

Sustainability is Critical for Project Success!

Interview with Joel Carboni, PhD¹

Author, Educator, Sustainability Expert
Founder & President, Green Project Management (USA)
Visiting Professor, Skema Business School (France)
Contributor to UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



Interviewed by Yasmina Khelifi

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Introduction to the interviewee

Dr. Carboni is a highly respected expert in sustainable project management. He is a graduate of Ball State University and holds a Ph.D. in Sustainable Development and Environment. He has over 25 years of experience in various areas of project management, including government, finance, consulting, manufacturing, and education.

He is a frequent speaker at conferences and events related to project management and sustainability and has worked in more than 50 countries. In addition to serving as President Emeritus of the International Project Management Association (IPMA) in the United States and being a member of the Global advisory board,

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Dr. Carboni is also the founder of GPM (Green Project Management) and a visiting professor at Skema Business School. He is also the GPM representative to the United Nations Global Compact, where he was a founding signatory of the Business for Peace Initiative and the Anti-Corruption call to action, and a contributor to the development of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs).

Dr. Carboni is the creator of the PRiSM™ project delivery methodology and the P5 Standard for Sustainability in Project Management and has written training programs on Green and Sustainable Project Management that are offered in more than 145 countries through professional training providers, business associations, and universities. He is the lead author of the book "Sustainable Project Management."

Honors and accomplishments

- 2021 CEO Today Magazine – Award Recipient, Sustainability Leader of the Year, USA
- 2019 CV Media UK — CEO of the Year for Sustainable Development — 2019
- ACQ5 Media USA —International Game changer of the year recipient — 2018
- Appointed to the Forbes Nonprofit Council —2018 - Current
- Knighted by the National Capital Region Commendery, Order of St. George, Canada, in October 2017
- Recipient of the Medal of Honor from Universidad Autonoma Lisbon, Portugal — 2017
- Recipient of the ‘Best of the Best’ for HR & Training Award – AI Media — 2017
- International Project Management Association US Representative —2015 - Current
- Recipient of the Global Sustainability Leadership Award – CSR World Congress, February 2015
- Contributing developer of UN Sustainable Development Goals (#12 Responsible Consumption) —2014
- The first recipient of an International Project Management Association (IPMA®) Achievement Award for “Applying sustainable principles to project delivery.” — 2013
- Recipient of the Global Training and Development Leadership Award from the World Human Resources and Development Congress — 2014
- Humanitarian and Liberty Awards from the SGI-USA and the BSGI award from Soka Brasil.
- Member of the Forbes Non-Profit Council since 2017
- A life member of the National Eagle Scout Association, and an Eagle Scout, class of 1991

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Interview

Q1: First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request from PMWJ. Let us explore the different aspects of your career. How did you come to project management and sustainability from Japanese and Asian studies?

Joel Carboni (Carboni): My journey to project management and sustainability is a bit of an unexpected one. Back in 1993, I was pursuing a Dual Japanese Language and Secondary Education major at my university. However, when it came time for the mandatory practical semester in a high school, there were very few options available for a Japanese program. I ended up graduating with a Japanese Language degree and two minors - Asian Studies and Secondary Education - but without the required experience to become a teacher.

Left with a degree but no clear path ahead. I was fortunate enough to have a friend working in tech who helped me land a job. That's where my journey in project management began - as an accidental project manager. The rest, as they say, is history.

Despite not becoming a teacher, my career has still allowed me to pursue my passion for education through Green Project Management (GPM), which is an education provider. I'm grateful for the opportunities that have come my way and for being able to combine my passion for education with my professional pursuits.

Q2: Sustainability is a buzz word. You earned a PhD in sustainability. You wrote a book. What is your definition of a sustainable project?

Carboni: I completely agree that sustainability has become a buzzword that people often oversimplify. In reality, sustainability is multifaceted and requires consideration of environmental, social, and economic impacts throughout the project lifecycle. A truly sustainable project should aim to reduce negative impacts on the planet and its people while promoting positive change. At its core, sustainability means 'do no harm', but I also believe in promoting "regenerative" sustainability, in which a project can have a net positive impact on the environment and society. My definition of a sustainable project, therefore, is one that measures and manages all these aspects and seeks to achieve a balance between them for a better future for all.

Q3: Is sustainability possible in all industries? In some developing countries, sustainability may mean less financial rentability.

Carboni: Absolutely! Sustainability is possible in all industries, but it may require different approaches depending on the context. In some developing countries, sustainability measures may seem to conflict with financial rentability. However, taking a long-term view and factoring in the benefits of regenerative sustainability - such as positive environmental impacts, improved social conditions, and increased market appeal to eco-conscious consumers - can actually lead to greater financial stability and

profitability in the long run. It's definitely a challenge, but one worth pursuing. This is what drives me and the team at GPM to do what we do. I strongly believe that projects are the perfect vehicles to advance sustainability.

Q5: How can a project manager apply sustainability to their projects according to you?

Carboni: To lead a project sustainably, the project team needs to first understand the organization's goals and strategy for sustainability. Once this is established, the next step is to conduct a sustainability impact analysis to determine how the project aligns with those goals. At the same time, it's important to manage the impacts of the project from environmental, social, and economic perspectives. Of course, if there are no goals, the analysis will provide clear information on the benefits that can be realized by establishing them.

In our recently released P5 Standard for Sustainability in Project Management version 3.0, we provide contextual lenses to assess project impacts. For example, greenhouse gas emissions (GhG) are different depending on whether the asset is being developed as a project or in operation. Our standard takes into account the total asset lifecycle to ensure that all phases of the project are sustainable as well as the useful life of the project outcome.

By following these steps and using established standards and tools, which we provide for free on our website www.greenprojectmanagement.org/p5 project managers can apply sustainability to their projects and make a positive impact on the environment and society. It's important to remember that small changes can add up to big results, so every effort counts!

Q6: You are the Founder of Green Project Management for 14 years. What changes about sustainability have you noticed over the years?

Carboni: A lot has changed in sustainability since I founded Green Project Management 14 years ago. One of the biggest trends I've noticed is a growing awareness and sense of urgency around environmental issues, such as climate change and resource depletion. This has led to increased efforts to reduce carbon emissions, switch to renewable energy sources, and implement sustainable practices across industries.

Another trend is the shift towards a circular economy, where waste and pollution are minimized and resources are used more efficiently. This is being driven by advances in technology, such as 3D printing and the Internet of Things, which allow for better tracking and management of resources.

Looking forward, I see sustainability becoming even more integrated into business strategy and decision-making processes. Companies that fail to adopt sustainable practices will be at a competitive disadvantage, as consumers increasingly demand products and services that are environmentally and socially responsible. I also anticipate greater emphasis on social sustainability, including issues such as dignity, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DDEI).

I'm excited to see how sustainability continues to evolve and become more ingrained in our daily lives and business practices. It's an exciting time to be involved in this field and I'm looking forward to seeing what the future holds!

Q7: What are the goals of GPM in the future?

Carboni: At GPM, our goals are simple yet ambitious - we aim to empower individuals with tools and methods that can drive positive change. While this mission remains constant, we are always seeking new opportunities to collaborate with like-minded organizations who share our vision.

Over the past few years, we have placed a great deal of importance on our collaborations with like-minded organizations such as PMI, IPMA, Agile Business Consortium, and most recently with the PMO Global Alliance. We are exploring additional partnership where shared value can be realized and will help us reach people who can serve as catalysts for sustainable change.

Our P5 standard and PRiSM method are highly adaptable and plug-in ready, which uniquely positions us to unite the project management profession to tackle some of the biggest challenges of our time, such as climate change, biodiversity degradation, and societal imbalances. We believe that by using project management to solve societal and environmental challenges together, we can make a real difference in the world.

Overall, we are excited about the possibilities for collaboration and innovation, and remain committed to driving positive change through sustainable project management practices. Our future goals involve further developing our partnerships and continuing to use project management as a driving force for positive change. We're excited about the possibilities and eager to continue making a meaningful impact.

Q8: Can you talk about your partnership with PMI and what that means?

Carboni: We value our partnership with PMI as they have the largest reach and influence in the profession. As I mentioned earlier, our mission at GPM is to empower individuals with the tools they need to drive positive change. By partnering with PMI, we are able to create shared value and more effectively achieve this mission.

PMI recognizes the importance of sustainability challenges, and because we have honed our approach to sustainable project management over the past 14 years, partnering with them makes sense on many levels. By working together, we can leverage our collective experience and knowledge to make even greater progress towards our shared goals.

Overall, we're excited about the potential of our partnership with PMI and look forward to working together to drive positive change through sustainable project management practices.

Q9: You are also the past president of IPMA (USA) as a volunteer (unpaid role). How do you find the time? Why are you volunteering?

Carboni: Volunteering, for me, is a way to stay grounded and connected with my community. I find that giving back is important and fulfilling, and it helps me stay balanced amidst the busyness of life. Yes, I am very busy, I am also a Scoutmaster and visiting professor, so my calendar is difficult to manage. But I have always felt that there is time to do important work. Plus, being involved with other organizations has allowed me to meet amazing people and learn new skills. So, it's a win-win situation!

Q10: Do you have a last message to PWJ readers, please?

Carboni: Absolutely! My last message to PMWJ readers would be to check out our free standard and see how they can make a bigger impact beyond their projects. Sustainability is crucial to the success of any project, and it's rewarding on many levels to make a positive impact on the environment and society. By adopting sustainable practices in their projects, readers can contribute to a better future for all. So, I encourage everyone to learn more about what sustainability means to them and how they can incorporate it into their projects. Together, we can achieve incredible things and make a real difference in the world.

About the Interviewer

Yasmina Khelifi

Paris, France



Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI-ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at [Orange S.A.](#) (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in [projectmanagement.com](https://www.projectmanagement.com) as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast [Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi](#) to help people in becoming better international leaders.

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