

## 3 Things Seasoned Facilitators Can Learn from E-Facilitation

by Valerie Uccellani

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I have made a living facilitating learning since I boarded a plane to Guinea-Bissau in 1986. That's nearly 30 years! So I have to admit I was a bit surprised at how much I learned about facilitation when my friend and colleague, Anouk Janssens-Beyernage, invited me into her on-line c-facilitation course recently.

As I reflected on my learning experience, I drew out three insights that might stretch and bolster your own facilitation.



### 1. Give People Time to Think before Contributing.

Many of you are jazzed by Susan Cain's recent work on introversion. So much more than I ever did, I now appreciate the value of giving people time to think before asking them to share their thoughts. It is not just "introverts" who need this. We all do.

In an entirely asynchronous environment, learners get permission and space to step away and contemplate something - deeply - before sharing what they think or feel. A learner can easily log-in, read a resource, contemplate it, go for a walk, do some other work, keep it in the back of her mind, and then post some thoughts. Neither the facilitator nor other participants are staring her down, waiting immediately for her to share her brilliance. The clock isn't asking her to say something smart, or take a position, before the task is over.

It's good to cut time-pressures from our face-to-face meetings or gatherings. But it rarely happens. A face clock is still my favorite facilitator's tool. But, we do a great service for the learners when we give them time to reflect, and to step away from an issue (journal on it, for instance) before having to speak their minds. I find that when we do this dialogue becomes less aggressive, less impulsive, less competitive, and less "positioned."

***TIP: Design meetings and workshops in such a way that issues can be contemplated, over time, with the promise that someone's input will not get missed, even if they choose not to talk immediately.***

## 2. Challenge People with Real Life Scenarios to Solve.

If you are reading this blog you are probably already a believer in having learners “do” what they are learning. For example, you probably use small group, pair, or solo work for responding to an open question, or creating a visual which shows their thinking about an issue. *But how many of us really push ourselves to create tough, problem-based scenarios that will feel absolutely real to people?*

In the recent e-facilitation course, we were asked to imagine that we were an e-facilitator named “Chris.” (Notice the gender-neutral name, carefully chosen so that we could easily envision ourselves as him or her). As “Chris,” we were presented with a panel of names and photographs of the people who were participating in our imaginary e-learning course. We could read their latest posts to the group and were given some background information about their participation so far. We then had to decide how we would, as e-facilitators, respond (or not) to each learner. Would we write to them personally? Would we post something on the course site? If so, what would we say? What tone would we use?

***TIP: Take the time to create tough scenarios for people to grapple with. Make learning safe and also challenging - really challenging!***

## 3. Let People Choose Where They Want to Spend Their Time.

When you look at a well-designed Moodle learning space (Moodle is the e-learning platform used by DynaMind), you’ll see many places where you could go. For example, you might:

- scroll through the central syllabus and preview the different learning tasks for the course; or
- click on resource links that accompany each week’s lesson and delve into some reading; or
- post a burning question in the discussion forum.

For those who like e-socializing, there’s always the option of a “social corner.”

As I perused the learning space for my recent e-facilitation course, I was drawn to some parts of the space more than others. I knew where I wanted to go (and where I didn’t want to spend any time). E-workshops have a chronological structure of tasks, and people seem to appreciate that structure. That said, discussions from previous weeks often keep going as parallel threads: we can have several discussions going at once. People tend to love that aspect. It’s never “too late” – nothing is “finished” if you don’t want it to be.

So I wonder: What if we created more of these “optional” learning spaces and open discussion threads for people in our face-to-face meetings and workshops?

