

# Some “extra-curricular” influences on my project management perspectives: 2. Some mid-career external help-related activities<sup>1</sup>

By Alan Stretton

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to this series of three articles

As noted in the first article of this series (Stretton 2026c), I had earlier discussed some experiential influences on my perspectives on project management in Stretton 2025c, which was strongly focused on directly 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 second of three articles which discuss some of these. I have used the descriptor “extra-curricular” to distinguish these influences from the more direct career-related experiential influences discussed in Stretton 2025c

The first of these articles looked at some early-career education-related influences. This second article looks at some mid-career external help-related activities I undertook, and their influences. The third article 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.

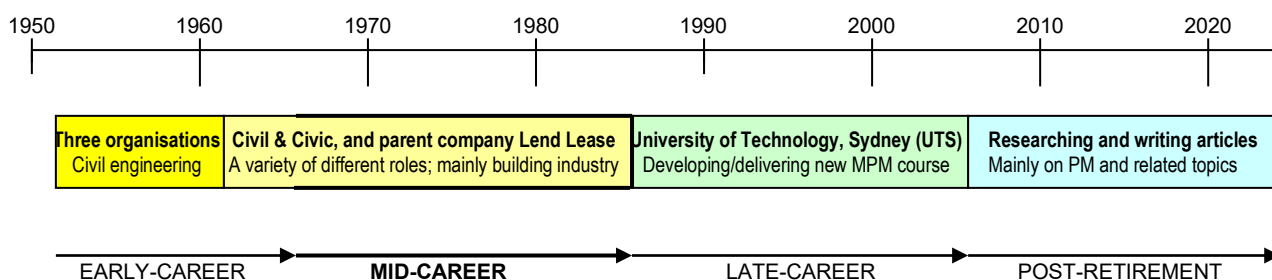


Figure 1. Relating career stages with primary activities at those times

### Some background to this second article

<sup>1</sup> How to cite this work: Stretton, A. (2026). Some “extra-curricular” influences on my project management perspectives. 2. Some mid-career external help-related activities, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue V, May.

### ***My regular-career vocational activities in this mid-career stage***

First, it should be noted that these external help-related mid-career activities were undertaken whilst I was working full time with Civil & Civic, and its parent company, Lend Lease Corporation (often abbreviated to C&C/LLC), which mainly operated in the Australian building industry. My many roles in over a quarter century with them were summarised in the first article of this series, so will not be repeated here.

### ***The broad nature of my external help-related activities***

The majority of my external help-related activities discussed below were education-related. Mostly they involved my working with established educational institutions in teaching mature-age students in graduate diploma or masters courses, generally on project planning and control, but also on other management-related topics.

### ***Some personal background relevant to my external activities***

We will first look at some personal background which underlay these external initiatives, initially in the context of project planning. Stretton 2025d included discussions of the introduction and deployment of network planning techniques into Civil & Civic (C&C) from 1962.

I described how we moved from arrow diagramming (the Critical Path Method – CPM) to Fondahl's "activity-on-node" method (later to be described as the Precedence Diagramming Method – PDM) in 1963. I also described how enthusiastically this was taken up by our project managers, how it evidently contributed to improved project performance, and thence to C&C's evolving reputation for on-time-and-budget project delivery.

Much of my role in all this (along with two of my staff in particular) was essentially educational. We undertook some formal internal education sessions, but mainly worked directly with project teams, helping them plan and control their projects.

### ***A perceived need for broader adoption of effective project planning techniques***

Even towards the late 1960s, I was not aware of any broader external initiatives having been undertaken to progress construction planning in the broader context of the building industry at large. However, I was convinced that the whole industry would benefit from using the emerging network planning tools. This led to the notion of my personally trying to contribute something – but how? It appeared to me that I would probably get the widest coverage by working with appropriate educational institutions.

## ***Initial approaches to the University of New South Wales***

So, I approached the School of Building at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), (the latter being located quite close to where I lived at the time). The head of the school, Professor Balint, was enthusiastic about having me contribute. This then led to my becoming quite heavily involved in teaching in their Graduate Diploma and Masters courses. Virtually all the teaching at this level was done in the late afternoon and evenings, which allowed me to undertake this teaching whilst still working full time with Civil & Civic. The company was wholly positive about my being involved with UNSW, although initially a little concerned about the extra workload on me.

We now look at this, and many other external initiatives, in more detail.

## **PART-TIME EDUCATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF NSW**

### **Teaching project planning in Graduate Diploma and Masters courses (1968-1975)**

My teaching program in these School of Building courses broadly followed our project planning approaches at Civil & Civic. Most of the students in these courses had had some relevant work experience, and so were able to relate quite well to the “shared experience” approach I had developed for internal Civil & Civic education programs.

This teaching program turned out to be a learning experience for all parties. I learned a great deal from my (mostly) mature-age students. In many ways we were actually exchanging experiences, within frameworks which I was providing, but which they were helping refine.

These processes influenced my perspectives on project management in rather obvious ways. And, in more general terms, they enhanced both the quality and quantity of my contributions to the world at large.

### **Ten 45-minute television lectures on “Planning for Building Operations” (1972)**

This one-off series of ten 45-minute lectures was prepared for internal television broadcasting by the Division of Postgraduate Extension Studies of UNSW. By arrangement, it was actually initiated via the School of Building at UNSW. It was essentially a solo effort, with me as the lecturer, and involved a great deal of time and effort on my part. On the positive side, it certainly helped me develop my materials with higher levels of precision than previously. However, I had no feedback on this particular venture, so have no way of knowing if my efforts actually made an effective contribution.

### **Teaching organisational strategic & marketing planning in Masters course (1979)**

This one-off series of teaching in the School of Building's Masters course was based on my experience with these topics in Civil & Civic and its parent company Lend Lease. Assembling and delivering these materials required some serious work in consolidating my perspectives. Subsequent interactions with these mature age students provided a further learning experience for me, as well as for the students. This, in turn, helped with many of the later articles I have written about the relevance of organisational strategic planning and marketing planning to project management.

### **Chairman of the Visiting Committee to the School of Building (1980-87)**

The Visiting Committee comprised several top-level executives from Sydney's building sector, and met formally each year with the Vice-Chancellor and other senior UNSW academics to review progress in the School of Building, and discuss recommendations for the future. My role as Chairman involved substantial coordination of opinions from the committee on the state of the local building industry, on actual and desirable inputs from academe, and on the UNSW capabilities and possibilities for responding appropriately.

### **Visiting Professor, School of Building (1987)**

In some ways this was rather an honorary type of role – but it did place some demands on me to be appropriately precise in talks and lectures I was called on to deliver from time to time.

## **PART-TIME ACTIVITIES WITH OTHER EDUCATION-RELATED BODIES**

### **Faculty of Architecture and Building, NSW Institute of Technology (NSWIT)**

#### ***Teaching Marketing and Project Mgt. to final year Building degree students (1979-80); Teaching Project Management to final year Building degree students (1984)*** :

I found these teaching assignments somewhat more demanding than those at UNSW, mainly because few of the students had had any significant experience which would help them equate with the materials I was discussing. So, it was a learning experience for me to try and make adjustments which worked best for the students.

#### ***Member of a Course Advisory Committee for a proposed Graduate Diploma in Project Management (1979-80)***

The committee did a lot of work on this proposed initiative, but the latter did not eventuate. However, I have no doubt that my work with this committee was a key factor in my being invited to lead the development and delivery of a Master of Project

Management course when NSWIT transitioned to the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) at the beginning of 1988 – an invitation which I accepted

### **With Warren Centre for Advanced Engineering, University of Sydney (1982-84)**

I was a member of the Project Steering Committee for “Macroprojects: Strategy, Planning and Implementation”, but resigned because I felt unable to contribute as significantly as I would have wished, because of my lack of personal experience in macroprojects.

### **“Executive-on-campus” at Hawksbury Agricultural College (1985)**

I was invited to accept a temporary post described as “Executive-on-Campus” with the School of Management and Human Development at Hawksbury Agricultural College in April 1985. I think both parties benefited from interchanges relating to the substantially different contexts in which management processes were being discussed. I certainly did.

### **With Standards Association of Australia (SAA) (1981-82)**

I was a member of SAA Committee BD/80, and Drafting Panel: Project Network Planning. I was a late-comer to these groups, and was unable to influence their work to anything like the extent I would have preferred.

### **Other external help-related activities**

I have included a list of a dozen other mid-career external initiatives in an appendix – mainly to indicate my involvement with a wide variety of groups of other disciplines and vocational interests – all of which broadened the range of my knowledge, and thus contributed to enhancing my perceptions of, and writings on, project management.

That concludes this rather long list of my mid-career external help-related activities. I will now briefly discuss a proposed external activity which was abandoned.

### **NOTES ON AN ABANDONNED PERSONAL PhD INITIATIVE, AND ON ATTENDANT TENSIONS BETWEEN PRACTICE AND ACADEME**

As outlined above, I spent a good deal of my external help-related time teaching at some of our local institutions of higher learning, and particularly the University of New South Wales (UNSW). These cooperative activities worked smoothly, and there were no significant tensions at any time.

However, we did have some significant tensions in another area, which I have not previously written about. In my very substantial interactions with UNSW, we got around to discussing possibilities of my undertaking a PhD. I had long seen project management

as a process of integrating the work of multiple contributors from many different disciplines into a coherent whole. As a potential PhD topic, I then had the idea of exploring possibilities for extending this integrating role into wider domains where effective integration of diverse resources was needed, but currently absent. I proposed this as a draft topic for a PhD to UNSW around the mid-1980s.

This was immediately rejected as a suitable topic. UNSW insisted that I choose a "narrow-and-deep" topic, rather than the "broad-and-shallow" domain of integrating the outputs of "narrow-and-deep" operational activities. I argued that my topic addressed a real-world opportunity, which could potentially lead to real-world benefits, and therefore appeared to represent a good investment of my personal time and effort. I was not interested in any "narrow-and-deep" topic I could think of, nor in getting a PhD just for the sake of having one.

Well, I argued my point for some two years, before UNSW finally consented to my choice of topic. However, by this time, our many discussions and arguments on this matter had rather clearly indicated that, if I did proceed with a PhD, I would have to follow a heap of academic value standards, many of which would simply waste my time, rather than contribute directly to the potential for real-world benefits which I was aiming for. I therefore decided against pursuing the PhD idea any further.

I think this incident demonstrates a type of tension between academe and practitioners which is real, and not likely to go away. But, from my viewpoint, project management is a practice, and work done by academics should ultimately support this practice – rather than taking on a life of its own, and remaining in the sheltered halls of academe.

Morris 2013:248 summarises the essence of these types of tensions as follows.

...we have very few academics in project management who have ongoing experience of the reality of managing projects: very few would be called on by industry to manage or to advise on the management of projects. They are not the seat of project management knowledge: practitioners are. Instead academics disaggregate the subject and research and teach its elements, generally from one theoretical stance. And interdisciplinarity generally doesn't even come onto the curriculum.

I think the above also emphasises why a practice-based journal such as this *PM World Journal* is so important for sharing practitioners' experience, and furthering the quality of their actual performance on projects.

## **EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES WITH PROJECT MANAGERS FORUM (PMF)**

As has been the case with countless numbers of project managers elsewhere, I spent a good deal of extra-curricular time and effort trying to support the work of project management representative bodies. In my case I was quite strongly involved with two different bodies – one in Australia, and the other in the USA.

However, my involvement in this mid-career stage was mainly confined to Australia's Project Management Forum. My involvements with its successor AIPM, and North America's PMI, belong to my late-career stage, and will be discussed in the third article of this series.

My direct involvement with PMF can be summarised as follows.

1976 : Member of the Foundation Committee of the Project Managers Forum (PMF)  
1976 : Guest speaker at the first public meeting of the Project Managers Forum, Sydney  
1976-88: Numerous contributions to discussion panels and the PMF magazine

Broadly speaking, we formed PMF as a vehicle to help project managers and project team members exchange information and experience. Initially these exchanges tended to focus on network analysis techniques and the like, but they quite quickly broadened into other aspects of project management. This was an ongoing learning experience for everyone involved. I later published some "Notes on a history of Australia's Project Managers Forum, precursor to the Australian Institute of Project Management" in PM World Today (Stretton 2011m)

My involvement with PMF also helped initiate my writing articles which were mostly concerned, directly or indirectly, with project management. My first 25 published articles were written in the latter part of this mid-career stage – and, of course, researching and writing these articles were additional extra-curricular activities in their own right

## **SUMMARY/DISCUSSION**

This article has looked at some of my mid-career external help-related activities, and how they have influenced my project management perspectives, and writings.

The majority of these were education-related. They involved my working with established educational institutions – most notably in teaching roles, but also in a variety of other ways.

My motivation for these external activities was to help raise the performance of the building and related industries at large. However, as will be apparent from the above, these activities also added very substantially indeed to my own range of knowledge and skills, many of which further influenced my later writings on project management.

Most of these activities were undertaken in the period when I was working full time for C&C/LLC, but were done with the approval of these organisations. In one sense these extra-curricular activities were often quite demanding. However, they also followed on quite naturally from my own work in C&C/LLC, and therefore appeared to me to be a natural extension of that work, but into different domains, with wider audiences. So, I

believe they were all win-win situations – very satisfying from my point of view, and evidently well received by both the learning institutions and the students.

It was also noted that my work on a course advisory committee almost certainly contributed to a rather dramatic change in my career, when I took up an offer to join the newly created University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) in early 1988 to develop and deliver a Master of Project Management course – which initiated my late-career stage.

I added a note about an abandoned initiative of mine to undertake a PhD, and of attendant tensions between practice and academe. These appear to be an ongoing feature of the wider project management world.

Finally, I briefly discussed my involvement in the formation and activities of Australia's Project Managers Forum (PMF), which was a great learning experience in its own right. It also helped initiate my longer-term stream of extra-curricular published writings on project management and allied subjects.

## REFERENCES

STRETTON, Alan (2026c). Some "extra-curricular" influences on my project management perspectives. 1. Some early-career education-related factors. *PM World Journal*, Vol. XV, Issue IV, April. <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/pmwj163-Apr2026-Stretton-Extra-curricular-PM-influences-1-Early-career.pdf>

STRETTON, Alan (2025d). Recollections and reflections on some early developments in project management in Australia. *PM World Journal*, Vol. XIV, Issue XI, November. <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/pmwj158-Nov2025-Stretton-Recollections-reflections-on-early-PM-in-Australia.pdf>

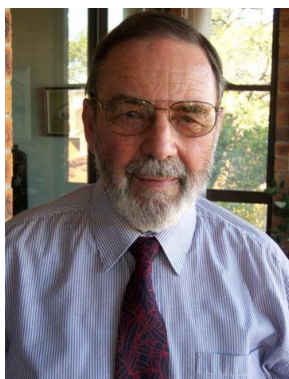
STRETTON, Alan (2025c). Ongoing Odysseys in Project Management: Some experiential and allied influences on my perspectives and writings on project management. *PM World Journal*, Vol. XIV, Issue IX, September. <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/pmwj156-Sep2025-Stretton-Ongoing-Odysseys-in-PM-experiential-influences.pdf>

STRETTON Alan (2011m). Notes on a history of Australia's Project Managers Forum, precursor to the Australian Institute of Project Management. *PM World Today*, Vol XIII, Issue IX, September. <https://pmworldlibrary.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sep-2011-PMWT-Featured-Paper-STRETTON-History-of-the-PMF.pdf>

## **APPENDIX: SOME OTHER MID-CAREER EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES**

- May 1979 : "Development Aid Pocket Book: Some Basic Information about Development Assistance to Underdeveloped Counties" (100 pp; mimeo). Privately circulated by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid to 18 member NGOs (private voluntary agencies).
- Nov. 1979 : "Motivating Construction Personnel". Project Managers Forum – speaker and panellist, with Dr John Borcharding (University of Texas at Austin) & Jim Shearer (BWIU) [15/11/79]
- Mar. 1980 : "Technology and the Economy: Some Observations of an Engineer in the Private Sector of the Building and Construction Industry". Address to a symposium on "Technology and the Economy", run by Qld Div of IE Aust and the Economics Society, Uni. of Qld. [4/3/80]
- May 1980 : "Are Project Managers Born, Taught or Made?". Project Managers Forum – speaker and panellist, with Prof Ron Woodhead, Ian George and Chris Gordon [28/5/80]
- Nov. 1980 : "The Industrial Relations System in the '80s". Australian Business Economists meeting – speaker and panellist, with Justice Macken and John MacBean [12/11/80]
- July 1983 : "Reducing the Occurrence and Impact of Industrial Disputes". Address to joint meeting of the Project Managers Forum and the Mgt & Industrial Engg Branch of IE Aust, Sydney [27/7/83]
- June 1985 : "Practice and Universities – the Future". Paper and talk to a meeting of the Faculty of Architecture and Planning, University of Melbourne, on Faculty Futures, Ballarat [22/6/85]
- July 1985 : "Cooperative Aspects of Industrial Relations". Lecture/discussion, Construction/Project Management course, Institute of Administration, University of NSW, Little Bay [10/7/85]
- July 1985 : "A Practitioner's Perspective of Problem-Based Learning". Paper and talk to a meeting of Civil Engineering staff, Swinburne Institute of Technology, Melbourne [18/7/85]
- May 1986 : "Continuing Education and Interaction between Academia and Industry". Address to the AUBEA/AQSITE Conference, the University of New South Wales, Sydney [16/5/86]
- July 1987 : "Expert Systems – Will They Replace the Experts?". Joint speaker (with Prof John Gero) to Symposium of the Building Science Panel of the Institution of Engineers, Australia [6/7/87]
- Oct. 1987 : "Re-education for Work". Speaker and panellist, World Future Society Education Conference on "Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA [28-31/10/87]

## About the Author



### **Alan Stretton, PhD**

Life Fellow, AIPM (Australia)

Auckland, New Zealand



**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).

*To see more works by Alan Stretton, visit his author showcase in the PM World Library at <http://pmworldlibrary.net/authors/alan-stretton/>.*