

Interview with Joel Carboni, PhD, KStG, GPM®, IPMA Level B®

President and Founder - GPM Global and the IIPSD
President - IPMA-USA



Interviewed by Ömer Berkay Dağlı
Southampton, United Kingdom

Joel Carboni is a leading figure on sustainable project management. He is a graduate of Ball State University and holds a Ph.D. in Sustainable Development and Environment. He has over 20 years' experience in portfolio, program and program management working in Municipal Government, Big Five Consulting, Banking, and Higher Education. He is the founder of Green Project Management (GPM Global) and is the President of IPMA-USA.

As an author and an actor on the international sustainable development movement he is the GPM Global representative to the United Nations Global Compact, a founding signatory of the UN's Business for Peace Initiative, signatory to the call to action on Anti-Corruption, Caring for Climate, and one of only fourteen listed supporting organizations of the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education Initiative (PRME). He is a frequent speaker at project management and sustainability symposiums, congresses, and conferences all over the world.

Joel is the architect of the GPM PRiSM Methodology, The GPM P5™ Standard for Sustainability in Project Management, Co-Architect of the Portfolio, Program and Project Materiality Assessment Model (PSM3), and Advisor to the IPMA Individual Competence Baseline 4th Version (ICB4). Also Dr. Carboni is the first recipient of an IPMA Achievement Award for "Applying sustainable principles to project delivery" in October of 2013. He is a Certified Senior Project Manager (IPMA Level B®), Certified Green Project Manager (GPM®) and PSM3™ First Assessor.

Ömer Berkay Dağılı (Dağılı): Dear Dr. Carboni, first of all, thank you for agreeing to have an interview with me. It is very important for me to welcome a knowledgeable and experienced project manager like you. Could you please introduce yourself to PM World Journal readers?

Joel Carboni (Carboni): Hi Omer, Thank you for the opportunity to chat. I fell into project management by accident as many do. I live in Detroit, here in the U.S., am married and have two great kids. I feel like the airport is my second home though as much as I travel. I have spent the past nine years trying to advance sustainable practices and have put my suitcase down in over 50 countries.

Dağılı: Related with these changes in your life, in one of your interviews (Pasian, B. 2017)¹, you mentioned that project management is the only discipline that focuses entirely on change. Could you briefly tell us what project management means for you related with this thought?

Carboni: Projects are essentially change. Whether it is a new skyscraper changing the look of a city skyline, two corporations merging into one, or the redesign of a car, project management is a common thread. To me, project managers are the protagonists to change.

Dağılı: What is it that you are most proud of after working in this field for so long? Please share with us some unforgettable lessons learned in your career?

Carboni I have had the great fortune to work in several industries in different types of projects which has given me unique perspectives, proving invaluable. When developing methods and standards, I am able to draw from a wide spectrum of projects and take into consideration how my work would be viewed through the lens of different types of project managers. In terms of lessons learned... I would say that if I could go back in time and share one thing with a younger version of myself it would be to elevate the importance of benefits realization over time, cost, and scope.

I know saying this opens a can of worms, but I can say that from my experience in the field, executives understand benefits and for project management to ascend into a mature profession, we need to of course hold true to our roots but at the same time evolve to become more business focused.

Dağılı: I know you've been on a lot of tasks together. Among these, I think it should be the IPMA-USA presidency that takes your most time. Could you tell us about this task with the explanation of general structure and function of IPMA?

Carboni: I have a lot on my plate. IPMA for the United States is growing which is very exciting. We have a growing young crew and are doing a lot of work with Universities and young professionals.

¹ Pasian, B. 2017. Thoughts on Climate Change and Project Management. *Project Management Research and Practice*, 4, 5462. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/pmrp.v4i0.5462>

From a structural perspective, IPMA is a federation. Each member country brings the best of what it has to offer to contribute internationally to standards and practices. To me, this is the best form of collaboration as it isn't one country leading the way but everyone advancing together.

Dağlı: *With the first quarter of the year gone, what has the IPMA-USA accomplished so far in 2018 compared with 2017?*

Carboni: Last year we made a concerted effort to emphasize mentorships while helping organizations to cultivate project management competence. Our Competence baseline, ICB4, which is a free resource (as it should be), is a great tool and we are working with many organizations to adopt it. This year, we are extending these efforts by offering corporate chapters which is being well received.

Dağlı: *According to the Global Risk Report published by the World Economic Forum in late 2017, climate change is at the greatest risk facing the world. From your perspective as an experienced Project Manager, how do you think today's project management practices face this risk, and what are the responsibilities that the PM World should take on this issue?*

Carboni: Climate Change is the greatest threat to our way of life. Project Managers are simply not prepared to address it mostly due to the fact that it is such an albatross and isn't on the radar. Corporations understand that they have a role to play to mitigate the effects of climate change but are challenged to make the connection to what that means to projects. PMs have a responsibility, first because it is the right thing to do as humans, but also because we affect almost every new product and service. Our hands are on everything so a few small changes can have major impacts.

Dağlı: *I know you've done a lot of work, including your doctoral studies on sustainability. Especially since 2009, the Green Project Management (GPM) organization that you have established and are currently running as its president is the most successful and influential among these studies. Could you give us more details about this organization?*

Carboni: GPM started as response to a lack of movement in sustainability within the project management profession. If I had a dollar for every time someone asked me "what are you guys?", I could probably retire. GPM is a social enterprise that has one foot in the project management world and the other in sustainable development. We see projects as the vehicle to deliver sustainability. We offer certifications, standards, training (through partners and universities) but rather than compete with the big associations, PMI and IPMA, we see ourselves in a supporting role. We grew very fast and developed a good reputation and use our position to encourage change. We work very closely with the United Nations in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and bring that insight to the PM profession.

Dağlı: *How do you think the sustainability objectives set by your organization and project management can be combined? In particular, can you briefly mention the applications of the P5 standard and the Prism method suggested by GPM?*

Carboni: Our P5 Standard has been downloaded over 60,000 times and our new book ‘Sustainable Project Management’ was a best seller on amazon when it was released last month. Both are meant to be used to provide guidance on how to weave sustainability into the fabric of projects. P5, short for People, Planet, Prosperity, Projects and Process is a tool that gives guidance on how to assess risk and opportunity against sustainability criteria and maps to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. PRISM, a full-fledged methodology makes use of P5 in its activities and can be tailored to meet the needs of any organization.

Dağlı: *In which industries do you think these sustainability practices should be implemented in particular? In this context, how do you evaluate the steps taken by the project management organizations, including IPMA?*

Carboni: Every industry shares the same planet. As such, each has the responsibility to understand what they can do ensure the resources we enjoy today will be there for future generations. IPMA has been very vocal in support of sustainability. The 2019 IPMA World Congress for example, is entirely focused on sustainability, which is fantastic and last year’s research conference in Iceland was also. The ICB, the core standard, includes competence elements for sustainability, the first time a large federation has taken a stand.

Dağlı: *Finally, could you describe the future of the project management from your perspective? And how can the project management professionals adapt themselves to this future? What do you suggest to future project managers?*

Carboni: As automation and real time metrics become more and more part of our lives, project managers will have to juggle both the project team and the demands that information at your fingertips bring. The weekly or monthly status report will be a thing of the past and the need to manage stakeholder expectations will be in real time. That being said, the need to “professionalize” and become more benefits-focused will be important.

Dağlı: *Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your ideas.*

About the Author



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Ömer Berkay Dağılı is currently a Masters Candidate at Southampton Business School, University of Southampton, based in UK for the academic year 2017-2018. Previously, he has served as an Officer on Watch for over 30 months on board chemical tankers, based in different routes around the world where he served as Third and Second Officer. He completed his graduation in Marine Transportation Management dual diploma with honours from both Istanbul Technical University, Turkey and State University of New York Maritime College, USA in 2014. His major fields of study are project management, logistics and inter-modal transportation. His research interests include global project management, leadership, uncertainty management, programme and portfolio management, strategic PM, PM governance, stakeholders, project control and PM in the transportation and logistics industries. Omer served as a [research intern for the PM World Library](#) during January 2018, completing the program in record time. He can be contacted at omerberkaydagli@gmail.com