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INTERVIEW

## Thoughts on Climate Change and Project Management

Joel Carboni, Green Project Management

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### Background

Addressing the undeniable challenge of climate change within the pages of PMRP is a priority and, starting with the 2017 volume, will become an ongoing focus for submissions. In support of this, the views of Dr. Joel Carboni were recently captured on a variety of topics relevant to both project management researchers and practitioners.

Dr. Joel Carboni is a leading figure on sustainability in project management. He is a graduate of Ball State University, holds a Ph.D. in Sustainable Development and Environment and has over 18 years' experience in portfolio, program and program management for government, banking, legal and big five consulting. He is a regular speaker at CSR, sustainability, and project management symposiums, congresses and conferences all over the globe. He is the President of asapm The United State's Member Association to the International Project Management Association and the founder of GPM Global (Green Project Management). He is the GPM representative to the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) leading as founding signatory of the UN's Business for Peace and Anti Corruption Initiative and one of only fourteen listed supporting organizers of the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education Program (PRME). He is the architect of the PRiSM™ project delivery methodology, P5 Standard for Sustainability in Project Management and co-architect of the PSM3 Organizational Sustainability Model. He has authored training programs on Green and Sustainable Project Management that

are currently offered in over 150 countries and six languages through professional training providers, business associations, and universities.

## Defining climate change

**BP:** ‘Climate change’ is a very broad term used to encompass threats to the sustainability of life on our planet. What definition would you offer that gives this topic more immediate meaning to both project management researchers and practitioners? Is there a difference?

**JC:** More than offer a definition, I believe that it is important to recognize that the Earth’s climate is always changing. It has gone through warm and cold periods, each lasting thousands of years. What is alarming is that what we are facing right now is the rate of change since the industrial revolution. The impacts that projects have on our environment should be viewed more seriously, and both project management practitioners and researchers must take ownership of their ability, as change agents, to take greater responsibility.

## Affected industries and projects

**BP:** Can you offer insight into specific industries or project types that might be most affected, including any that are emergent?

**JC:** The healthcare industry will be profoundly affected as health related projects will have to contend with temperature extremes, impacts of extreme climatic and weather events as well as rapid demographic and environmental changes... all of which pave easier routes for vector-borne diseases to spread.

## The focus of project management researchers

**BP:** In writing my own recent editorial, I’ve found the absence of research articles amongst my project management colleagues quite surprising. Clearly little attention has been paid on these projects or their management. What are your thoughts on this?

**JC:** This isn’t surprising at all. Project management has largely existed in a bubble. We are taught from day one that projects are time bound. Our constraints are time, cost, and scope and anything that happens after handover is an operations issue and therefore not part of our remit. Therefore, long-term impacts to climate do not align with short-term thinking. It should.

**BP:** What topics would you encourage project management researchers to investigate related to this public priority? Don’t limit yourself!

**JC:** We need to think outside the box, literally. We need to escape from the strict phase confines of Initiation to Close and evolve towards a cradle-to-cradle mindset. This requires a paradigm shift in how portfolios are developed, projects and programmes are selected, prioritized and managed. It also requires a fresh look at what benefits define project success.

## Education

**BP:** Many practitioners are pursuing masters-level degrees in programs with a project management focus. What guidance would you give to the program directors of such programs? What topics would you advise these practitioner-researchers to focus on?

**JC:** I would encourage a focus on sustainable development as an objective of project management and the positive contributions the discipline can have. Project management is the single discipline that is entirely focused on change. As our world changes, so should the products and services that sustain us. In that vein, we must encourage students to push the boundaries with fresh and innovative ideas that will make project management even more valuable.

## The work of professional associations

**BP:** Climate change and similar public priorities have only been modestly addressed in the competency and assessment frameworks. What are your thoughts on this? How would you direct the leadership of IPMA and PMI to more assertively alter the next versions of these tools?

**JC:** I can't speak for PMI as I am not a stakeholder however IPMA has adopted sustainability in the new *Individual Competence Baseline* (v4) and the *Project Excellence Baseline* is focused on sustainability, which is a major step forward. At GPM, we have been agnostic in what we offer and our standard (P5) is principle based and designed to support all of the project management associations.

## Future interests of practitioners

**BP:** If you could speak to a project manager from 3-5 years in the future, how would you advise them to be an effective project manager with respect to this critical public priority?

**JC:** I would give the same advice that I do today which is that we are facing problems that have been accelerated by human activity and it will require human ingenuity to adapt. We must work together to mitigate the affects of climate change and architect solutions that ensure this planet is inhabitable for decades to come. We don't have a contingency plan...

**BP:** On a more regular basis, what sources would you advise project managers to look for information about climate change as it relates to their practice?

We developed the P5 standard for sustainability in project management which offers practical advice, and is free. I recommend people add it to their PM tool belt. Aside from that, I would encourage PMs to become familiar with the Paris Accord, and the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). These are international policies and objectives that all aspects of business should understand but especially the discipline that drives change.