

# The Leader Redefining Project Leadership

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## The Accidental Project Leader: How Dr. Michael Pace is Redefining Project Management

**In a world often defined by rigid structures and predictable career paths, Dr. Michael Pace stands out. Far from the stereotypical “man in a grey suit” often associated with project management, Pace’s journey is a captivating blend of science, real-life application, and a relentless curiosity that has propelled him to the forefront of sustainable project leadership.**

As the Vice President of Learning and Academics for Green Project Management (GPM), he’s not just teaching the next generation of project professionals; he’s actively shaping the future of the industry, one regenerative idea at a time.

## From Crime Scenes to Corporate Strategy: An Unconventional Ascent

Pace’s entry into the world of project management was, by his own admission, unexpected. His academic roots lie in **forensic science**, consider the origin for the popular TV series, CSI, a field he initially pursued with aspirations of medical school. Working with law enforcement, he honed skills in systematic examination and multi-perspective analysis, a foundation that, surprisingly, proved invaluable in his later career. After a postgraduate degree in chemistry, biology, and psychology, he found himself in a toxicology lab. It was here that his innate organizational prowess was recognized. “My bosses there began to send more ‘project’ akin activities to him,” he recounts. This seemingly innocuous start paved the way for a career spanning government institutions, private banking, healthcare, and energy programs, where he consistently applied his core tenet: “seeing all things from all angles and making what seems complex

simple.”

Pace describes himself as a “scholar-practitioner,” or “pracademic,” a term that perfectly encapsulates his unique blend of academic rigor and real-world application. This duality, he explains, is crucial. “I want to keep close ties with the corporate world, however I also want to keep learning and help the industry to progress. Being part of the corporate world means I can test new theories and support them to rapidly evolve into practice.”

His secret weapon? **Curiosity**. “It helps to be curious,” he states, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a “beginner’s mindset.” This approach, rooted in the Buddhist concept of *shoshin*, allows him to constantly challenge assumptions, explore new solutions, and teach others from a perspective of continuous growth.

## Regenerating the Future: Green Project Management’s Vision

Pace’s current role at GPM is a natural fit for his distinctive background and forward-thinking philosophy. For over 16 years, GPM, founded by Dr. Joel Cardoni, has championed “green-led” project management. Pace highlights a crucial shift in their mission: “Our organisation is rapidly transitioning from issues of sustainability to the urgency of regeneration – the difference? Sustainability is about stopping further harm, regeneration is about fixing what is broken.” This profound message underpins GPM’s **5 P’s framework: People, Planet, Prosperity, Process, and Product**, which guides their approach to making things better in the world and the societies we inhabit.

When asked how GPM helps global organizations to navigate the path to sustainable project delivery, Pace’s response is concise yet powerful: by providing **knowledge, agency, and value**. “Organizations and the people within them need to have the knowledge to do things better,” he explains. However, the real challenge lies in empowering individuals and organizations to take action and recognize the inherent value in their sustainable endeavors. He cites Unilever’s proactive sustainability efforts as a key factor in fending off a hostile takeover bid – a testament to the tangible benefits of green practices.

Pace also advocates for a united front among project associations like IPMA, PMI, and GPM. Referencing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, he emphasizes that **partnerships** are crucial for tackling the immense environmental challenges facing the industry. “Ultimately by partnering, ‘we’ as an industry can make the biggest impact, on what is an enormous issue.”

## Cultivating Critical Thinkers: Challenges and Advice for the Next Generation

Working with younger project professionals and students, Pace observes unique challenges in today’s landscape. The pervasive dilemma of needing experience to get a job, but being unable to gain experience without one, is a significant hurdle. Beyond this, he expresses concern about a potential decline in **critical thinking skills**. “Students focus so heavily on the assignment or on the grade that they forget about the learning that’s supposed to happen,” he notes, advocating for educational approaches that foster questioning and challenge from an early age.

For aspiring project practitioners, Pace's advice for building career resilience is clear: **master the art of managing people.** "Projects succeed because of people, and fail because of people." He firmly believes that "being great at managing people, is a critical aspect of great project management." In a world where interpersonal dynamics often dictate project outcomes, investing in psychological understanding and communication skills is paramount.

## **Milestones and Future Horizons: A Legacy in the Making**

Reflecting on a career spanning over two decades, Pace struggles to pick a single "most proud" moment, instead offering a compelling suite of 'career bests'. First, his involvement in securing a patent for a world-first system for managing toxicology results, a project that taught him the value of bringing a unique perspective to problem-solving. Second, achieving his PMP certificate just days after major surgery, a testament to his unwavering determination that he often shares to inspire his students.

And finally, the project that elicits the broadest smile: delivering Dish's Mayweather vs. Pacquiao pay-per-view boxing match. He describes it as "as complex as projects come," rife with multiple stakeholders, conflicting goals, tight deadlines, and unprecedented challenges. Despite the immense pressure and the myriad of possibilities for failure, the event went off without a hitch, setting viewership records and highlighting his team's exceptional foresight and execution. "There were so many things that could go wrong," Pace recalls, "You are operating from instinct, adrenalin and the knowledge that there is no room for failure."

Looking ahead, Pace's future work agenda is anything but quiet. He's leading a major joint workshop with the Project Management Institute (PMI) on sustainable project management, completing a new book on "Regenerative Strategic Planning," and pursuing his second doctorate (an Ed.D. this time), focused on education for sustainability at the University of Glasgow, UK.

As our conversation concludes, Pace offers several nuggets of advice for project professionals aiming to improve within the industry: **"Learn more, be open to growth and be willing to be part of the conversation."** In a changing world, continuous learning, having a beginner's mindset, and proactive engagement are the cornerstones of impactful project leadership.

Dr. Michael Pace, with his unique blend of experience and unwavering curiosity, is not just a leader in this conversation; he is a driving force for positive change.

What aspects of Dr. Pace's approach to project management resonate most with your own professional journey? And join us in coming weeks as we focus on the titans of project education, in our 'Project Professors' series of interviews.

**Dr Michael Pace, PhD, Specialist in Sustainability and Project Management Education. And Vice President of Learning and Academics at Green Project Management (GPM). Dr. Pace specializes in sustainability and the accompanying need for education, training, and upskilling.**

**His work, has centered on translating complex matters across a wide range of fields. Most recently he has been working to define how to incorporate regenerative sustainability into project approaches, and on determining which framework(s) might be most applicable in varying project contexts. Alongside his research and work within GPM, Dr Pace regularly**

**mentors candidates progressing towards PM certifications, including the PMP, the IPMA certifications, GPM's Sustainable Project Management certification, and other major approaches.**

If you would like to be part of the conversation Join Michael at GPM's monthly 'Round Table' event. Details for which can be found here <https://gpmambassadors.org/>, or connect through LinkedIn [Here](#).

He will also be leading a workshop this June, in Orlando, Florida, US, in partnership with the Project Management Institute:

<https://www.pmi.org/events/pmi-training/pmi-training-orlando-2025/sustainable-project-management—gpm>