

Why the AI Race in Project Management Is Shifting Accountability Away From Humans and Onto Flawed Algorithms¹

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Introduction

The number of trends related to the use of AI in work processes is growing like a snowball. Project teams consciously implement smart systems to automate planning, track tasks, or predict risks. In turn, large vendors offer exciting capabilities through autonomous agents, promising to significantly reduce the workload of managers. However, if something doesn't go according to a plan or changes suddenly, who is responsible for decisions — a human or a system?

We see algorithms becoming increasingly autonomous. At the same time, there are specialists in the industry who don't consider the overall responsibility of these algorithms. Unfortunately, this issue is often ignored.

The Promise vs. The Reality of AI in Project Planning

The prospects for using AI in project planning are quite promising. The Association for Project Management (APM) shared the study, which found that 70% of PM professionals are already using AI, and 29% say their companies plan to implement it.

I've recently read a column titled "The Next Generation Project Manager," written by Alfonso Bucero, in which the author contrasts Maria, a traditional PM, with Javier, a manager who actively uses AI. Faced with routine tasks and sudden changes, Maria reacts too late and loses. Javier, in his turn, acts immediately and wins by using AI.

This optimistic example of AI's application in project management is supported by the data from Gartner, which states that by 2030, 80% of project management work will be performed by artificial intelligence.

It seems that smart systems should positively influence the project's success. However, only 36% of organizations deliver projects on time, according to Wellington's "State of Project Management 2026" report.

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It all means that tools are getting smarter, but results are not improving. This happens for various reasons, including the fact that AI systems are still imperfect.

Many years of experience in project management allow me to highlight the following AI strengths in this area:

- Automation of routine tasks such as status updates and report preparation.
- Smart planning based on a description.
- Working with requirements and transforming chaotic thoughts of clients into structured tasks.
- Finding risk patterns considering historical data.

The disadvantages are also obvious:

- Lack of understanding of a team's context. The likelihood that AI will be able to resolve a conflict or negotiate with an irritated client without human intervention is extremely low.
- Assessing the current workload of a certain performer.
- Adaptation to chaos. AI won't be able to judge in conditions of uncertainty, where data is insufficient, or in a force majeure situation.
- Accountability. In any case, a human remains accountable for a project's failure.

The last point seems especially discussible.

The truth is that the AI race in project management is shifting responsibility from humans to imperfect algorithms.

The Accountability Gap No One Is Talking About

Effective project management is built around accountability. Each task is assigned to a responsible person. Managers always know what happens and what stage each activity is in.

Reputable organizations like IPMA, PMI, and APM support this approach. They promote the idea that without predefined accountability, a project and a team quickly descend into chaos. Many acknowledge the problem, but few discuss it.

A smart system may change the direction of a project independently, making suggestions, delaying deadlines, identifying risks, or changing priorities. In many cases, a manager has no choice but to simply accept it.

To better understand this thought, let's look at an example from the construction industry.

While awareness of AI technologies among construction companies is quite low in some countries (as, for example, described in the column "Adoption of Artificial Intelligence on Construction Projects" by Elvis Izuchukwu Nnadozie, Benedict Amade, and Gregory Chimere Enyinna), the overall situation is quite positive.

Imagine a project aimed at reconstructing a bridge over a river.

A manager picks an AI tool and connects it to a system for planning and task tracking, hoping for better results and lower costs. A work plan contains a task related to pouring concrete for a large section of the bridge, which a team of 15 workers should complete by the end of June.

However, according to the updated weather forecast, heavy rain and extreme gusts of wind are expected, which will certainly complicate the task.

The AI agent studies the weather forecast and decides to postpone the concrete pour for 3 days, which also affects other tasks like painting. The system automatically adjusts subtasks in a project schedule and cancels concrete deliveries on those days. The integrated task management system fails, and the team gets no notification. A subcontractor who supplies concrete pumps bills for equipment downtime.

Unfortunately, the schedule changes are too late for the manager. As a result, the team misses the deadline and is penalized for the downtime. The cost estimate increases by 15%.

Here I have a question: "Who is actually responsible for the decision made?"

AI is not a subject of law. Logically, top management cannot reprimand a tool, fire it, or sue it.

If an AI assistant reschedules a deadline or miscalculates the budget, causing problems for the entire project, a client will undoubtedly blame your company, relying on a contract.

What about the situation inside a company? Most likely, this is the responsibility of a manager, for whom AI is just a tool.

Why This Is Especially Dangerous in Complex Projects

I deliberately use the example of construction project management. This field is known for its complex cases (as are fields such as engineering, complex software development, healthcare, etc.).

According to “Pulse of the Profession 2026,” shared by PMI, 97% of managers worked on at least one complex project in the past year. Such projects usually have many different dependencies that require judicious decision-making rather than simple optimization. Standard mathematical algorithms cannot identify and control them.

Generally, complex initiatives require not optimization based on the predetermined parameters but consideration of stakeholder experience and input.

Real-world projects are subject to parameters that change more rapidly than smart systems can cope with, and flexibility should be preferred to rigid logical consistency. This should serve as a warning for managers to be prepared to respond rapidly to unexpected circumstances, with an emphasis on emergent decisions over best practices.

This is actually supported by the famous Cynefin concept, which helps to identify optimal operating modes and to choose a management strategy in complex, chaotic, and ambiguous environments.

The Right Role for AI in Project Management

So, how should we determine the degree of accountability between a manager and AI?

I believe the ideal situation is that AI is a helpful assistant in a manager's toolkit, but not an autonomous agent with authority to make decisions.

In practice, it can mean that smart tools make a huge number of decisions on their own, but only within the boundaries predetermined by people. When a risk occurs, a sophisticated system identifies and signals the risk as critical, but makes no decisions regarding context or response without continued manager involvement. Implementation of a suggested reallocation of resources requires active manager coordination with a team and results in a final decision by the manager.

The team of the project management software, where I am the CEO, has recently rolled out an AI project generator that creates plans based on a description. If a user provides a short prompt, they receive a high-level breakdown of tasks. If a description is long and detailed, a plan is more comprehensive.

In both cases, users receive a ready-to-implement project. However, such a plan may be useless if a manager doesn't take care of further configuration, editing, resource availability, task dependency constraints, critical tasks, and other important aspects. It means that a user is completely responsible for this.

This is analogous to conducting a successful airplane flight. Professional navigators don't fly aircraft. Instead, they provide pilots with information to support decision making. Similarly, AI should provide managers with the right data. Its appropriate role is a navigator, not a pilot.

To optimize the situation, companies should establish legally defined accountability. It's about defining responsibilities in contractual agreements and PM job descriptions. There, you can consider how to block AI decisions in the created project plan until a manager manually clicks the "Approved" button.

Furthermore, it's essential to understand the limitations of the AI developer's liability.

Don't assume that you can shift responsibility to the vendor who created a smart tool. Typically, the terms of service for such AI systems include a clause stating that a developer is not liable for any problems or losses incurred as a result of using a system.

Conclusion

The growth of AI in project management is inevitable. However, industry representatives must clearly understand whether they use AI to automate work or to automate accountability. The former may result in progress, while the latter poses a risk.

As AI becomes increasingly persuasive in its recommendations, keeping humans at the center of decision-making can be considered a professional obligation.

It turns out that smart systems provide managers with a superpower. However, the price for this is absolute accountability for any decision made with AI assistance. If you are involved in PM processes and are concerned about accountability, develop your own standards for which decisions AI can make autonomously and which require explicit human confirmation. Regulate and document them within your company and in agreements with clients.

Remember that attempts to shift blame to AI in the professional community are viewed as professional incompetence. Pay attention to this issue today to avoid problems in projects tomorrow.

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About the Author



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Dzmitry's core competency lies in his ability to integrate product development, technology, AI, and business strategy. With deep technical knowledge, he constantly evaluates tasks from a business perspective, focusing on solving real user problems and scaling the product without unnecessary complexity. As CEO, he oversees strategic development, key product decisions, and finance, working at the intersection of technology and marketing. He focuses on removing process bottlenecks, streamlining, and automating workflows where necessary. Dzmitry can be reached at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nedudi/>

About GanttPRO

GanttPRO is a B2B SaaS project management platform built around Gantt charts. It helps teams plan projects, visualize work, manage workloads, assign responsibilities, and track progress in one place. The product is used by more than 1 million professionals worldwide, including teams from NASA, NVIDIA, Sony, and [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com). For more information, visit www.ganttpro.com