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From QS to AI Crystal Ball: My Slightly Terrifying (But Mostly Right) Predictions Journey at House of PMO

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James Garner, Guest Writer and PMG Special Impact Coach

Last week at the House of PMO Conference, I did something that felt equal parts exhilarating and mortifying – I publicly graded my own predictions from 25 years ago while surrounded by some of the brightest PMO minds in the industry. Spoiler alert: I wasn't completely terrible at this whole "seeing the future" thing, which is either validating or concerning, depending on how you feel about my latest batch of predictions for 2035.

The Conference That Gets It Right

First, let me gush about House of PMO for a moment. If you've never experienced this conference, imagine the perfect blend of practical wisdom and forward-thinking strategy, delivered by people who actually do the work rather than just theorise about it. This isn't your typical death-by-PowerPoint corporate event – it's where PMO professionals come to genuinely level up.

The day was packed with sessions that tackled everything from stakeholder management nightmares to

digital transformation success stories. What struck me most was how every presenter brought real battle scars and genuine insights rather than theoretical frameworks. These were practitioners sharing what actually works in the trenches of project delivery.

The audience was equally impressive – a mix of seasoned PMO directors, emerging project leaders, and transformation specialists, all united by a shared recognition that the PMO profession is evolving at breakneck speed. You could feel the collective hunger for practical strategies to navigate the changing landscape.

My Moment of Truth (and Mild Panic)

Standing on that stage, clicking through slides of my 2000 university dissertation titled "Information Technology in Construction: Past, Present and Future," I felt like I was watching my younger self play professional fortune teller. There I was, a fresh-faced Quantity Surveying graduate who'd just traded his calculator for what would become a 26-year journey into the unknown.

The presentation was meant to share my personal transformation from traditional QS to Head of AI and Data at Gleeds, but it became something more vulnerable – a public audit of whether I actually knew what I was talking about two and a half decades ago. In a room full of people who make their living managing complex projects and predicting outcomes, this felt like the ultimate professional stress test.

Here's what made me squirm (in the best way): I got it mostly right.

Scoring My Younger Self's Crystal Ball

The conference audience watched with what I can only describe as amused scepticism as I broke down how my 2000 predictions held up:

Digital collaboration becomes standard – 9/10. Common data environments, BIM Level 2 mandate, remote work explosion. Young James clearly saw the collaborative future coming, though he probably couldn't have imagined Zoom fatigue as a legitimate workplace concern.

On-site mobile IT (devices, chips, printers) – 9/10. Tablets and smartphones are now construction site essentials. IoT sensors are routine. Not bad for someone who was still using a Nokia brick phone and thought WAP browsers were revolutionary.

Industry-wide software standardisation – 7/10. We adopted open standards like IFC and COBie, though seamless integration still feels like trying to get teenagers to clean their rooms – technically possible but requiring constant vigilance.

Digital/IT roles in project teams – 9/10. BIM managers and digital leads are now standard on most projects. This one felt obvious in hindsight, but apparently wasn't in 2000 when "IT person" meant the one person who could fix the printer.

The most satisfying vindication? **"IT seen as strategic enabler, not just a cost"** – 8/10. Leadership

mindset has fundamentally shifted toward digital transformation investment, though we still occasionally hear “but can’t we just use Excel?” in boardrooms.

Total average: 8.4/10. Not terrible for a 23-year-old trying to predict the future of an industry notorious for resistance to change.

The Context That Made It Matter

What made this retrospective particularly relevant to the House of PMO audience was the broader theme running through the day’s sessions: how do we prepare for transformation we can see coming versus transformation that blindsides us?

Earlier sessions had covered everything from agile PMO methodologies to stakeholder engagement strategies, but there was an underlying current of anxiety about keeping pace with technological change. Multiple speakers referenced the challenge of upskilling teams, managing digital transformation projects, and maintaining relevance in an AI-driven future.

My presentation aimed to offer both reassurance and a wake-up call: predicting broad technological trends is actually quite manageable if you pay attention to patterns, but the human side of transformation – the barriers, resistance, and adaptation challenges – that’s where the real work happens.

The Barriers That Nearly Broke Me

Of course, being right about the destination doesn’t mean the journey was smooth. I shared the brutal realities I faced transitioning from traditional QS work to AI leadership, and I could see heads nodding throughout the audience – these weren’t unique struggles:

Scepticism from colleagues – “Why fix what isn’t broken?” became the soundtrack of my early career transformation attempts. Sound familiar to anyone who’s tried to champion new PMO methodologies?

Time investment – Learning new technologies while maintaining full-time QS responsibilities meant countless late nights and weekends. Just like professionals today juggling transformation initiatives with business-as-usual project delivery.

Credibility gap – Being seen as “a QS trying to do tech” rather than a legitimate AI practitioner was perhaps the most crushing barrier. Every leader trying to drive digital transformation faces this same challenge of proving value before seeing results.

Technical learning curve – Mastering complex AI concepts without a computer science background felt like learning Mandarin while running a marathon. The modern equivalent might be professionals trying to understand machine learning, automation, and data analytics while still delivering projects.

The conference audience got this immediately. These weren’t abstract challenges – they were the daily reality of professionals trying to evolve their roles while maintaining operational excellence.

The Skills Revolution We Can't Ignore

This is where my presentation aligned perfectly with other sessions throughout the day. Speaker after speaker had touched on the skills challenge facing PMO professionals, and I brought some sobering statistics that crystallized the urgency:

- 73% of executives report skills gaps in their organizations
- 50% of jobs will be transformed by AI by 2030
- 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet

We're not just facing incremental change – we're in the middle of a skills revolution that makes my 2000s predictions look quaint. The construction industry's productivity challenge is particularly stark. While other industries achieved +2.8% annual productivity growth, construction managed -0.1%. Professional services, according to Bain analysis, will see up to 41% of labour time automated through generative AI.

This isn't a distant future problem – it's happening now, and PMO professionals are uniquely positioned to either lead this transformation or get swept aside by it.

My Terrifyingly Specific 2035 Predictions

Which brings me to the part of the presentation that could set me up for spectacular public humiliation in 10 years. The conference audience seemed split between fascination and concern as I laid out my predictions for 2035:

1. **Agentic AI Runs Projects** – Autonomous agents will plan, allocate, and resolve issues in real-time
2. **Humanoid Robots Join the Workforce** – On-site robots handling repetitive, hazardous tasks
3. **Blockchain + Stablecoins for Payments** – Smart contracts auto-paying teams using digital currencies
4. **Digital Twins Everywhere** – Live, real-time replicas for optimisation and forecasting
5. **Quantum for Instant Project Solutions** – Real-time optimization of logistics, cost, and scheduling

The most ambitious prediction? **AI-Orchestrated Teams** – roles like AI Orchestrator and Change Navigator emerging to manage human-AI workflow. I could see some audience members frantically taking notes while others looked slightly queasy.

The Conference Conversation That Mattered

What made this presentation particularly powerful within the House of PMO context was how it connected with the day's broader themes. Other sessions had explored stakeholder management, change leadership, and transformation delivery – all skills that become even more critical in an AI-augmented future.

During the networking breaks, conversations kept circling back to a central question: how do we prepare

our teams and ourselves for changes we can see coming while staying flexible enough to adapt to surprises?

My answer, refined through discussions with fellow attendees: start experimenting now, build learning into everything you do, and remember that the goal isn't to predict the future perfectly – it's to develop the adaptability to thrive regardless of what comes next.

The Honest Truth About What's Coming

Standing on that stage, sharing both my predictions and the brutal challenges I faced, I realised something important: the future doesn't care about our comfort zones, but PMO professionals are uniquely equipped to navigate uncertainty.

The audience could see I wasn't selling snake oil – I was someone who'd lived through one major industry transformation and was preparing for the next, even bigger one. The robots are coming (literally – I showed BMW's deployment updates). Agentic AI is already reshaping how we work. The question isn't whether these changes will happen, but whether PMO professionals will lead the transformation or be transformed by it.

My journey from QS to AI leadership taught me that adaptation isn't just about learning new tools – it's about fundamentally reimagining what's possible. The skills that got us here won't get us there, but the core PMO competencies of planning, coordination, and change management become even more valuable in an AI-driven world.

The conference reminded me why I love this community: these are professionals who don't just accept change – they orchestrate it. They understand that the future belongs to those who can bridge technical possibility with human reality.

Now, let's see how my 2035 predictions hold up. Check back with me in 10 years – I'll be ready with my report card, hopefully delivered from the stage of House of PMO 2035.

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