

Video 1

From the first Module of our course we already are familiar with the profile of a virtual facilitator, we have also learnt about the necessary skills and competencies of such a person.

To refresh our memory and add some more views, we can define the facilitation as the art of leading people through learning towards agreed objectives in a manner that encourages participation, ownership and creativity by all those involved.

Simply said that the facilitator is the person doing facilitation. And to expand upon it, a facilitator is a “person that makes an action or learning easy or easier”.

In our case we are focused on virtual facilitation. So, who is a virtual learning facilitator? Just one more and maybe the last definition 😊

Virtual learning facilitator is anyone who facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and competences by establishing and proper using of a favourable virtual learning environment, suitable tools and techniques or guidance functions.

If we want to be good virtual facilitators we have to be aware of the fact that online and face-2-face facilitation are different beasts. It's easy to get into trouble when we attempt to bring what we do as face-2-face facilitators or teachers, to the virtual world.

OK then, what are the main differences. Here are the main ones which we can see if comparing virtual and face-2-face facilitation, and tips for dealing with those differences:

- ▶ **Different senses come into play.** You know that the majority of what we communicate to others tends to flow through non-verbal channels. Yet, in most online contexts you don't see the other people in real-time, so verbal and the written word become more important. Get your listening and reading-between-the-lines hats on!
- ▶ **Technology might be a barrier.** Even if it feels like you're there (think telepresence), you're not. Technology is always between you and them. It's never neutral. Get comfortable using the technology, so you can focus on what's really important. The Module 2 of our course might be really helpful.
- ▶ **Feedback comes at a different pace.** In the face-to-face world, you can see (usually) when someone is ticked off, bored or disengaged from the process. And, you can respond, if appropriate, immediately. Well, when online, in the virtual learning environment you may not even be aware that a 'moment' is happening. Routinely check-in with the participants.
- ▶ **Winging it can be disastrous.** Group interactions; plenary, breakouts, games... need to be carefully planned and thought out, in the virtual space. It's much harder to change the process, online. Better to create a structure that allows you to improvise 'inside the box'.
- ▶ **Real estate is reduced.** In a face-to-face meeting, you can look around the room and admire all your work, all those populated flipcharts on the wall. The big picture is always available. In the

online, how will you look around? Keep going back to the big picture, and summarize progress-to-date. Iterate.

- ▶ **Relationships and trust.** A record of our interactions, positive and negative, takes on a different meaning, online. An ephemeral comment made in a face-2-face session, can become permanent, when left in an online chat session. Agree up-front, how these revelations will be dealt with; e.g., confidentiality: what happened in Vegas, stay in Vegas
- ▶ **Administrative clarity.** In a face-2-face session, we are all together, literally. We are physically present, see the same agenda, and can respond as a group, to the situation at-hand. In the virtual one, we are likely all in different locations (and time zones). Become an expert in seeing the agenda, content... from the students' perspective.

...and there more facts we as virtual learning facilitators have to be aware of and work with.

Depending on the learning objectives, we can offer virtual courses in the synchronous and asynchronous or even blended mode as you certainly remember from the Module 1. Each of these has its bright sides, and of course, its drawbacks. However, we as virtual facilitators should be aware that we have to choose and use the proper facilitation tools and techniques for the different modes of delivery.

And finally would you like to get some summary and special instructions on how to become better virtual learning facilitator? Here are some:

- ▶ **Give meaningful feedback**

When participants receive meaningful feedback, they will likely be extra motivated and engaged. Giving good feedback is one of the most important roles of the e-facilitator. People put a lot of effort into their learning. Even the simple act of turning up might have been an endeavour. A good e-facilitator shows consideration for these efforts. Offering only a standardised piece of feedback or a message along the lines of "well done, now move on" with just a few points to consider might be discouraging or even disrespectful. If you're not doing this already, spend some time learning how to **weave feedback**. Weaving feedback is a great e-facilitation technique because it connects participants' contributions to the workshop's themes. When done well, it's an important motivational tool.

- ▶ **Make sure your virtual course/workshop design supports interaction**

The way an online workshop or course is designed influences greatly how interactive it can be. It also impacts on how much your e-facilitation skills can make a difference. If the e-course uses a traditional 'content + discussion forum + quiz' learning design, then there is very little you can do to increase interaction. Discussion forums are tricky if their only function is to 'discuss'. Discussion isn't really a learning task and people get bored of it very quickly – some people won't even bother to join.

- ▶ **Increase your presence but don't interrupt**

The trick is to find the middle ground between being omnipresent (and too stifling) and being invisible (appearing uninterested). The issue is not so much the number of times you post, but rather what conversations you react to and where you step back.

- ▶ **Develop an inspiring online voice**

We all have different online voices and e-facilitation styles. Successful e-facilitators tend to have a similar 'tone': warm, humble, respectful, kind... they genuinely care for the participants and you can really read this between the lines. In asynchronous communication, it's sometimes easy to forget that a

conversation is a two-way street. Good listening (reading) skills are essential to developing an inspiring online voice and ultimately being a great e-facilitator.

Listening isn't the same as watching. Just because we have the technology doesn't mean we need to watch every single move by our learners. When people feel watched, they don't feel safe and will not feel comfortable to fully participate.