

# AI and The Lazy Project Manager <sup>1</sup>

By Peter Taylor

## Keep it simple

In 2009 I wrote, as part of the introduction to my first book (still the most popular and successful one<sup>2</sup>) ‘The Lazy Project Manager: How to be twice as productive and still leave the office early’, as follows:

*“Productive laziness is all about success, but success with far less effort.*

*By advocating being a ‘lazy’ project manager, I do not intend that we should all do absolutely nothing. I am not saying we should all sit around drinking coffee, reading good books, and engaging in idle gossip whilst watching the project hours go by and the non-delivered project milestones disappear over the horizon. That would obviously be just plain stupid and would result in an extremely short career in project management – in fact, probably in a very short career, full stop!*

*Lazy does not mean stupid.*

*No, I really mean that we should all adopt a more focused approach to project management and exercise our efforts where it really matters, rather than rushing around like busy, busy bees involving ourselves in unimportant, non-critical activities that others can better address, or which do not need addressing at all in some cases.*

*Welcome to the home of ‘productive laziness’.”*

The essence of this vastly different book on project management was that a good project manager would always work ‘smarter and not harder’ and I tried to present this argument through the use of dinosaur analogies, referencing the work of an Italian economist and a management thinker, weaved in with a touch of the approach of a Prussian field Marshall and a beloved Disney character. You know, all the usual stuff!

---

<sup>1</sup> How to cite this paper: Taylor, P. (2022). AI and The Lazy Project Manager, *PM World Journal*, Vol. XI, Issue III, March.

<sup>2</sup> Until this one perhaps?

Since then, I have written and presented a lot. On many different subjects. But always, at least I have always tried, by applying that greatest of principles 'KISS<sup>3</sup>' to ensure simplicity of purpose, focus, process, and outcome.

And, if you think about it, the rise of support that AI will bring to project management can only be considered as part of this KISS application.

Personally, and I am quite sure most project managers would agree, anything that can alleviate some of the repetitive and arduous (but important of course) tracking, analytics and reporting activities, and not only alleviate but improve, then sign me up!

## Going for an AI drive

Let's think about this as a car analogy.

For example, in fact I'm going to explore you two examples here. The first is, if you think about travelling in London, which is my nearest city. Now London is a complicated landscape to try and navigate around if you don't know exactly where you're going and even then, there are challenges of traffic congestion, roadworks, road closures, diversions, events, things like that. So, moving around London, assuming you're talking about moving above ground at this point (not using the London Underground) I could get in my car, and I could drive to London, I can do that. I have a reasonable knowledge of London, but normally I would not because normally I would catch a train to London and then to get across London it is then a matter of using a choice of the famous London taxis, or perhaps or doing a private hire.

Now the advantage of London taxis has always been that the drivers of the London taxis have undertaken, well before they can get into a car, before they can drive a taxi, before they can get their license, they must undertake something that is known as 'The Knowledge<sup>4</sup>'. The Knowledge is an extremely robust process of evaluating an individual's awareness of road connections, appropriate journeys, alternative routes, etc. And if you ever go to London, you might see a

---

<sup>3</sup> KISS, an acronym for keep it simple, stupid, is a design principle noted by the U.S. Navy in 1960. The KISS principle states that most systems work best if they are kept simple rather than made complicated; therefore, simplicity should be a key goal in design, and unnecessary complexity should be avoided. The phrase has been associated with aircraft engineer Kelly Johnson. Variations on the phrase include: 'Keep it simple, silly', 'keep it short and simple', 'keep it simple and straightforward', 'keep it small and simple'.

<sup>4</sup> The London taxicab driver is required to be able to decide routes immediately in response to a passenger's request or traffic conditions, rather than stopping to look at a map, relying on satellite navigation or asking a controller by radio. Consequently, the 'Knowledge of London' is the in-depth study of a number of pre-set London Street routes and all places of interest that taxicab drivers in that city must complete to obtain a license to operate a black cab. It was initiated in 1865 and has changed little since. It is the world's most demanding training course for taxicab drivers, and applicants will usually need to pass at least twelve 'appearances' (periodical one-on-one oral examinations undertaken throughout the qualification process), with the whole process usually averaging 34 months, to pass.

number of people riding around on scooters, with a clipboard mounted on the handlebars, identifying, or trying to learn what's known as the knowledge of London, it's a very tough thing.

Once you have that knowledge, then, then you know London, you know, the way to get around London, you know the most effective routes, the alternative routes, the back roads and if you have ever been in a London taxi sometimes, they take you on some of the most incredible little journeys as they cut through side streets to get to a major location.

Well, you know, that is an incredibly powerful thing.

But if you're talking about say Joe Public (myself included) driving along in London, not having passed 'The Knowledge' then this is where you can use some technology such as 'Waze'<sup>5</sup>. (Other providers are available, this is just my personal favourite).

I'm a heavy user of Waze because of what it can do for the private hire car, or for the delivery driver, or even for the general public who just is getting in their car and going to a place for the first time, it can offer up some incredibly significant opportunities to find the most appropriate route, and it's based on collaborative power.

It is AI empowered in the background with algorithms running to try and constantly find you the best current route through, based on information of road layout, based on understanding of major roadworks that are recorded, but also based on the feedback from all of the other little 'Wazers'<sup>6</sup> out there who are constantly updating that information providing real time information that will aid you in your journey and vice versa.

Here we now have the ability to navigate somewhere that you don't really know very well and not having to worry about the fact that you're having to try and find the right route. You know, the days when I used to try and drive with a giant map on the passenger seat or having to almost rehearse and memorise new routes. That is long gone, you can just wake up and go find the most appropriate route by just putting in your desired end location and perhaps some settings (do you want to go on motorways/freeways or do you want to use the back roads etc.). This frees you up to concentrate on what you're supposed to be doing, which is driving a car safely.

In the back of a taxi, I am already allocating the responsibility of safe navigation to someone else, the taxi driver, and by using some navigation technology in my own car then I can also focus away from the distraction of navigation. But there is much more to come.

---

<sup>5</sup> Waze is a GPS navigation software app and a subsidiary of Google. It works on smartphones and tablet computers that have GPS support. It provides turn-by-turn navigation information and user-submitted travel times and route details, while downloading location-dependent information over a mobile telephone network.

<sup>6</sup> These are the users of Waze who can passively use the system or interact and provide traffic alerts.

Inevitably we will rapidly move towards self-managing cars (The Knowledge will, one day die out completely sadly, an incredibly old and very important skill will be tech superseded). In the autonomous vehicles of tomorrow (well they exist now but tomorrow for the general public), then our process, or responsibility is reduced, only to doing what we want to do whilst in that car and in the end, there will be all of the technology, artificial intelligence allows that car to self-manage itself to take you from your starting point 'A' safely on to your journey's end point 'B'. And all your job is to just to enjoy that experience and work or relax, using the in-car entertainment or whatever you wish really. You are fundamentally absolved from (almost) any responsibility as to the safe driving of the vehicle from point A to point B.

Now, some of us might miss that driving experience but I think it's something that we just have to accept will come eventually.

So, to, in project management it is very much like this, I think. You know, we are not going to go all the way towards the autonomous project management experience (my opinion). I just cannot see that. But there is a significant step forward in in the coming months and years that will take us to a completely different place as far as project management is concerned, and I believe this, it truly fits with the principles that I had all those years ago.

Behind the 'Lazy Project Manager' and the whole 'working smarter not harder' approach I advocate, and the power of working with people (that I believe project manager is really all about, managing yourself and managing other people, whilst delivering a project successfully) then I can only welcome AI into my profession.

I believe AI can only make things better here.

So, here is to the next generation of AI empowered Lazy Project Managers.

## Keep on being 'Lazy'

I concluded 'The Lazy Project Manager' by reminding readers that,

**'Progress isn't made by early risers. It's made by lazy men trying to find easier ways to do something.'**<sup>7</sup>

The Lazy Project Manager was built for the AI empowered project management world by using technology to find the easiest way to do something and to spend the freed-up time focusing on people.

Because people deliver projects. People!

---

<sup>7</sup> Robert Heinlein, 'Time Enough For Love' US science fiction author (1907 - 1988) – and yes, a quote of its time, so please replace 'men' with 'people'.

## About the Author



**Peter Taylor**

London, UK



Keynote speaker and coach, Peter Taylor is the author of the number 1 bestselling project management book 'The Lazy Project Manager', along with many other books on Project Management, PMO development, Executive Sponsorship, Transformation Leadership, and Speaking Skills. He has built and led some of the largest PMOs in the world with organisations such as Siemens, IBM, UKG, and now Ceridian, where he is the VP Global PMO. He has also delivered over 450 lectures around the world in over 25 countries and has been described as 'perhaps the most entertaining and inspiring speaker in the project management world today'.