my articles on the roles of users in project management	Several articles on representing the key roles of customers/users of project outputs in achieving outcomes





**Figure 3. Summary of personal experiential et al headings and emergent themes/topics in writings**

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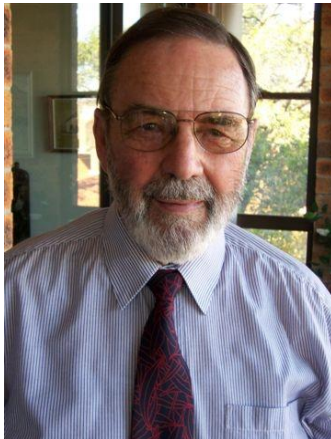
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