

虚拟团队 真实管理

专访虚拟领导力专家彭尼·普兰

撰文 / 尉艳娟 编辑 / 王兴钊



2001年，彭尼·普兰（Penny Pullan）博士原定于9月13日飞往美国参加一个全球项目的启动会议，但由于“9·11事件”的影响，出差计划被搁浅。无奈之下，彭尼·普兰博士只能尝试着与团队成员远程合作项目。自此，彭尼·普兰博士开启了虚拟团队管理的研究工作。

彭尼·普兰博士出版了《商业分析和领导力：影响变革》（*Business Analysis and Leadership: Influencing Change*）、《虚拟领导力》（*Virtual Leadership*）等著作。牵手项目管理20余年，她从未厌烦，在她眼中，项目管理是有趣、丰富多彩的职业，每一天都有不一样的精彩。她是项目管理咨询公司创始人、图书作者、咨询师、演讲家等，但是，“导师”是她最喜欢的标签，因为随着年龄的增长，她尤为享受培养别人、见证不同的人生开启新的可能。

彭尼·普兰博士指出，了解团队成员和建立信任感是领导虚拟团队面临的两大挑战。虚拟团队领导者需要具备以下品质：尊重他人，对不同的观点持开放态度，真诚透明，平

等，关心他人，同理心，自信，言出必行，倾听，有条理，抗压能力。

人们处理视觉信息要比言语信息快得多，因此彭尼·普兰博士建议在虚拟团队管理中要多采用可视化工具。

虚拟团队管理中，激励相关方和团队成员是一大挑战。彭尼·普兰博士强调，在报酬不是问题的情况下，激励团队成员有三大要点：目标（purpose）、精通（mastery）、自主（autonomy）。

谈到对中国项目管理从业者的印象，彭尼·普兰博士坦言，中国的项目管理从业者对工作投入，愿意学习和提升自我，但特别“要面子”，在提问题的时候要充分考虑到这一点。

展望未来，彭尼·普兰博士认为，受虚拟团队、跨文化环境等因素的影响，项目变得愈加复杂，因而项目管理将更加注重软技能。人工智能将帮助人类做一些程序化的工作，我们作为拥有软技能的人将有更多大放光彩的机会。

● Interview

Project Management in Penny's Eyes

Q1. What is it that has motivated you to stay for over two decades in this profession?

Penny Pullan: I want to change the world and make it a little bit better than it would have been without me! Project management has helped me to do this and has also been a lot of fun. I don't think that it is possible to be bored when you're doing such a diverse and interesting job.

Q2. You have so many labels on you such as speaker, author, consultant, director, etc. Which is your favorite role and why?

Penny Pullan: I love my job – which is a real mix of writing, speaking, working with people and running my own consultancy. For me, the key part that keeps me interested is the variety of what I do and the diverse people I mix with. Every day is different. Recently, I have worked in Paris with project managers from a medical devices company, in Southampton with people who are working on geospatial projects and remotely with researchers in the USA! In amongst these, I have had time to think and mull over the topics I've been asked to speak on to audiences around the world.

Q3. Someone has described you as being passionate, goal-oriented and ambitious. How do you describe yourself as a professional?

Penny Pullan: I've noticed, as I get older, that I'm enjoying developing others as much as, or even more than, developing myself. There is something magical in getting alongside someone as their mentor and watching as they open up to new possibilities and then make them happen. So perhaps you can describe me as a mentor, keen to open up new possibilities and potential in all I work with.

Q4. Having been in this profession for over 20 years, what changes in project management have you observed?

Penny Pullan: I've noticed that projects are becoming more and more complex! When I first started out, I remember working on a project that changed things for one manufacturing location. Now, similar projects in that industry are being rolled out around the world, with all the complications of virtual teams and cross-cultural working that's needed to make these global projects work. I've seen

a corresponding shift in the project management profession from thinking that detailed planning and following defined processes is enough, to embracing the softer skills that are so important to make projects work.

Challenges in Leading Virtual Teams

Q5. What are the major challenges in leading virtual teams? What are your suggestions on overcoming those challenges?

Penny Pullan: There are lots of challenges in leading virtual teams! The one that comes out consistently as the biggest challenge for teams is engaging remote team members in meetings. Engaging people remotely is a real challenge. In team meetings, use visuals (more below) and call on people regularly throughout your virtual meetings. Agree that you'll do this as part of your upfront "ground rules" so that everyone knows that you'll call on them. Do fun things as a project team and use as many senses as you can! (There is much more on this topic in my book: *Virtual Leadership!*)

Another big one is developing trust between team members when you don't have time to get to know each other in person. I also find that people often find barriers in language and culture very difficult to overcome. With all of these, taking time to get to know each team member one-to-one is very helpful. When they know, like and trust you as their project manager, then things will become easier. When they understand how you work, what makes you tick, what's important for you and they know more about your culture, it helps. You should aim to learn these things about each person too!

Qualities of Virtual Team Leaders

Q6. In your opinion, what are the top competencies of virtual team leaders?

Penny Pullan:

- Respect for others, including their culture, nationality, language, context, perspectives;
- Openness to ideas from others;
- Integrity, being transparent and avoiding hidden agendas;
- Equality and fairness to your team and sharing the pain, for example, not allowing the most remote person to have to be up late for meetings all the time;
- Caring and empathy, showing consideration for others in your virtual team;
- Confidence in your own abilities and judgment;
- Commitment: show that once you've said you'll do something, you will deliver;

- Listening: I love the Chinese symbol for listening, which includes the ears but also the eyes, undivided attention and also the heart! It's a model for how to listen to team members!
- Organised;
- Calm under stress, to be able to deal with the tricky situations that come up in projects.

There are many more, but these ones would all be very useful.

Power of Visuals

[Q7. You've made a keynote speech titled "Power of Visuals". Would you please introduce it in detail?](#)

Penny Pullan: As humans, we are able to process visual information so much more quickly than verbal information. As our projects become more complex and we work in virtual teams, we should use appropriate visuals to help support our communications in our work. In the keynote, I shared a number of ways to do this and encouraged the audience to overcome their fear of drawing by learning how to draw simple graphics of people!

[Q8. What are your tips on risk management in virtual teams? And how should we deal with complexity in virtual teams?](#)

Penny Pullan: The risk management process is the same with virtual teams. What is harder about virtual risk management though is engaging people in the process! Just as with complexity, use visuals to help and make things as engaging as you can. How can you make risks fun? How can complexity be interesting? How can you split things down to create great challenges for smaller groups to focus on?

Motivators of Virtual Team Members

[Q9. Based on your experience, how to motivate stakeholders and virtual team members?](#)

Penny Pullan: I find Daniel Pink's summary of motivation of knowledge workers from his book *Drive* applies well to stakeholders and virtual team members. He talks about purpose, mastery and autonomy as being important, once payment is good enough not to distract people. So, be clear on the purpose of your project and the bigger difference it will make to people and the world. Let virtual team members develop skills in areas where they'd love to develop mastery. Encourage people to work autonomously,

agreeing up front what needs doing and then supporting without micromanaging!

Tips on Ambiguity

[Q10. When faced with ambiguous requirements in leading virtual teams, what should PMs do?](#)

Penny Pullan: In our complex world, things aren't always simple and there are not always simple solutions to the problems that occur. Instead, things are often ambiguous, with added uncertainty about the future. What many project leaders do in this situation is to use a more agile approach, where it isn't as important to have all of the requirements pinned down right from the start, but that the requirements can be uncovered progressively as the project moves on. Of course, it's important to have a clear vision and high level scope of what the project is trying to do and to work on the lower level requirements over time.

[Q11. What role do you think AI will play in future virtual project teams? In your eyes, what will the future of project management be like?](#)

Penny Pullan: It's going to be exciting! As AI can reduce the more formulaic parts of our role a little, then there will be even more scope for us to shine as individual human beings.

We're in this volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. For me, it's the human aspects of the project manager that will help PMs stay competitive. As I said, AI will do more and more of the things that are formulaic and predictable. The soft skills of relationship building and problem solving alongside other people that we have as humans are what will set great PMs apart.

Impression on PMs in China

[Q12. Have you collaborated with virtual team members from China? What are your impressions on them?](#)

Penny Pullan: Yes! I also have family links with China over many years. My mother was born in Hong Kong, China and my grandparents lived in Shanghai and all over China in the 1930s and 1940s. I find my Chinese colleagues very committed to their work and to learning and developing themselves. I have had to learn to appreciate just how important face-saving is to my Chinese colleagues over the years and to understand how best to ask questions given this. 