

# Some “extra-curricular” influences on my project management perspectives: 1. Some early-career education-related factors <sup>1</sup>

By Alan Stretton

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to this series of three articles

In Stretton 2025c I discussed many experiential and closely allied influences on my perspectives on project management, and on my 280+ published articles. The focus in the 2025 article was strongly on direct career-related experiential influences.

However, there have also been other types of influences which have helped shape my perspectives and writings on project management. This is the first of three articles which discuss some of these. I have used the descriptor “extra-curricular” to distinguish these influences from the more directly career-related experiential influences in Stretton 2025c

This first article will look at some early-career influences, which were mainly education-related. The second article will look at influences from many of my mid-career external “helping” activities, whilst the third will be concerned with some late-career and post-retirement activities and their influences.

Figure 1 broadly relates these career stages with my primary activities at those times.

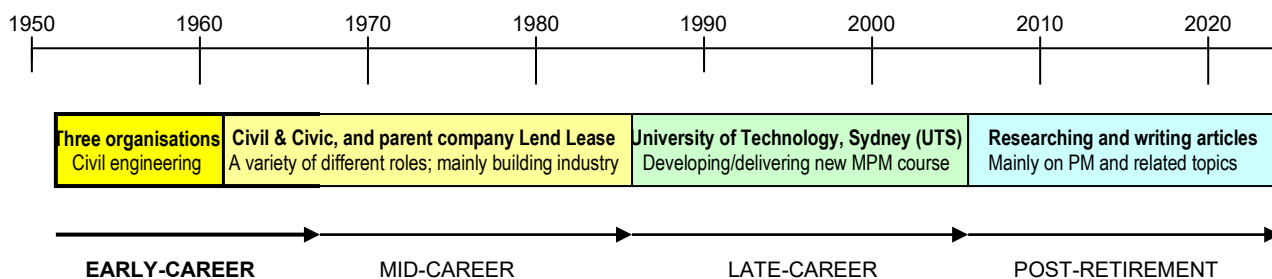


Figure 1. Relating career stages with primary activities at those times

### Some background and preview to this article

I will try to briefly set the scene regarding lack of learning support in the early post-WW2 construction industry in Australia, and, in this context, preview some aspects of my learning experiences in my early-career stage, broadly up to the mid-1960s.

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Most practitioners of my generation, who began their careers in the early post-war era, and who later became actively involved in project management, came to the latter from a variety of different vocations. In the construction-related domains in which I worked from the early 1950s, these included people from many branches of engineering, architecture, quantity surveying, and specialist trades, amongst others.

But, as many of us moved into positions which have since been identified with project management, we had to learn a whole new range of skills. However, we had few, if any, credible guidelines on what these skills were, and/or how to go about developing them. Consequently, in practice, we were all basically “learning on the job” – typically a combination of learning by working with more experienced people, plus a good deal of learning by personal trial-and-error.

The latter is an unenlightened way of learning new skills, and is very expensive for employing organisations. My three employers of the first decade of my early career did not provide organised learning programs. However, most fortunately, that was to change in the early 1960s, when I joined Civil & Civic and its parent company Lend Lease Corporation (C&C/LLC). I will focus on two major education programs which were undertaken in all Lend Lease group companies, plus a personal learning experience I had with the parent company. These are now briefly previewed.

The most important of these programs was an in-house general management education program, first delivered in 1963. This program profoundly influenced how our people saw their jobs, and went about them. The benefits deriving from this program were far-reaching, for individuals, and their projects, departments and companies. At a personal level, this program profoundly influenced the way I saw my own work and career, and also my perspectives of – and later writings on – project management.

The second internal C&C/LLC education program was on marketing, which provided a structured background for Lend Lease companies and people to further improve their services to external customers. It also influenced my own perspectives and later writings, notably on the importance of customers and users in the project management context. Finally, I add a section on my experience with organisational strategic planning and management, and how that has also influenced my project management writings.

## **THE 1950s: INFLUENCES FROM FORMAL ENGINEERING EDUCATION ETC.**

### **Vocational activities in the first decade of my career**

As noted in Stretton 2025c, I graduated as a Bachelor of Engineering (BE) from the University of Tasmania in 1948, and as an MA (in mathematics) from the University of Oxford in 1951. I found out 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 – and so decided to pursue civil engineering in Australia. I initially worked some five years with the newly created Snowy

Mountains Authority (SMA), mainly in construction sectors, followed by three years in consulting engineering, and two with a construction contracting organisation.

### **Influences from formal educational degrees**

Regarding contributions from my formal education in civil engineering, I had learned a bit about designing structures, but nothing worthwhile about constructing them, which was my primary vocational pursuit over this early decade.

So we were very much in a learning-on-the-job environment – essentially a combination of learning how to do things with more experienced construction people, and personal trial-and-error when help from more experienced people was not available.

### **Influences from relevant available literature**

In practice, the only relevant literature resources that we knew of at the time were a few odd publications from North America, such as “Engineering News Record”, which occasionally found their way into remote areas of the Snowy Mountains such as ours. One such resource helped us develop a planning and cost control system which the SMA did not have at the time for its day labour construction work, We decided to develop such a system for our Upper Tumut region, following some very basic North American materials we had found. These helped us gradually develop a system that gave us the information and means of control that we needed. This was a great learning experience for me – but it still had some quite strong elements of trial-and-error.

I do not recollect having any contributions from education or allied resources in my three years in engineering consulting or two years with a major construction contractor.

It is noted that these days we would say that all these activities can be represented as part of project management undertakings. But the latter would only emerge much later as a generally recognised avocation in its own right, and with its own guidelines.

### **EARLY 1960s: INFLUENCES FROM ALLEN GENERAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

Before discussing the foreshadowed C&C/LLC in-house general management program, I will summarise the many roles I had in C&C/LLC later in my early-career stage, and throughout my mid-career stage – roles which benefitted hugely from this program.

### **Vocational activities in over a quarter century with Civil & Civic / Lend Lease**

These activities were too numerous to set down in detail. The following summarises my main roles in C&C/LLC, many of which were overlapping.

- Developed & deployed new financial and cost control system for C&C and its projects (1962-63)
- Introduced and deployed network analysis planning on C&C projects (CPM 1962, PDM 1963)
- Taught network analysis planning on C&C projects (CPM 1962, PDM from 1963)

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- Managed ongoing planning support, and R&D, departments in C&C (1964-1978)
  - Presenter/discussion leader in in-house management education program in C&C (1963-67)
  - Managed the entire Lend Lease in-house management education program (1965-72)
  - Secretary to LL Group Development Committee (top-level strategic planning) (1965-1972)
  - Others: *Organization development projects; Employee benefit initiatives; Corporate outreach projects; Internal trouble-shooting missions; Counselling and mentoring*

## **The origins and impact of the C&C/LLC general management education program**

It should first be noted that, up to this time (the early 1960s), any recognition of management as a distinctive discipline in its own right had not yet found its way into the Australian building and construction industries.

I think it was in late 1961 that three top Lend Lease executives attended a public presentation by L. A. Allen of his "Profession of Management" program, and recognised its potential benefit to the organisation. This led to thirty of the senior executives of Lend Lease (plus a not-so-senior me) participating in a week-long live-in "Profession of Management" program conducted by Allen, in September 1962.

This, in turn, led to Lend Lease purchasing the program, to be run in-house, initially by twenty Session leaders and twenty Briefing leaders (presenters) who were given an intensive week's training by Allen staff. The program initially covered some 400 Lend Lease people from 1963 – but the program continued to be presented to many hundreds of other Lend Lease people well into the 1980s. The contents of this program essentially comprised materials covered in his book, Allen 1964. Some time later, a well-known book by Koontz & O'Donnell 1978 covered much the same ground.

The impact of the program in Lend Lease was very substantial indeed, as I am able to personally confirm – particularly for the years 1965 to 1972, when I was responsible for managing the entire program within all Lend Lease companies. I know that many, if not most, participants had similar experiences to my own in discovering new opportunities which seemed to emerge with the addition of a management perspective to previous work perspectives.

I also observed the very considerable benefits that emerged through having a common frame of reference to facilitate discussions, and the sharing of experience, both within companies, and between the various companies of the Lend Lease group.

## **Personal influences from this general management education program**

### ***Adding a management perspective to my work roles***

It is first noted that I was trained as one of the original Briefing leaders, and presented the Allen management materials to several Civil & Civic cohorts for some years from 1963. So I became very familiar with these materials.

It was quite a revelation for me to recognise that most of my work to date had so many specifically identifiable management components. It certainly gave me a new and enlightening perspective on some essential aspects of my role in managing my own department. This was also the case with my managing several operational improvement ventures (i.e. projects) within C&C.

This was long before the substantive emergence of project management as a distinctive discipline. But many general management skills are also skills which are required in project management. As PMI 2004:15 put it,

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.

Morris' 2013:116 essentially makes a similar point, albeit somewhat indirectly, with his observation that

...the project development [life] cycle is, for me, the one thing that differentiates projects from non-projects..

Consequently, all the project managers in the C&C/LLC companies benefited early, and very substantially, from this ongoing general management education program. In C&C, more specific project management guidelines, which supplemented these from general management, began being documented from the late 1960s.

### ***Reflections on longer-term implications of my general management perspectives***

Reflecting further on the above, it is clear that I continued to relate most things I did to a broader general management context. This, of course, also applied to project management. I have therefore typically related project management to the broader context of management of the relevant organisation in which, or for which, projects are being undertaken. This perspective has tended to provide a more holistic perception of where project management sits in the world at large than might otherwise have applied.

This perspective may not always be directly apparent in my writings on project management, but is one which has underpinned many of my articles. I have also written quite a few articles which look at many of the more specific ways in which some key general management activities relate to corresponding project management ones – for example, in a series of seven articles in this journal, starting with Stretton 2015g.

### **Influences from other general management sources**

As a consequence of my role in delivering the Allen management program in C&C/LLC, it was a natural progression for me to start looking at the then current literature on management at large – from around the mid-1960s. There were substantial numbers of

such publications, and the ones I accessed added substantially to the materials in the Allen program, to my knowledge at large, and to my effectiveness as a manager.

This also led me to thinking about undertaking an MBA, which had recently been instituted in one of our major Sydney universities. Indeed, I applied for enrolment around 1968, and was interviewed by the head of its Graduate School of Management. After confirming that I worked for Lend Lease, he then proceeded to give me what could be fairly described as a somewhat patronising dissertation on Lend Lease's business philosophy, strategic objectives, and the like. His understanding of these attributes was so different from the real situation – which I knew intimately because of my role as the secretary of Lend Lease's top strategic planning group (see below) – that I could see no point in continuing the interview, let alone undertaking his MBA program. So, for better or worse, that brought this particular idea about my further formal management education to an abrupt halt.

## **INFLUENCES FROM AN INTERNAL MARKETING EDUCATION PROGRAM**

### **The origins and internal impact of this Lend Lease marketing education program**

The Lend Lease marketing education program was originated and developed in-company (mainly in Lend Lease Homes), and was promulgated in all companies of the Lend Lease group from 1965.

The principal author was my colleague Barry Rutter, together with A. Howard and N. Noonan. Rutter confirmed to me that the reason they developed their own program was because there was so little relevant material available elsewhere at the time.

The background to this initiative was that most of the Lend Lease group companies at the time were suppliers of goods and services within the Australian building industry. However, although there was some recognition of the importance of customers, there was still a stronger basic focus on producing the goods and services than there was on identifying and satisfying customers' needs. – i.e. still more of a production orientation than a customer service orientation. The opportunity to establish a better balance between the two had been recognised by at least one of the group company's CEO's, who took the initiative in having this marketing education program developed, and in getting top level approval for deploying it throughout the Lend Lease group companies.

It should also be remarked that, at that time at least (and perhaps for a long time later), marketing was typically confused with selling. The difference between the two was well described by Levitt 1960 as follows.

The difference between marketing and selling is more than semantic. Selling focused on the needs of the seller, marketing on the needs of the buyer. Selling is preoccupied with the seller's needs to convert his product into cash; marketing with the idea of satisfying the needs of the customer by means of the product and the whole cluster of things associated with creating, delivering, and finally consuming it.

Within the group companies, this marketing education program provided a structured background for these companies to further improve and enhance the extent and value of their services to external customers. This marketing education program was progressively upgraded, and continued to be presented well into the 1980s.

### **Personal influences from this marketing education program**

From my personal perspective, the marketing education program neatly complemented the management education program by consolidating what had been more of an embryo customer focus up to that point. Along with so many others, I had a reasonable recognition of the importance of individual customers – but this marketing course also opened up our awareness of the much broader domain of markets at large.

This then prepared me nicely for my work as secretary of the LL Group Development Committee (our top level strategic planning body) from 1965, to be discussed shortly.

In the meantime, it is noted that this marketing education program influenced my later writings on project management quite substantially. I have frequently commented on the comparative neglect of customers and users of project outputs in the project management literature (e.g. Stretton 2024b), and have written many articles about their key roles in converting project outputs to outcomes and benefits – particularly in the context of outputs to external customers from project-based service organisations.

And although there are sectors of project management which indeed do normally involve customers and users in helping decide on what projects to undertake to achieve certain objectives, this should happen much more often than it does in other sectors. I have also written many articles about this.

### **INFLUENCES FROM ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING**

As indicated above, I was the secretary (i.e. work-horse) of the Lend Lease Group Development Committee (its top level strategic planning group) for seven years from 1965. Although this was basically a direct experiential learning experience (there was little directly relevant strategic planning literature available at the time), rather than an “extra-curricular” one, I briefly include it here because my work in this area benefitted directly from my exposure to both the general management and marketing education programs.

The benefits from the management program are rather obvious, as that program was directly concerned with managing organisations at large, which of course includes organisation strategic planning. The marketing program particularly helped my work in segmenting the various markets in which the Lend Lease companies operated, or might look to operate, to better understand their dimensions and characteristics, and to look for further opportunities.

This experience with strategic planning also inevitably involved my looking at most of the work undertaken by Lend Lease companies in the context of their contribution to Group strategic objectives – and thence to looking at projects undertaken by its subsidiary company Civil & Civic in a similar strategic planning context.

This perspective has carried over into my writings on project management, in several different ways. Beginning with Stretton 2017k, I developed a linear basic organisational strategic management framework, which I have consistently used in many articles which discuss the role of projects in strategic initiatives to achieve specific strategic objectives. Additionally, in late 2020 (Stretton 2020l) I also developed a recursive organisational strategic management model, which I have used in several articles which have looked at more general project-related issues in relation to an organisation's broader strategic objectives. More detailed discussions of both the above are given in Stretton 2025c.

## SUMMARY/DISCUSSION

This article has been concerned with some early-career education-related inputs which influenced my (later) perspectives and writings on project management.

I first tried to present a reasonably accurate picture of the relatively primitive state of things in the Australian building and construction industries in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in relation to individual and corporate learning. I have shaped this article around my own experiences at the time in furthering my own learning, with a particular focus on how strongly this was advanced by my involvement in two major in-company educational programs in C&C/LLC.

The most prominent of these was the general management education program, which gave me an entirely new perspective on my several different vocational roles in both my early-career and mid-career stages – and also markedly influenced my subsequent writings on project management. I believe that the importance of shared general management know-how is still markedly undervalued in the project management literature.

The second major in-company education program was on marketing, with its focus on customers and users. I have since written quite extensively about the importance of customers and users in the project management context. Finally, I added a section on my experience with organisational strategic planning and management, and how that has also influenced my later writings on project management.

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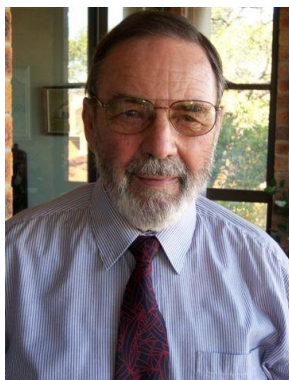
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## About the Author



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**Alan Stretton** is one of the pioneers of modern project management. 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. Alan 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 280+ professional articles and papers. Alan can be contacted at [alanailene@bigpond.com](mailto:alanailene@bigpond.com) .

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