Peter Taylor

The lazy project manager

*How to be twice as productive and
still leave the office early*

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PETER TAYLOR

To David, my manager and mentor for the last fifteen years, who has actively encouraged my laziness at all times.

And to my family, whose increasing demands for money have driven me, not to drink, but to authorship and public speaking.

Thank you.

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Acknowledgements

I have received a lot of support during this project, the writing of my first book, and I want to thank everyone.

I will avoid doing it by name (you all know who you are), but I will do it by role instead – this will both help protect the guilty and keep me safe from forgetting someone important.

There was my flight companion back in 2008 who, when asking me what I wanted to do next in my career, declared that being an author and public speaker was a great idea but that I was probably too lazy! Well, that was the catalyst, for sure.

There were those who didn't laugh (too much) when I put together the idea for the lazy project manager and the first version of the website (www.thelazyprojectmanager.com) and bravely showed it to other people for the first time.

And there were those who supported me during the writing period itself, commenting, and contributing, reviewing, acting as unpaid editors and generally helping out.

Finally, thank you to Richard at Infinite Ideas for having nothing better to do on the day my book idea landed in his in-box.

Thanks to all of you.

Introduction

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'.

On the following pages you can read more about what I mean about productive laziness and how you can apply these simple techniques and approaches in your own projects. The major project topics will be covered but from a 'productive lazy' point of view.

I am not, by nature, a lazy person but I do have many other things to do in life, beyond the projects and programmes[1] that I manage, and I have therefore learned the manner in which to balance life, projects and work. What I am, though, and also by nature, is success orientated. Therefore the balanced approach that I utilise also has to ensure that both my projects and my career are successful and that they leave me with sufficient time for home and family. I am a Lazy Project Manager. You can carry on as you are or you can join me in the comfy chair of life and still get the project results that you and your project sponsors demand. Lazy does not mean unsuccessful.

It is, however, important to be clear what this concept of productive laziness is all about and, in the importance of scope definition, precisely what it is not about.

This is not a project management training manual. It will wholeheartedly fail to teach you to become a project manager; if you do want to learn about critical path analysis, earned value management, 'Monte Carlo' simulation, work breakdown structures, critical success factors and terms of reference then put this book back down and pick up an (allegedly) more boring-looking one that is no doubt somewhere nearby. You can come back to my more interesting book later on when you need a little light refreshment for the mind.

Equally, it is not a replacement for a good fundamental project management education programme. There are, I guarantee, huge parts of the project management skill set and process missing.

1. Programme management or program management is the process of managing multiple interdependent projects that lead towards an improvement in an organisation's performance. It typically supports a strategy in place for the business, such as an ambition to be the fourth biggest supermarket by 2015 or reduce wastage by 5% in two years.

It is not an alternative to a project management methodology; definitely not. And it is not a replacement for experience or for valuable support from an experienced project management coach. All these things you should already have in place, achieved or secured – or, if not, have a plan in place in order to do so.

But it is a sharing of my experience and can act, to some degree, as a virtual coach for you in your project work. It does describe a way to 'work smarter'. It is, if applied well, a means to become more productive in what you do for your projects and what you can do outside your projects. It can deliver a better work–life balance.

It works, and has worked, for me and it may work for you as well. I hope so. To be clear again, I have been formally trained in many project management methodologies over the years, I am a certified PMP® through the Project Management Institute (PMI)[2], and I have obviously had a lot of practical experience over the last twenty years in a wide range of projects and businesses and have been supported by some great project managers in my time.

Being a Lazy Project Manager is all about being focused in your project management efforts and learning to exercise your efforts where it really matters, where they make the most impact.

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2. The Project Management Institute (PMI) is a non-profit professional organisation dedicated to advancing state-of-the-art of project management. It is the world's leading association for the project management profession. PMI sets standards, conducts research, and provides education and professional exchange opportunities designed to strengthen and further establish professionalism. This institute aims to advance the careers of practitioners and enhance the performance of business and other organisations. This is done by running and maintaining five credentials in project management including the 'Project Management Professional' which is properly expressed as the credential PMP®.

There are many, many books that will take you into every detail of every component of the project management skill set and process steps; this is not one of them. This is project management from 37,000 feet. So welcome to the project management 'mile high' club!

The science behind
the laziness

This isn't all just made up you know, there is science and history and a singing bear behind all this theory.

The Pareto principle (also known as the 80/20 rule) states that for many phenomena, 80% of the consequences stem from 20% of the causes. The idea has a rule of thumb application in many places, but it's also commonly misused. For example, it's a misuse to state that a solution to a problem 'fits the 80-20 rule' just because it fits 80% of the cases; it must be implied that this solution requires only 20% of the resources needed to solve all cases.

The principle was in fact suggested by management thinker Joseph M. Juran and it was named after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, who observed that 80% of property in Italy was owned by 20% of the Italian population. The assumption is that most of the results in any situation are determined by a small number of causes.

So '20% of clients may be responsible for 80% of sales volume'. This can be evaluated and is likely to be roughly right, and can be helpful in future decision-making. The Pareto principle also applies to a variety of more mundane matters: we might guess – approximately – that we wear our 20% most favoured clothes about 80% of the time; perhaps we spend 80% of the time with 20% of our acquaintances, and so on.

The Pareto principle is unrelated to Pareto efficiency, which really was introduced by Vilfredo Pareto. Vilfredo Pareto (born 15 July 1848 in France, died 19 August 1923 in Lausanne, Switzerland) made several important contributions to economics, sociology and moral philosophy, especially in the study of income distribution and in the analysis of individuals' choices. He introduced the concept of Pareto efficiency and helped develop the field of microeconomics with ideas such as indifference curves. In 1906, he made his observation about Italian property which was later generalised into the Pareto principle, and into the concept of a Pareto distribution.

The Pareto principle or 80/20 rule can and should be used by every smart but lazy person in their daily life. The value of the Pareto principle for a project manager is that it reminds you to focus on the 20% that matters.

Woody Allen once said '80% of success is showing up'. I'm not so sure about that; I have seen projects where there was a physical project manager around, but you would never have believed that looking at the project's progress, or lack of progress. No, it's better – I believe – to appreciate that out of all the things you do during your day, only 20% really matter. Those 20% produce 80% of your results. So you should identify and focus on those things during your working day.

Do this well and you will enjoy the world of productive laziness.

The intelligence of laziness

It's no good just being lazy; you have to be better than lazy, you have to be lazy in a very smart way.

Productive laziness is not just about being lazy, it requires something more – and that is a powerful and magical combination of laziness and intelligence. Smart lazy people have a real edge over others in society and are most suited to leadership roles in organisations. This theory has existed for many years and has been applied in a number of interesting ways. One of the most famous of these was in the Prussian Army.

Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke (26 October 1800 – 24 April 1891) was a Generalfeldmarschall. He is widely regarded as one of the great strategists of the latter half of the 1800s, and was the creator of a new and more modern method for directing armies in the field.
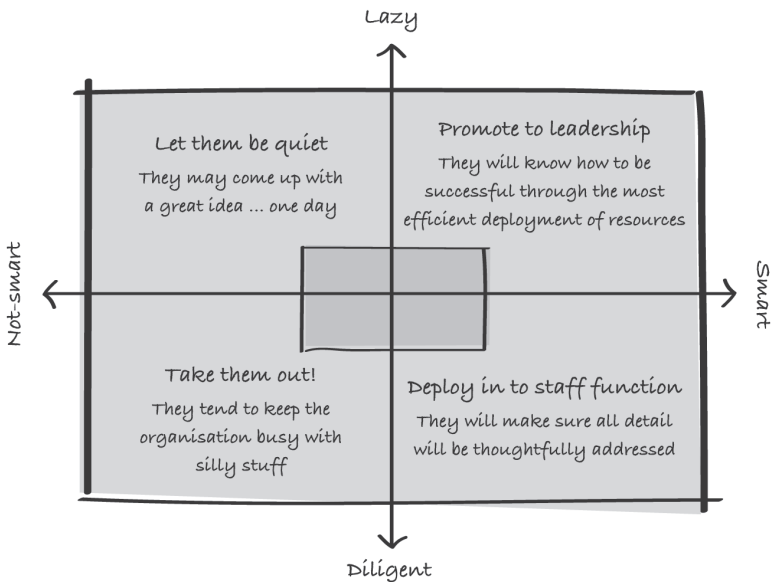
In 1857 Helmuth von Moltke was given the position Chief of the Prussian Grosser Generalstab (military staff), a position he held for the next thirty years. As soon as he gained the position he went to work making changes to the strategic and tactical methods of the Prussian army – changes in armament and in means of communication,

changes in the training of staff officers and changes to the method for mobilising the army. He also instituted a formal study of European politics in connection with plans for campaigns which might become necessary. In short, he rapidly put into place the features of a modern General Staff.

Moltke had a particular insight and approach to categorising his officer corps, something which lives on to this day within many armed forces, and something which can be applied to all forms of leadership, including project management.

If you consider the two ranges of individual characteristics, those that go from diligent through to lazy, and those that go from non-smart through to smart (yes, I am being politically correct here), then you end up with the four character types in the diagram below.

Lazy

Let them be quiet
They may come up with a great idea ... one day

Promote to leadership
They will know how to be successful through the most efficient deployment of resources

Not-smart

Smart

Take them out!
They tend to keep the organisation busy with silly stuff

Deploy in to staff function
They will make sure all detail will be thoughtfully addressed

Diligent

General von Moltke divided his officer corps into these four distinct types, depending on their mental and physical characteristics. He ended up with (and he never had to be politically correct, having been born in the nineteenth century and being chief of the Prussian army) type A: mentally dull and physically lazy; type B: mentally bright and physically energetic; type C: mentally dull and physically energetic; and type D: mentally bright and physically lazy.

Type A officers, who were mentally dull and physically lazy, were given simple, repetitive and unchallenging tasks to perform. They had reached their career peak in the army. That said, if left alone they might just come up with a good idea one day; if not, then they wouldn't cause any problems.

Type B officers, who were mentally bright and physically energetic, were considered to be obsessed with micromanagement and would, as a result, be poor leaders. Promotion was possible over a period of time but not to the status of commanding officer of the General Staff. These officers were the best at making sure orders were carried out and thoughtfully addressing all the detail.

Type C officers, who were mentally dull but physically energetic, were considered to be somewhat dangerous. To Moltke, they were the officers who would require constant supervision, which was an unacceptable overhead and distraction. Because they would potentially create problems faster than could be managed, these officers were considered too much trouble and were dismissed. No career there, then!

Which brings us to type D officers. These were the mentally bright and yet physically lazy officers who Moltke felt could and should take the highest levels of command. These officers were smart enough to see what needed to be done but were also motivated by inherent laziness to find the easiest, simplest way to achieve what was required. Put in a more positive way, they would know how to be successful through the most efficient deployment of effort.

'Whenever there is a hard job to be done I assign it to a lazy man; he is sure to find an easy way of doing it.'

Walter Chrysler

OK, now take your pick. What do you want to be? Type A, B, C or D? Tough question, eh?

So, smart lazy people have a real edge over others and are most suited to leadership roles in organisations. The Lazy Project Manager is all about applying these principles in the delivery and management of projects. It is assumed that you are not stupid (well, you have bought or borrowed this book and I see that as a positive sign of intelligence), so you are already on the right hand side of the diagram. What you now need to do is hone your lazy skills in order to rise to the top right hand side of the diagram. Do this, and not only will your projects be more successful, you will also be seen as successful yourself, and a safe pair of hands for future leadership roles.

A final definition

It's a kind of magic: when one plus one equals so much more than two.

So what do you get when you cross one of the seven deadly sins (sloth – number four in the modern-day listing, as it happens) with an accelerant for resource usage (good old productivity)?

- **lazy** [leizi]   adjective (lazier; laziest)

1. If someone is **lazy**, they do not want to work or make any effort to do anything.

    – **Lazy** and incompetent workers are letting the company down.

    – I was too **lazy** to learn how to read music.

    - **laziness** noun

    – Current employment laws will be changed to reward effort and punish **laziness**.

2. You can use **lazy** to describe an activity or event in which you are very relaxed and which you do or take part in without making much effort.

    – Her latest novel is perfect for a **lazy** summer's afternoon reading.

    – We would have a **lazy** lunch and then lie on the beach in the sun.

    - **lazily**   adverb

    – Lisa went back into the kitchen, stretching **lazily**.

3. If you describe something as **lazy**, you mean that it moves or flows
    slowly and gently.

    –   …a valley of rolling farms spread out along a **lazy** river.

    •   **lazily**   adverb

    –   The river threaded its way **lazily** between the old city and the new.

Laziness – sloth: apathy and inactivity in the practice of virtue (personified
as one of the deadly sins).

So lazy – or laziness: is mostly seen as a negative term, or at the very best,
as a term of selfish indulgence.

Productiveness – on the other hand, is seen as a very positive term:
the ratio of work produced in a given period of time. Productivity relates to
a person's ability to produce the standard amount or number of products,
services or outcomes as described in a work description.

So, put the benefits of productiveness together with an intelligent application
of laziness and you get 'productive laziness'.

Or, to put it another way, you get the maximum output for any given input,
with an eye to minimising the input as well. Or, to put it yet another way, you
get a lot of bang for your buck, as some like to say!

It's a jungle (book) out there!

Doo be doo be doo: inspiration from a great 'character' actor.

You know that scene from *The Jungle Book*, one of Disney's great films[3], where the bear Baloo encourages Mowgli, the boy, to think about life in a different way?

Baloo sings about looking for just the bare necessities of life, about trying to relax and cool it, and not spending any time looking for things that aren't worth it or can't even be found. Or, put another way, he is explaining to Mowgli that life using the good old 80/20 rule can be a lot less stressful.

For me 'The Bare Necessities' could well be the productive lazy theme tune. Check out the full lyrics some time, take a stroll down memory lane and watch the film one more time and enjoy Baloo the (singing) bear teaching you all about the bare necessities of life that will come to you.

If that isn't good old doo be doo be doo productive laziness, I don't what is!

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3. The Jungle Book is an animated feature film, released on 18 October 1967. The nineteenth in the Disney animated features canon, it was the last to be produced by Walt Disney, who died during its production. It was inspired by the stories about the feral child Mowgli from the book of the same title by Rudyard Kipling. The movie remains one of Disney's most popular, and contained a number of classic songs, including 'The Bare Necessities' and 'I Wanna Be Like You'. Most of the songs are by Richard M. Sherman and Robert B. Sherman.

Can I cheat?

It is impossible for a man to be cheated by anyone but himself[4], so it's your call entirely…

So you are already thinking in the 'lazy' way? That combination of inherent intelligence and underlying laziness is kicking in already?

You are wondering if you really have to read the whole book through, study the contents carefully, connect with each idea and experiment in your daily project life in order to reach the higher plane of conscientiousness that is productive laziness. You are thinking that this seems like an awful lot of hard work considering this book is supposedly teaching you to take it easy in the comfy chair.

Or maybe you are one of those people who just have to skip to the end and see what happens. Or maybe you want to just validate the value of the book before investing any more of your overly hard-worked-for money by seeing some sort of summary and conclusion.

Possibly you are a student of project management who, having left some piece of work right to the very last moment – again – is rushing to grab as many salient points and quotes on this subject as possible, with as little actual effort as possible, in order to both meet a deadline and achieve an acceptable grade.

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4. 'It is impossible for a man to be cheated by anyone but himself.' Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882).

Whatever the reasons, and in the extremely selfish interests of a potential book sale, here is the answer you are looking for:

Yes!

Yes, you can cheat. Yes, you can skip all the way to the chapter which is entitled 'Quick tips to productive lazy heaven'. And, yes, there you will find what you are looking for.

But – just before you head off to the end of the book – I do hope that you will return to the next chapter at some point, partly because it does set the scene for the structure of the book (and the quick tips), partly because there are many wise words and ideas covered that will help you in the future, and also partly because I have spent a long time writing this book and will probably sulk if you don't.

OK, decision time. See you on the next page – or later on, near the end of the book.