

# **My Impressions from the Workshop 'Facilitation Skills for Project Professionals'**

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At the beginning of May 2013 I had a great chance to participate in a facilitation workshop provided by Dr. Penny Pullan, UK – a recognized facilitator, coach, business analysis and project management practitioner, the founder of [Making Projects Work Ltd](#). Based on the feedback from our colleague Anna Brickman who met Penny last year at a BA Conference in London I had expected a valuable and exiting training. The reality exceeded all my expectations.

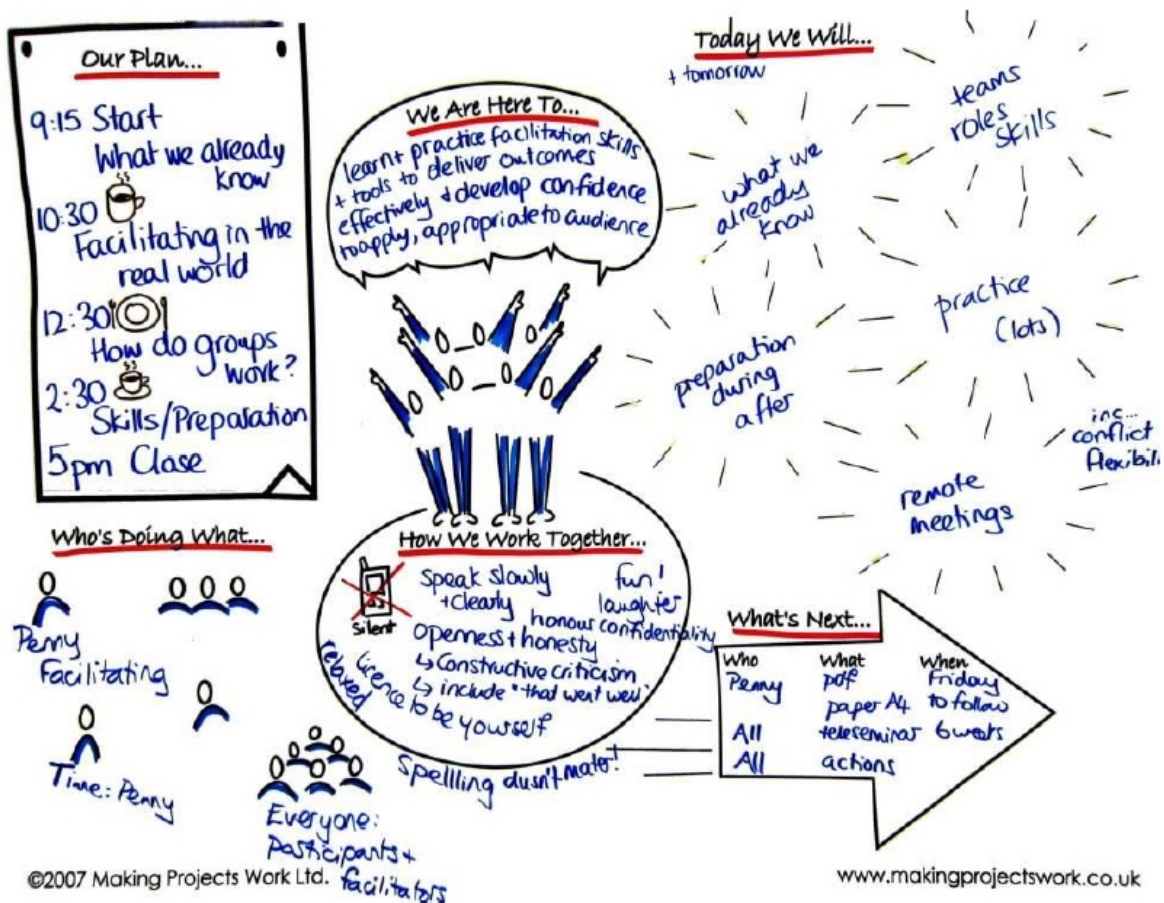
## **Before the Workshop**

I would mention that the workshop started well before the scheduled date. Penny provided all participants with some learning modules and a self-assessment form to find out where each of us was and what we would like to achieve in a year. A pre-workshop phone conversation arranged by Penny was aimed not only to obtain more information to tailor the event for the needs and goals of the trainees, but made me feel a desired guest who deserved a special care at the workshop.

## **During the Workshop**

The group of the participants this time was rather small (usually it is 5 to 8 people). There were five of us – project and program managers and business analysts. All but me were from Great Britain, native speakers, creating language challenge for me. (Most of you know what I mean ☺). At the end of the second workshop day I merged into the flavours of British English rather well, but unfortunately it was time to say 'Good bye'.

Workshop facilities - a spacious meeting room in a hotel – impressed me at first sight. Multiple big movable pin boards, colorful posters on the walls, bright stationery and thick markers for notes, bigger and smaller working tables and many, many, many books related to facilitation and team work.



This template Penny has created and uses to start a meeting.

"The show begun".

Just to be on the same page I'd like to quote one of facilitation definitions here:

"Facilitation is the art of leading people through process toward agreed-upon objectives in manner which encourages participation, ownership and creativity from all involved." (www.grove.com)

The main focus of the workshop was on practice, a lot of practice. Each participant facilitated a number of small sessions (10 to 30 minutes). Penny prepared tasks for each session and some hints about possible techniques to use.

The first session I facilitated was like stepping into cold water for me, which made a huge difference at the end of the training. I felt much more confident and relaxed. I enjoyed minutes of rest while the group was working and no facilitator's intervention was necessary.

It was a miracle: most of participants hadn't met before, but during two days of the workshop we gained a sound feeling of team work in a safe and confident

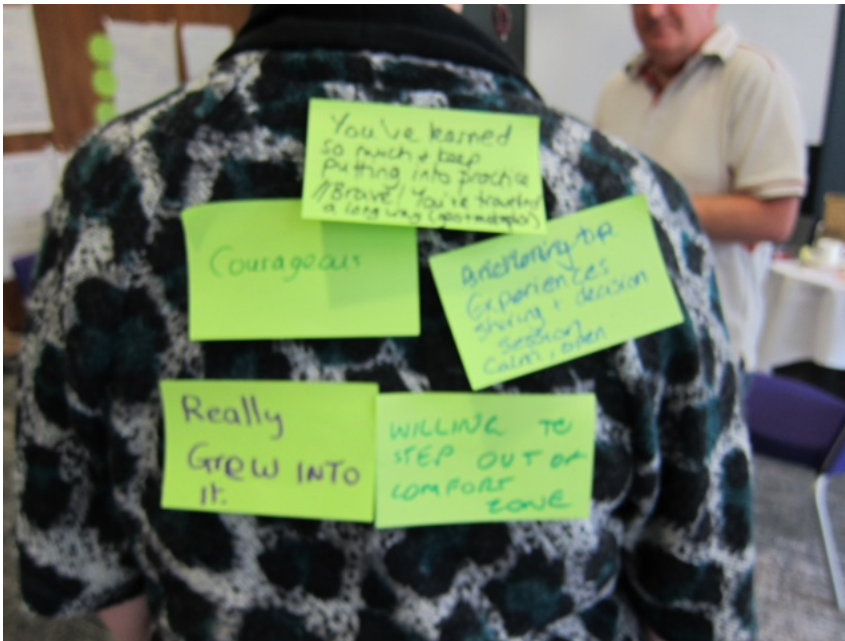
atmosphere, learning, getting and providing support, having fun, playing, capturing and sharing ideas for further development.



*After one of exercises*

It's a worthwhile experience to be mentored by a world class facilitator, like Penny Pullan, to see and feel how excellent facilitation differs.

Many of our facilitation training sessions were sessions with the aim to provide feedback. Each participant including our trainer Penny received and provided feedback on the facilitated sessions and the event as a whole. We tried about 10 different ways to provide feedback keeping in mind the 'golden rule': give and receive feedback as a gift. In addition Penny managed to provide personal written feedback for each of us for every session and I treated it as a special gift, indeed. And again feelings when expecting feedback developed during the workshop from apprehension before the first feedback to excitement and anticipation at later ones.



*This feedback I'd received at the end of the workshop 😊*

By the way, it's a great exercise for all of us and especially for those who are used to 'trolling': provide feedback in the way that a person feels valued, is encouraged and infused to improve and develop his/her skills. Is it easy for you? Do you often receive feedback as a gift?

I believe you've already learned that I'm excited about the training and can tell more and more about it. To cut a long story short, I'd like to list the most memorable topics we've touched upon during the workshop.

These are:

- Multiple team performance models
- Conflict handling
- Remote meeting / Virtual facilitation
- 'Facilitation under fire'

Among the most moving ideas and tips I'd like to mention:

- Use 'what works well' as a basis for your and team development
- Get time to prepare carefully for each facilitated session
- 'Be big' – use big posters, pictures etc.
- Focus on a group not yourself as a facilitator; it's especially important when facilitating 'under fire'
- Distinguish clearly the roles when performing more than one role (e.g. facilitator+business analyst or facilitator+project manager)
- Assume good intent especially in conflict situations
- Use all possibilities to practice in a safe environment (e.g. facilitation of a birthday party is a good idea)

## **After the Workshop**

The next day after the workshop I received an e-mail from Penny with a PDF file documenting fascinating experience of the workshop. All charts produced during two days were there accompanied by attractive photos of memorable moments of the event. A booklet with the workshop materials arrived in a week by mail, thus, I have got a tangible reminder about the thrilling event. It is bright, emotional, inspiring. During the workshop I got carried away by Penny's skills to capture the team's input and visualise it on huge charts. She managed to do it fast and neatly accompanying the text with cute drawings. It made output of the workshop very involving and personal.

And the last but not the least - Penny provides the support for facilitation skills development after the workshop via a forum and 'Reflecting on your Facilitation Practice' module at the website of Making Projects Work Ltd., via scheduled phone calls of the team, e-mails etc.

I'm delighted that I had a chance to meet Penny, to attend the workshop and learn from this positive, professional and devoted person. I wish all our project managers and business analysts could use such a chance some day.

You can find out more at [www.makingprojectswork.co.uk/facilitation](http://www.makingprojectswork.co.uk/facilitation)