Living our everyday life shows that basically the whole world - companies, universities, public administration bodies, almost all of us are online: working, sharing, shopping, gathering information, celebrating, searching for information and learning in the virtual environment.

And from the first part of this Module we already know that there are quite a lot events we can and sometimes, we have to facilitate in a virtual environment, for our teams or trainees as they work and study from home, co-working spaces or might be geographically scattered in all over the world. These might be various workshops, webinars, meetings, training sessions or courses.

But it is not so easy to facilitate any event even in a face to face mode, in your own environment and without any doubts or fears of having low quality voice or picture transmissions because the network is overloaded or your Zoom or Webex simply does not work. Not having a chance to read your audience faces and feel the atmosphere in the classroom takes away even more advantages from you. A spontaneous reaction, changing the strategy or leading the discussion to the safe waters is much more complicated in a virtual environment. You certainly can recall such a situation, might know the feeling or have faced such an occasion.

Scary? No, I would not say so, but certainly the facilitation of any event in the virtual environment for sure requires careful and comprehensive preparation. Even more scary? No, believe me, not. Firstly, you are certainly not alone in such a situation and I can guarantee that after this short video and with support of the other parts of this course you will feel much more confident and self-reliant. So, let's go right to the core: here are a few best practices that are essential for a positive experience for yourself and your learners.

► **Set up your technology for success.**

  o Connectivity is critical. You need a stable Internet connection, a landline phone, a backup mobile phone, and a headset. Two monitors are key—and laptop ones are not ideal. Their screens are small, you cannot view the facilitator guide electronically, and they feel clunky. Do yourself a favour and splurge on the second monitor.

  o Have a backup plan for when technology fails. A hot spot that you can connect to if the power goes out. And yes Murphy's law is always here, and your technology will fail at some point.

► **Ask to work with a co-facilitator/technical partner**

  o It pays to have a technical partner in the virtual classroom. A good producer allows you to focus on the content and the learner experience while he handles logistics and technical snags. I give sincere thanks to all the producers I have worked with in the past.

o Discuss expectations with your co-facilitator before the course. Talk through how you want to communicate, ask for timing reminders, and review how the co-facilitator should handle participant questions in the chat while you are facilitating. For instance, I communicate with my co-facilitator via text rather than WebEx chat to keep the communication lines different from the participants.

► **Leverage interactive features**

o Use a conference platform that allows for interactivity, like Adobe Connect or WebEx Training Center. When these tools are used appropriately, the virtual classroom experience can be as interactive as a typical classroom experience.

o Try to include an interactive element every three to five minutes. Use whiteboard annotations, chat, agree/disagree, and emoticons. Having a balanced mix of these features sprinkled throughout the session will keep learners engaged. For example, it could be as simple as, "Who has facilitated in the virtual classroom before? Green check for yes, red x for no."

o Use breakout groups to send learners into small groups just as you would in the face-to-face classroom. For example, separate learners into virtual breakout groups and ask them to discuss key findings on different topics. Instead of asking learners to use flip charts, add whiteboards to virtual breakout rooms so that learners can draw, type, and annotate thoughts. At the end, bring everyone together and share the whiteboards as part of a large group debrief.

► **Use a discussion board.**

o Use the discussion board to send a warm welcome to the group with your photo before the training or class. Share facts about yourself and expectations for the course. Ask learners to respond with photos and similar information.

o After each session, use the discussion board to post follow-up resources or respond to questions that you did not have time to fully address. Post discussion questions to keep the conversation going between sessions and grow peer relationships.

o When the class is finished, post congratulations, note recommended next steps, and create a thread for learners to share contact information.

► **Personalize the experience.**

o Try calling individuals by their first names and initiating conversations before and after class. Remember experiences and questions that learners share so that you can refer to them in later conversations.

o Think about what you do in the face-to-face classroom and work to create that same vibe in the virtual space. For example, if you do a pace-checker activity in the face-to-face classroom where you have a flip chart that has three circles on it. 1. Slow Down 2. Just Right 3. Speed Up. Learners leave sticky dots to indicate what they need changed in relation to pace. You can use this same technique

as a slide in the virtual classroom. Instead of a sticky dot, learners use their drawing tools. Another useful activity that is used in the face-to-face class is called "one word." You ask a question and ask someone to catch a ball and respond with one word. For example, "One word: What's your favourite travel destination?" Then, participants take turns passing the ball around. This same activity can be done in the virtual chat when returning from a break. Ask each participant to reply with one word in chat to various questions. This allows all participants and you to learn more about each other and re-energize the room.

o As you gear up for your next virtual facilitation, commit to trying one new tip or technique to elevate the learner experience. Once you master one technique, add on another and build from there. Over time, the best practices become habits and part of your normal virtual classroom preparation and execution routine.

Do you want it in written, in bullet list and simpler? Here you are

- ► Use the right tools
- ► Know your audience & setup
- ► Keep it simple
- ► Practice your facilitation tools
- ► Find the right time/time zone
- ► Share the agenda beforehand
- ► Test, test, test
- ► Set clear ground rules
- ► Be kind & understanding
- ► Get everyone on camera
- ► Manage the audio
- ► Use remote friendly exercises
- ► Take regular breaks
- ► Get a co-facilitator to help
- ► Use text chat
- ► Time box activities