

Facilitating online meetings – tips and tricks

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“Facilitation is the art of leading people through processes towards agreed-upon objectives in a manner that encourages participation, ownership and creativity by all those involved” (R. Cserti)

Know your online tool and ensure everyone is familiar with the tools you’re using

No matter how good facilitator you are in face-to-face meetings, remember online environment requires from you to know your online platform that you are using. Test the online system ahead of time. Try to know it as much as possible so that you are comfortable using it and can explain it to others. Teach people to learn to use “mute” button—especially for large groups—so they get used to being on mute when they’re not talking;

It is important to test it in advance and know its functionalities:

- How to share contents such as PPTs and other documents
- Dividing participants into online rooms for group work
- Paying attention to chat section where people are posing questions and comments
- Other...

Engage people

- **Your attitude as facilitator** matters more than you think as people have invisible sensors to whether they will be judged, mocked or put in otherwise uncomfortable position for what they say. Characteristics of good facilitator would be the following:
 - An unbiased perspective
 - Sensitivity to the feelings of individuals
 - Sensitivity to the feelings of the group
 - Ability to listen
 - Tact
 - Commitment to collaboration
 - A sense of timing
 - Resourcefulness and creativity
 - A sense of humor 😊

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- Try out [online energizers](#) : this is a list with a number of short activities that you can use to encourage participant`s participation at the meeting. To “wake them up” and move their minds from other obligations into here and now. Remember you are doing it because you want to support them to focus on the meeting`s content. They will appreciate it in the end as they to want to get the most out of the time they spent at the meeting. Also, when choosing an energizer think of what you are trying to achieve with it and what type of people form your group, know the energizer that you are using and be comfortable with it.
- You also want to keep the make the so called “**safe space**” where they can express their challenges and concerns openly. There are five basic human needs you want to keep in mind when facilitating:
 - To be included
 - To feel safe
 - To be right
 - To be competent
 - To be appreciated
- Design agenda that leaves **balance among presentations and group work**. Follow the so called Minimum Viable PowerPoint (MVP) or in other words, select the least amount of data you need to inform and engage the group. For example, rather than spending 30 minutes talking about a time management technique, you can have people try it. Explain it very briefly in the first 10 minutes, give people a chance to practice the tool in small groups for 10 minutes, and then debriefed the experience for another 10. The same amount time resulted in far deeper learning than if people had just heard it talked about.
- **Encourage feedback**. Rely on your facilitation characteristics listed above and encourage honest, critical feedback not only from the major stakeholders but the whole group. It can also be advantageous getting feedback not only just after a session but also after some time has passed and some of the actions raised during a workshop have been implemented. Also follow the so called 5-minute rule, meaning never go longer than 5 minutes without giving the group another problem to solve. Encourage experts to involve participants. E.g. In 15-minute presentation, there should be 2-3 brief, well-defined, and meaningful engagement opportunities. For example, you could

wrap up presentation with a group-generated list of options, then throw out a polling/voting opportunity to determine the team's opinion about where to begin.

Resources:

- How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings by Justin Hale and Joseph Grenny (2020): [online source](#)
- Online Energizers by Trainings.350.org (2020): [online source](#)
- 9 Characteristics of a Good Facilitator by Mike Gospe (2016) [online source](#)
- Essential Facilitation Skills for an Effective Facilitator by Robert Cserti (2019) [online source](#)
- What is the role of a facilitator? (document available at CEF)
- Facilitating on-line meetings by Daniel Hunter [online source](#)
- Tips for better virtual meetings by Chnthia Clay (2016)

