

Some “extra-curricular” influences on my project management perspectives: 3. Some late-career and post-retirement activities¹

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INTRODUCTION

Background to this series of three articles

As noted in the first two articles of this series (Stretton 2026d, 2026c), I had earlier discussed some experiential influences on my perspectives and writings on project management in Stretton 2025c. The focus in the latter article had been strongly on direct career-related experiential influences.

However, there have also been other types of influences which have helped shape my perspectives on project management. This is the last of a series 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

The first article discussed some early-career education-related influences on some of my later project management perspectives. The second article looked at some of my mid-career external help-related activities and influences. This third article looks at some late-career and post-retirement activities, and their influences on my project management writings.

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

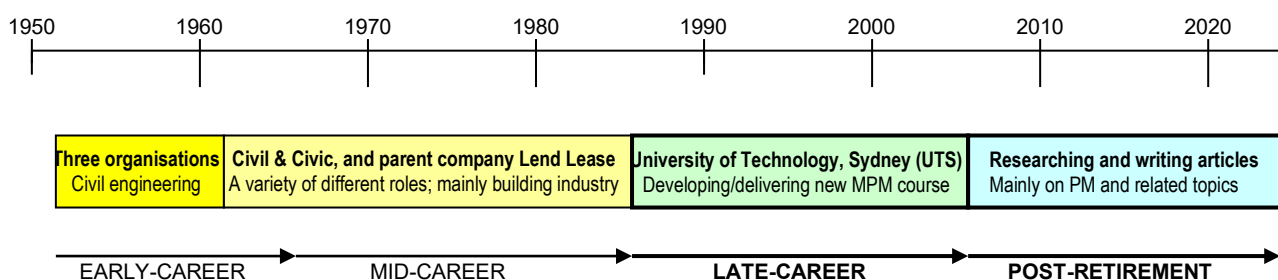


Figure 1. Relating career stages with primary activities at those times

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Some background to this third article

Late-career regular vocation, and two groups of external activities

As indicated in Figure 1, my late-career regular vocation was with the newly created University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), which engaged me at the beginning of 1988 to lead the development and delivery of a new Master of Project Management course. I described this in some detail in Stretton 2025c.

I engaged in two groups of external activities in this late-career stage. The was with two project management representative bodies – PMI in North America, and AIPM in Australia. Both were substantial involvements, and expanded my knowledge of, and perspectives on, project management a great deal. The second group comprised education-related activities which, although rather minor compared with my mid-career initiatives, still added to my store of perspectives on project management.

Post-retirement occupation, and external activities

Afer I retired from UTS in 2006, I became involved in a venture to improve the English translation of Japan's *P2M - A Guidebook of Project and Program Management for Enterprise Innovation* (PMCC 2004). This led to making comparisons with Western approaches to project and program management, which in turn led me to writing more and more on the latter subjects – an occupation I have continued to this day, and thoroughly enjoyed. Indeed, in this post-retirement stage I have now published well over 200 articles.

I have had two main extra-curricular activities in this post-retirement stage, the more influential of which was a senior level assignment with RioTinto, which gave me a much better understanding of the complexities of the mega-project world than I had previously had. This also raised some questions about an apparently unresolved incompatibility between the management of mega projects and that of smaller projects, and about how these are handled by our project management representative bodies.

We now look at the above extra-curricular activities in a little more detail.

LATE-CAREER EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES WITH PM REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

With North America's Project Management Institute (PMI) (from 1989)

My active involvement with PMI can be summarised as follows.

Oct '89-Jan '92: Chairman (later Director) of the Standards Committee of PMI
1989 – 1996 : Member of the Standards Committee

I discussed my involvement with PMI in some detail in Stretton 2025c, and will not repeat it here. This involvement exposed me to many project managers who were working in a hugely diverse range of contexts that were entirely new to me. Coupled

with this, working on the development of a new edition of the PMBOK Guide was a uniquely demanding task.

So, in this period I was (yet again) on a steep learning curve. Perhaps more than in any other of my activities, whether regular-career or extra-curricular, this experience with PMI very clearly demonstrated to me that, the more I got to know about project management, the more apparent it became that there was so much more that I didn't know. This is both a humbling and enlightening recognition.

With the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) (from 1990)

My active involvement with AIPM can be summarised as follows.

1990-92: Member of the Professional Affairs Committee of AIPM

1989-93: Intersociety Liaison for AIPM

1994 : Development of Study Guides for Registered Project Manager examinations

1994-95: Member of the Core Working Group of the Industry Representative Group for the development of Competency Standards for Project Managers

1996 : Elected Life Fellow of AIPM

The move to transform PMF into AIPM was associated with a desire to institute credentialling of project managers, amongst other moves towards professionalism. I became quite heavily involved with these 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. Once again, this was new learning territory for me, which also influenced my later writings on project management.

My role in intersociety liaison was also a broadening experience in its own right. I had already been heavily involved within North America's Project Management Institute (PMI) by this time, as just outlined. However, this broader liaison role led me to have substantial interactions with the UK's Association for Project Management (APM) and Europe's International Project Management Association (IPMA), and their people, which were particularly rewarding for me personally, as well as benefitting AIPM.

At this point I would like to comment on project management representative bodies at large. I noted above that we formed PMF in Australia as a vehicle to help project managers and project team members exchange information and experience. I understand that many other equivalent bodies, such as PMI and INTERNET (now IPMA) also started with this kind of sharing-information-and-experience objective.

As just noted, the move to transform PMF into AIPM was primarily associated with a desire to institute credentialling of project managers. This additional objective was also shared with many other PM representative bodies, and enacted.

Since then, different representative bodies appear to have added wide varieties of different objectives. I wonder how many of these new objectives are really the best for

member project managers, and/or best to actively advance the contribution of project management to the world at large. This question also comes up in the following section.

Involvement in a failed global project management initiative (1994-95)

I discussed this recently in Stretton 2025e in this journal, so will not try to summarise it again here. But this initiative involved quite substantial time and effort by all the key global participants, including myself. I learned a good deal from these very experienced individuals from different countries and backgrounds.

However, this experience also raised some questions about the motivations and objectives of some of our project management representative bodies.

Even today, I believe that at least some of these bodies do not operate in ways that best serve project managers, and/or best advance the contribution of project management to the world at large. For example, in a recent letter to the editor of this journal (Stretton 2026b) I questioned the efforts of project management representative bodies to really address cost blowouts and/or underperformance of major infrastructure projects, particularly in the transportation sector, which have been ongoing problems in so many countries for so long. Lack of effective interventions on their part reflect very poorly on project management at large, and raise real questions about current purposes and functions of its representative bodies.

SOME LATE-CAREER EXTRA-CURRICULAR EDUCATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Workshop for Australian Department of Defence with Bennett Projects (1992-93)

I was asked to help Bennett Projects conduct Project Management Workshops for the Australian Department of Defence, Canberra, in 1992-93.. These were the only significant direct interactions I had had with Australian defence project management people, and expanded my understanding of their particular contexts very considerably.

Member of International Journal of Project Management editorial board (1993-97)

I was Australian representative on the Journal's International Editorial Board – which certainly helped broaden my perspectives rather substantially.

Other late-career external activities

The appendix to this article lists two talks and five unpublished papers, which were additional to the above activities. They were also additional to my nearly fifty articles – mainly extra-curricular – which were written and published during this late-career stage,

SOME POST-RETIREMENT EXTERNAL EDUCATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES

University of Management and Technology, Arlington, VA, USA (2008-2023)

David Frame invited me to become a member of a Faculty Corps for the University of Management & Technology (UMT), Arlington, VA, in 2008. This was rather an honorary type of post. However, it gave me access to UMT's course notes, which I have occasionally referenced in my later articles..

An assignment with Rio Tinto, and direct introduction to mega projects (2012)

In my post-retirement stage I elected not to do consulting work, but to continue researching and writing articles.

However, in 2012 I was approached by Rio Tinto to contribute to a couple of 3-day high-level internal management conferences – one in Brisbane, and one in Salt Lake City.

These exposed me directly to many of Rio Tinto's senior people who were actively engaged in managing mega projects, and to many of the associated issues which were of particular concern to them.

This was my first (and only) direct exposure to the world of mega projects, and was an absolute eye-opener. Rio Tinto people were routinely dealing with project-related matters on scales of size and complexity which went far beyond anything I had ever experienced. In so many ways, their world of projects was very different to mine, and it was clear that their mega project management required a range of skills which were correspondingly different.

However, this short exposure to a different project management world had obviously shown me only some of the differences. I was aware of the contribution by Flyvbjerg et al 2003 to the mega project literature, but had not seen anything which had attempted a comprehensive comparison of implications for detailed on-the-job project management. But that was soon to change, as Bob Prieto did this in a series of articles in this journal – and continues to write expansive materials on the management of mega projects (which he describes as large complex projects – LCPs).

I have referred to some of Prieto's contributions in many of my articles since then. For example, in Stretton 2019i I included the following three tables of attributes of large complex projects vs. traditional projects, derived from Prieto 2015a.

- Some precepts/ assumptions re large complex project mgt. vs. traditional
- Types/extent of management focus on large complex projects vs. traditional
- Managerial leadership behaviours for large complex projects vs. traditional

I would like to have contributed more than I have in this context, but simply lack relevant experience, and thence the capability to make a substantive contribution.

There still appears to be an unresolved incompatibility between the management of mega projects and smaller projects. The conventional project management literature is still focused on the latter. Will it, or should it, try and include mega projects? There are plenty of other related questions, but few answers as yet.

Mega projects are too important – and many of them too visible to the public at large – to be ignored. Some sort of resolution is needed, but I doubt if I will be around to see it.

As a final, and quite different comment, I mentioned that I was approached by Rio Tinto to contribute to their internal conferences. This invitation was evidently made because one of their people had seen an article I had written on program/project governance in the predecessor to this journal, PM World Today (Stretton 2010a). He evidently thought I might be able to contribute something further to governance issues in Rio Tinto, thus initiating their approach to me. So this exposure to Rio Tinto was an unexpected bonus from my continuing to write articles in this post-retirement period of my career.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION OF THIS ARTICLE

The extra-curricular influences discussed in this article fall into three groups.

We first looked at my late-career external activities with two project management representative bodies – PMI in North America, and AIPM in Australia. Both were quite substantial involvements, and expanded my knowledge of, and perspectives on, project management a great deal.

The other late-career external group comprised two education-related activities, plus seven smaller initiatives, which, although rather minor compared with some of my mid-career activities, also added to my store of perspectives on project management.

Finally, we looked at two post-retirement activities, the more influential of which was a senior level assignment with RioTinto, which gave me a much better understanding of the complexities of the mega-project world than I had previously had – and raised some questions about an apparently unresolved incompatibility between the management of mega projects and that of smaller projects, and about how these are handled by our project management representative bodies

REVIEW OF “EXTRA-CURRICULAR” INFLUENCES FROM ALL THREE ARTICLES

This series of three articles has looked at some “extra-curricular” influences on my project management perspectives – i.e. influences which were additional to those which I have associated with my direct career experiences. The first of these articles looked at early-career influences, the second at mid-career, and the third at late-career and post-retirement influences.

The first decade of my early career had few education-related influences. Personal education was a combination of learning from more experienced colleagues, and trial-

and-error. It was not until I joined Civil & Civic/Lend Lease in the early 1960s that my employer helped with direct organisation-wide educational programs. The most important of these was the C&C/LLC general management education program, which influenced not only my perspectives on project management, but also the progression of my career at large. A second organisation-wide education program in marketing complemented the management program by adding an emphasis on customers, users, and the market-place at large.

Initially I had been a recipient of these educational experiences. However, I also became a teacher in my own right early on, through being chosen as a Briefing leader – i.e. presenter and discussion leader – for the general management program. Eventually I did a substantial amount of teaching management in-company, whilst I was also actively involved in teaching project planning.

These were strong catalysts in developing my skills and interests in teaching per se, which I came to very much enjoy.

This, in turn, led me to thinking about, and subsequently undertaking, quite extensive “extra-curricular” educational initiatives external to C&C/LLC (with their approval). These activities were a prominent feature of my mid-career stage, but were also maintained to some extent into my late-career and post-retirement stages.

The initial motivation for most of these educational activities was my desire to contribute something to a wider society. But, although it was not something I had thought about at the time, I also 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 substantial “extra-curricular” activities contributed a great deal, not only to my perspectives on project management, but also to the quality of my inputs to my regular career.

My other substantial mid-career “extra-curricular” group of activities was the beginning of involvement with two project management representative bodies, namely Australia’s PMF/AIPM, and North America’s PMI. These involvements became more extensive in my late-career stage. Although my involvement with each was quite substantial, I have elected not to discuss them at any length in this series – partly because I have discussed them at greater length elsewhere, and partly because so many others have contributed so much more in similar circumstances. However, it is also noted that the impact of these involvements on my perceptions and writing on project management have been very substantial indeed.

These involvements also tended to reinforce an emerging recognition about my knowledge of project management, which is often paraphrased along the lines of “the more you know, the more you know you don’t know”. I conclude this series with this sometimes humbling but also enlightening thought.

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APPENDIX: SOME OTHER LATE-CAREER EXTERNAL ACTIVITIES

Mar. 1995 : "Global Developments in Project Management". Talk to a luncheon meeting of the NSW Chapter of the Australian Institute of Project Management (AIPM) [1/3/95]

May 1995 : "Some Thoughts on Education and Development of Project Managers". Talk to a luncheon meeting of the ACT Chapter of the Australian Institute of Project Management [23/5/95]

Aug 2005 ; "Some Western Perspectives on Program Management". An interim report for the GPBSPMP Working Session, London, Sept 18-20 (mimeo). Also summarised in a Powerpoint presentation to ESC Lille, *5th International Project and Programme Management Workshop*,

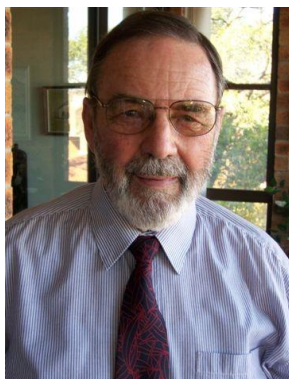
Jan 2006 : "Projects, Programs, Portfolios and Strategic Objectives". A paper prepared for GAPPS Working Session No 8, Singapore, January 19-20.

May 2007 : "Some issues arising from the program management literature". A paper prepared for GAPPS Working Session No 11, The Hague, May 2-4.

Aug 2008 : "Major Project Features not covered by PM Standards" A paper prepared for GAPPS Working Session No 14, Lille, August 24-26 .

Feb 2009 : "Program management literature overview". A paper prepared for GAPPS Working Session No 15, Pretoria. RSA, February 21-23 .

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 .

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