

Infrastructure leaders must adapt to join the fight against climate change

By [Olebogeng Manhe](#)

10 Feb 2023

At the COP27 summit held in Egypt last year, world leaders finally closed a deal to assist developing countries being affected by climate disasters - a clear indication that we are firmly in a time of action regarding climate change.

As a recent United Nations report reveals, the number of climate disasters globally has doubled over the past two decades. Serious environmental events such as these impact infrastructure in several ways, from disrupting water supply and conveyance to flooding, impairing above-ground infrastructure such as roads and bridges, and damaging buildings.

As a result, engineers, architects, and developers are now compelled to continually seek out ways in which to 'futureproof' construction and infrastructure projects.

There are many practical ways and new technologies that can assist in preparing against any potential future environmental damage. But leaders in the infrastructure sector will also have to adapt their ways of thinking if we are to achieve the goal of reducing carbon emissions, pushing them outside of their comfort zone and forcing them to obtain new capabilities.

Like Gap Infrastructure Corporation (GIC), companies which are involved in large-scale projects must be cognisant of how this will impact demands on leadership. Traditionally, infrastructure leaders with an engineering or technical background have not always been involved in such areas of expertise like climate change. But as modern leaders, it is now crucial to identify, understand and drive companies' social and environmental agenda as well.



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Sustainability a shared mission

Infrastructure projects have an enormous social and environmental impact. For this reason, most employees and investors rightly expect that projects will be constructed with sustainability in mind and executed in a way that provides long-term value to communities. When leaders believe in this shared mission, they are more successful in convincing all stakeholders to commit towards fulfilling and, ultimately, realising these goals.

Additionally, amidst growing competition for talent within the sector, infrastructure leaders must further communicate the societal purpose of their companies with transparency and authenticity to attract and retain staff. This means that to be successful, future leaders will have to develop an immense sense of purpose regarding their work. They must be able to authentically communicate their organisation's purpose, and should view sustainability and strategy as cohesive ideas.



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Work across value chains

As a leader in the infrastructure industry, I understand that these requirements are not insignificant, nor are the challenges that companies face in prioritising sustainability at every level of their organisations and projects. Finishing projects on time, within a budget, while still meeting emission reduction targets is no simple task.

Therefore, it is important for leaders to work across their value chains with all stakeholders to adapt the conventional economic measurements against which the success of a project is determined. Furthermore, infrastructure leaders must campaign for change by using their power to push for improved laws which will quicken innovation and investment in green technology and decarbonisation.

Ultimately, it is time to embrace creativity and collaboration to reduce emissions within the infrastructure industry – values which would not necessarily factor traditionally into an infrastructure leader's skills. However, we can only create permanent change if our industry leaders form strong cross-sector relationships to find creative solutions to improving environmental outcomes.

We can achieve our goals of reducing emissions if we hire more leaders who think out of the box, challenge norms and look at problems from a unique angle, in order to change lives.

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