

Four simple yet powerful ways of introducing and promoting sustainability in projects, programs, and portfolios ¹

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Abstract

Climate change and sustainability are among the greatest challenges society faces; and this also brings tremendous opportunities for sustainable project managers who can have a positive impact on people's lives and at the same time, create benefits for the planet.

In this article, the author explores four simple yet powerful ways of introducing and promoting sustainability in every project, program, and portfolio.

Context

Climate change and sustainability are among the greatest challenges society faces. In recent years, the world has seen a significant focus driven by the Sustainable and Development Goals (2016-2030), the different environmental agreements signed at global level and the target for a sustainable energy transition to carbon neutrality by 2050. It has certainly become a megatrend.

The Green Deal for the next ten years approved in the US and similar plans in other countries demonstrate the growing momentum towards sustainability, which has become a key driver for individuals and companies in their decision-making process, investments, materials, and innovations.

This global context brings tremendous opportunities for sustainable project managers who can have a positive impact on people's lives and at the same time, create benefits for the planet.

And the good thing is that it is not necessary to work in climate related projects to create the benefits, because they can be achieved in every type of project, program, or portfolio. We are all together on this and we can contribute from wherever we are and whatever we do.

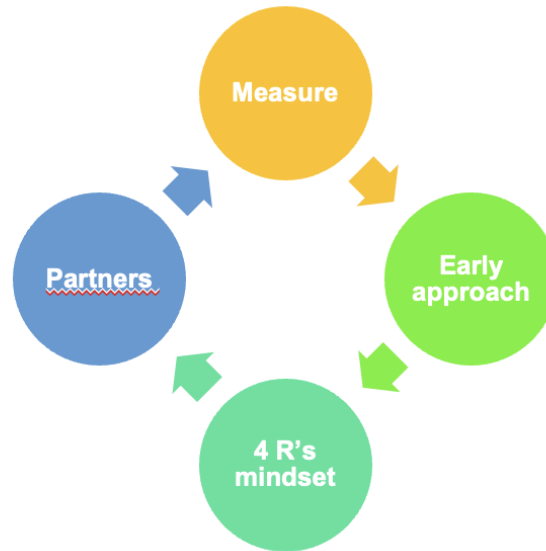
Characteristics of sustainability:

1. Satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the future.
2. Aims for triple benefit: economic, social, environmental.
3. Circular economy: Change the mindset from input to output to always inputs (reuse and recycle); the waste of a process can turn into the raw material of another process.

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4. Delivers value that remains long after the activity has been concluded (long-lasting value).

Four Simple yet powerful ways of introducing sustainability in projects, programs, and portfolios.



1) Measure Project, program or portfolio's carbon footprint

First step is measuring and being aware of the starting point. Sustainability is not just words, it needs to be measured, monitored, and audited; this will enable first, to be aware of the starting point and second, move from ideas and words to action.

And how is the environmental impact of a project, program, or portfolio usually measured? The central element is the carbon footprint: A carbon footprint is an environmental indicator that measures the total amount of greenhouse gases emitted by direct or indirect effects that are generated as a consequence of the organization's activities.

Carbon footprint is therefore the reference point for the action plan to measure and achieve better environmental performance. The output value is measured as the quantity (grams/kgs/tons) of equivalent carbon dioxide (CO₂ eq).

The GHG (Greenhouse Gas) protocol published by the World Resource institute (WRI) is perhaps the most widely used framework to think about measuring and reporting GHGs in the world. It provides requirements and guidance for companies and other organizations preparing a corporate-level GHG emissions inventory.

An easy way to experiment is by trying one of the carbon footprint calculators that are widely available on the internet.

Globally, the average global carbon footprint per person is closer to 4 tons. According to international institutions, to have the best chance of avoiding a 2°C rise in global

temperatures, the average global carbon footprint per year needs to drop to under 2 tons by 2050. This figure can give an idea of the magnitude of the challenge and the opportunities it brings.

2) Early approach: introduce sustainability from the very beginning of the value chain

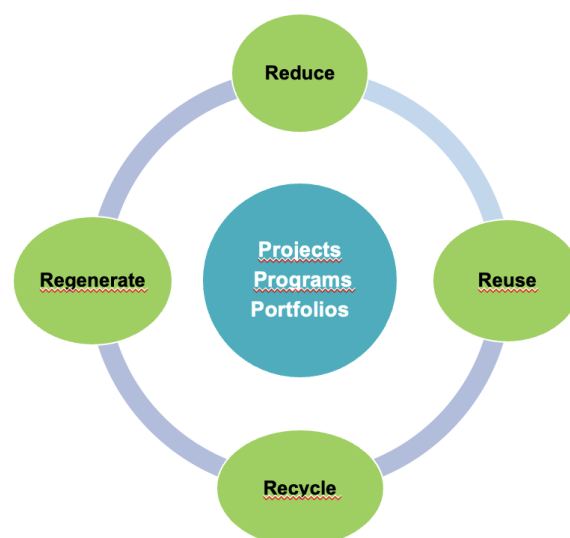
Among the many definitions that can be done, a sustainable project, program and portfolio has into consideration the environmental impacts of its activities, that is to say, introduces sustainability as part of its definition.

Thus, don't only think about sustainability and how to improve it once the product, service or process have been delivered. Think about it from the very beginning of the design phase and incorporate it within the decision criteria, no matter whether it is a product, a service, a process, a tooling... This will positively impact the whole value chain and therefore, will lead to a more sustainable project.

If from the beginning is meant to be "green", everything that is performed downstream, will be environmentally friendly and sustainable.

3) Apply the 4 Rs:

There are four activities that aim to extend the lifespan of products or materials and contribute to a more sustainable planet by avoiding their disposal, reducing waste, conserving resources, and decreasing their environmental impact. If applied consistently, they can lead to a virtuous circle of benefits.



- a) **Reduce** refers to the practice of minimizing the generation and use of materials, products, and resources in order to decrease waste. Reducing can involve using more efficient technologies, designing products to be more durable, choosing

alternative materials that are less harmful to the environment, and implementing processes that are more resource-efficient.

- b) **Reuse** refers to the practice of using an item or material again for the same or a different purpose, without altering its original state. Reuse can involve repairing, refurbishing, or repurposing items, as well as simply using them again in their original form.
- c) **Recycling** refers to the process of converting waste materials into new products or materials. Recycling involves collecting and sorting materials, such as paper, plastic, glass, and metal, and processing them into new products through a series of physical and chemical transformations.
- d) **Regenerate** refers to the process of restoring or renewing ecosystems or natural resources that have been degraded, damaged or depleted. Regeneration can involve a variety of practices, including reforestation, soil conservation, watershed restoration, and wildlife habitat protection. It can be performed directly or through investing in projects that pursue these goals.

4) The importance of partnership and alliances

This is a complex, multifunctional topic, that can be tackled from multiple angles. Therefore, it is fundamental to look for synergies among organizations, even competitors if there are common topics. Don't go alone because we are all together on this endeavor.

Sustainability can be promoted not only internally in the company but also engaging actively with the entire value chain (vendors, stakeholders, customers, etc), expanding best practices all over; if vendors supply more environmentally friendly products, then the company will be more sustainable as a consequence: green inputs facilitate achieving green outputs.

In other words, "be green and promote green" all over.

Conclusion

A more sustainable planet is positive for life and people, as it means being surrounded by a healthier and more resilient environment, full of color and beauty.

Applying the four simple yet powerful ideas of this article can lead to a positive impact on people's lives and at the same time, create benefits for the planet: measure, early approach, 4 Rs and partnerships.

Every person and every project count to make this successfully come true.

About the Author



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Human leadership, Global Sustainable Projects, Renewable energy, Story-teller, Keynote speaker, Lifetime learner, Risk management, Standardization

Manuel Ancizu is passionate about human leadership, sustainable projects and people's motivations. Enjoys working in international multicultural environments and wants to have a positive impact in society.

Manuel graduated in Economics from University of Navarra and obtained an MBA from IESE Business School (Spain); he has also studied in CEIBS (China) and University Anahuac del Sur (Mexico). He holds a number of professional certificates such as the PMP by Project Management Institute, Lead Auditor in ISO 9001:2015 by IRCA Association and has also received training in Management of Development Projects and Risk Management by Interamerican Development Bank (IDB).

Manuel has lived in Spain, France, UK and Mexico; he currently works in the wind energy sector leading the quality management of Offshore projects. Manuel has been involved in wind energy renewable projects developed in different parts of the globe with external customers, as well as in internal projects of cultural transformation, IT and global processes.

Thanks to his experience, he has delivered training sessions, lectures and keynotes to a different number of institutions.

Manuel is a qualified member of the Spanish Standardization Body (UNE) and has been involved in the development of Standards and Norms in Projects, Programs and Portfolios; he has also participated in the translation of different ISO 21500 to Spanish language.

Manuel loves smiling, storytelling, dreaming and making ideas come true in a sustainable manner.

Manuel lives in Pamplona, Spain and can be contacted at manuel@manuelancizu.com