

Creative Facilitation

[Online]



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The biggest challenge of working online is not the technology. It's about bringing more humanity to online meetings.

And this starts with us.

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Under the hood

The more we do this, the better our planning. We're getting better at knowing how long an activity takes online, and avoiding trying to do too much. We're constantly reminding ourselves to talk less and slow down.

Session 2: *Meetings that matter - how to create memorable online experiences*

In this session we will explore ways to bring online meetings to life by using stories, analogue tools, and activities that are relevant, memorable and enjoyable.

- Different ways of using online activities to increase participation
- How to shift people's thinking
- Ways to share and respond to personal experiences

Design

Part 1: Welcome, entry, orientation and connecting (15 mins)

- Welcome by host/sponsor, Acknowledgement of Country
- Overview
- Paired activity - sharing an object that is just out of camera, with the intention of building connection with at least one other person in the group

Part 2: Shifting focus and breaking trances(30 mins)

- Individual pen and paper activity, then discussions in groups of 3
- Move/Stop - a physical focusing activity that also reflects the challenges of operating in a continually-changing environment

Part 3: Demonstrating trust and breaking habits of small group discussions (30 mins)

- I've Got Your Back, in groups of 4

Part 4: Whole group discussion (20 mins)

- The challenge of turn taking in groups, creating an order by putting your name in chat

Part 5: Closing (10 mins)

- Under the hood
- Thank you's and reminder that this is only a part of the workshop - there's the notes too
- Evaluation poll

What we wanted to demonstrate, and for you to experience

- The importance of people connecting with each other early
- Cut the chatter (from the facilitators) and get on with it!
- The different dynamics of being in pairs, and groups of three and four, as well as the whole group (plenary)
- Ways to shift people's focus/thinking
- How activities can also reflect what's happening in the world eg Move/Stop and continually changing instructions/uncertainty
- Trusting the group to get on and do the activity
- Giving enough instructions to start and avoiding questions about an activity, knowing that they will figure it out
- Giving people an experience of deep connection online through the I've Got Your Back activity. Yes, it is possible to connect online!

Move! Stop!

Move! Stop! is a physical + focusing/listening activity. It can be used to re-energise a group, or to focus their attention, particularly before a tricky task or discussion. Confusion and making mistakes is a part of the activity. And relying on each other. Sort of relevant right now!

Suggest gallery view and all cameras ON. All microphones ON.

For this first activity, when I say MOVE, you move. When I say STOP, you stop. If you are able to get up and walk around, do it, but stay within the sound of my voice.

MOVE. STOP. STOP. MOVE. STOP. MOVE. STOP.

Great! Now, STOP means MOVE and MOVE means STOP.

STOP. MOVE. STOP. MOVE. MOVE. STOP. MOVE.

We are going to add more rules. Now, when I call NAME, you call out your first name.

NAME.

When I call CLAP, you clap once.

CLAP.

STOP. NAME. CLAP. NAME. CLAP. MOVE.

Now, NAME becomes CLAP and CLAP becomes NAME.

STOP. NAME. CLAP. CLAP. NAME.

We are going to add two new rules. When I say JUMP, you will JUMP (even a shrug of the shoulders counts).

JUMP.

When I say TWIST, get into it if you are not moving, find a way to do it if you are moving.

TWIST.

TWIST. JUMP. JUMP. TWIST. NAME. JUMP.

Now, JUMP becomes TWIST and TWIST becomes JUMP.

So, MOVE means STOP. STOP means MOVE. NAME means CLAP. CLAP means NAME.
JUMP means TWIST. TWIST means JUMP.

MOVE. STOP. CLAP. NAME. MOVE. JUMP. STOP. TWIST. CLAP. NAME. MOVE. CLAP.
CLAP. CLAP.

Facilitation Tip

It's ok to have fun. And vary the pace. The best activities are ones that are fun and have a purpose, such as those that help us switch from one type of thinking to another. Holding serious topics lightly is different to trivialising them. Bring fun, pace, and energy to your online workshops to engage people and intersperse these activities with slower-paced, more reflective activities.

I've got your back

Start with individually writing a few notes about an uncomfortable situation you have experienced.

Go through these instructions - and make sure they are also available for people to refer to, for example, in the chat window.

Put people into groups of 4 or 5

The Teller, with video and sound ON describes an uncomfortable facilitation situation they have experienced:

- What happened?
- How did you feel?
- What did you do?

The Listeners listen (with video and sound OFF)

NO questions or clarifications

When finished, the Teller turns their video and sound OFF and stays silent throughout.

Listeners turn video and sound ON – discuss what they have heard:

- What mattered to the teller?
- What do you think was not said?
- What can we infer about the teller's values and strengths?

NB: Listeners should NOT offer solutions or evaluate

At the end, the Teller should turn their video and sound ON and say Thank You!. Nothing else!

If time, repeat.

Facilitation Tip

When putting people into small groups and needing one person to go first, provide some random criteria for who that will be (in this case, I suggested 'the person whose birthday is next'). It saves time and prevents people deferring to others.

Our ten tips for facilitating online

Facilitating online is more challenging because participants are often more easily distracted, and the technology itself can easily become tiring. The job of the facilitator is to bring even more humanity and creativity to the work, not to get mired in the latest technological tricks.

1. Don't force it all online

There's only so much you can do with a group online before fatigue sets in - for the participants and the facilitators - especially given what else is going on in the world, our communities, and our families. We think a combination of synchronous (at the same time, together) and asynchronous (individual, self-directed in your own time) working and learning will become more common. What won't work is trying to force everything you did in a real-world meeting into an online meeting.

2. Don't use meetings to shovel content at people

A good online meeting is not one person presenting for 20 minutes with 30 increasingly bored listeners, many of whom have started doing their emails after 5 minutes. Our principle of not bombarding people with data applies even more strongly online.

3. Online was made for co-facilitating

Co-facilitating online is a must. You need at least one other person who can keep an eye on the tech, but we try and share the actual facilitating too.

4. Online multiplies the risks of teaching trance

Someone asks a question. A perfectly reasonable thing to do. The facilitator answers. A conversation develops between the questioner and the facilitator, while everyone else observes politely or checks their emails. It's even worse if it's a technical question. Equivalent to asking a presenter how the data projector works. Deadening.

5. Breakout or die

Smaller breakouts - and lots of them - will do wonders for energy levels. The plenary vortex is twice as treacherous online.

6. High tech, high touch

Just because you're using clever technology, don't forget the most valuable resource is human intelligence. Don't get people mesmerised by fiddling with screens and keyboards. Cluttered "whiteboards" can create the sizzle of participation but are often noisy and confusing. Allow your meetings to have visceral life, with movement, surprise and emotion.

7. Shift your focus

You don't need to make people spend the whole meeting staring at their screen. Create a reflective activity they can do away from their computer, perhaps using pen and paper to create a different state. Have them find an object in their workspace and use it as a prompt for sharing something about themselves. Create exercises for people to stand and move in and out of screen according to their answer to a question. Maybe get people to wave hands and gesticulate strongly to take their turn in a meeting, it gets them more physically active.

8. Just because you can doesn't mean you should

We've lost count of the number of times the facilitator has said "now just open xyz" and then launches into an activity, and someone pipes up and says "I'm lost". While opening multiple pages, different browsers, and different platforms might be clever and engaging, the opposite might also be true. Proceed with caution.

9. Put even more love into offline materials

Because you can't risk over-loading your online meetings, you need to get creative and caring about the content you share before and after the meeting. You can no longer get away with a badly written document or powerpoint that you can use valuable meeting time to explain. What you send out needs to be appealing and engaging.

10. The paradox of fixed *and* fluid

It might seem incongruous to suggest you be both fixed *and* fluid when facilitating online. You can be clear (fixed) about **what** you will be doing online, and fluid about **how**.

About Creative Facilitation

Creative Facilitation was founded by Johnnie Moore, UK, and Viv McWaters, Australia. We support change and innovation in organisations by hosting better meetings and supporting more effective conversations.

We use a wide range of processes, including many we've invented ourselves, to help groups get the most out of their time together. However, we'd say the most important thing is our ability to respond flexibly to what is happening live, in the moment. For us, facilitation is a craft rather than a science - our clients come back to us because they know we can be trusted to bring presence, curiosity and appropriate playfulness to the most difficult challenges.

[Download our free books](#)

Download free books, *Creative Facilitation*, *Nothing is Written: Learning is an Adventure* and *Bring Your Meetings to Life: A Guide for Community Groups*

You can also [sign up to receive our regular newsletter](#), with a single snippet of interest in each fortnightly issue.

Principles of Creative Facilitation

Let the participants to do the work

Remove obstacles to participation

Activity first, then discussion or analysis (if needed)

Bring abstract concepts alive with games or activities

Be clear why you are meeting, how you will meet, and then consider content

Help people engage with the topic, and with each other

Finish on time

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