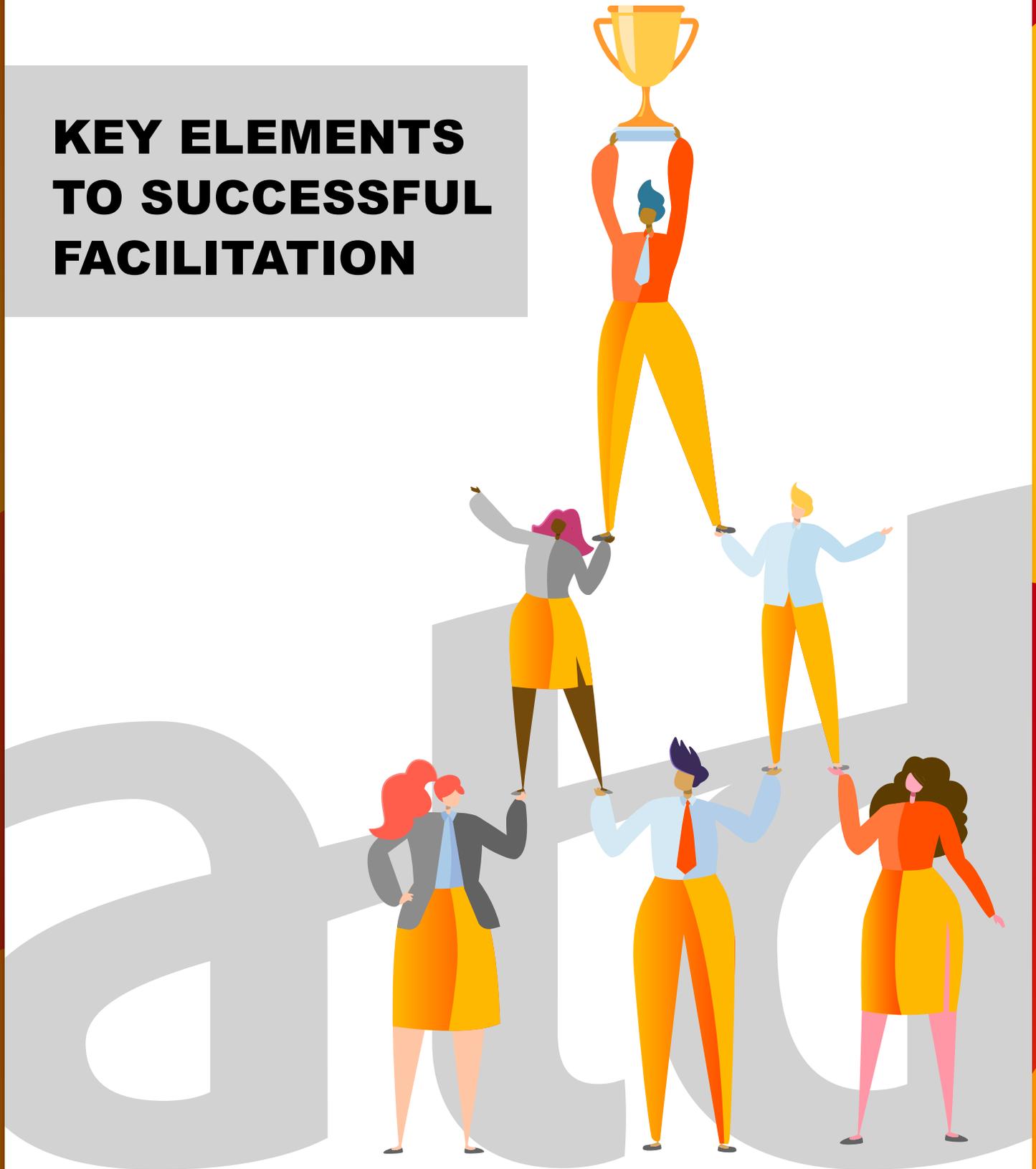


KEY ELEMENTS TO SUCCESSFUL FACILITATION



Facilitator or Presenter: What's the Difference?

The purpose of learning facilitation is to guide the learners to agreed-upon destinations, which are the learning outcomes. As such, facilitating a learning experience is like being a guide on a jungle safari: You point people in the right direction, make suggestions, take steps to enhance the experience for the participants, and give guidance—but you don't do it for them. In fact, you do it with them.

Facilitators assist teams in their meetings to improve how the team works together and comes to decisions, ensuring every voice is heard and conflicts are successfully resolved. In comparison, a presenter provides information to the group, typically in a one-sided delivery to an audience; for example, a presenter may report annual sales numbers or new HR policies to a group of employees. Trainers are also responsible for imparting information to their audience, but their goal is for the group to comprehend and retain the material, so training sessions are usually more interactive than a presentation.

Trainers and presenters are also typically considered authorities on their subjects, but facilitators don't need to have any special knowledge about the subject of the meeting. Effective facilitators also focus on the group dynamics and processes, and are accountable to the group; therefore, the facilitator must earn their trust.

It's a different role from that of a presenter or trainer, where there is a clear and obvious separation between the students and the instructor, and in which the presenter is positioned as an expert. In that situation, the learners are merely passive recipients of the knowledge. In contrast, facilitators operate as impartial peers to participants; they must earn trust not through subject matter expertise, but their ability to successfully guide discussion and consensus while getting down into things alongside participants.

The Roles of Trainers, Presenters, and Facilitators

Trainers and Presenters	Facilitators
Deliver information; assist with group discussions	Assist with group discussions
Share their knowledge; allow members of the group to share	Allow members of the group to share knowledge with one another
Are subject matter experts	Are not subject matter experts themselves, but support a group of participants who are
Focus on individual learning	Focus on group objectives

Roles of a Facilitator

Facilitators wear many hats during a learning event, and all these hats are critical to supporting an effective learning experience. An apt analogy might be the director of a play or movie: The director orchestrates everything that happens, from what the actors say and do, down to minute details of set design. These elements interact to support the goal of telling a story.

By the same token, all the roles facilitators fill and all the things facilitators do interact to support one goal: learning. While wearing these many hats, facilitators are also in charge of both the task (learning and applying knowledge and skills) and the process (how the learning and applying happen) of learning experiences. Each role described in the sections that follow focuses on managing a task or process.

Leader of the Group

Everything you say and do focuses on helping participants learn. As the leader, you create and sustain the environment so that classroom interactions (face-to-face or virtual) motivate participants to acquire new knowledge and skills. Your role is to help participants learn and apply the new knowledge and skills to their jobs.

In this role, the facilitator is in charge of leading both the task and the process aspects of learning. This process role is appropriate for the virtual classroom and online training if the facilitator develops a team approach to the online learners. This can be accomplished by raising hands, using emoticons, and incorporating such techniques as polling, threaded discussions, discussion boards, and chat.

Facilitators encourage group cohesiveness and direction throughout the participation process. They must manage the group involvement process, ensuring group members are treated as equals, encouraging group discussion, suggesting decision-making and problem-solving alternatives, guiding toward resolution, and promoting development of actions and follow-up plans. As leader, the facilitator must help team members to be sensitive to other members, involve all members, and establish and maintain group norms to help them function more effectively.

In the virtual classroom, barriers can be minimized by having participants engage in non-course-related discussion in the coffee shop and team discussion forums, reading others' profiles to gain an appreciation of the group's background, and setting ground rules. The system can be set up to notify facilitators if individuals appear distracted. They can then call on the participants and get them more actively involved.



One thing leaders do in leading the task component is provide feedback on participants' comments and individual and group activities. Individual comments and group discussions are ideal times to assess whether the learners are really getting the material. Your response gives them additional content and, at the same time, feedback on their understanding of the subject under discussion. Practice activities are great opportunities to provide balanced feedback. These same task-oriented actions are appropriate for the virtual classroom—online training requires the submission and response of ideas and content from the participant. Timely and complete feedback is critical for the online learner. There can also be an ongoing give-and-take between the participant and facilitator, which can take place through email, chat, or responses to threaded discussions.

Manager of the Agenda

Having developed a schedule, it is your job to maintain that agenda; this is a task-focused facilitator role. Starting on time, whether in the morning or after breaks, can be difficult to enforce. Even when starting on time is a ground rule, it is still difficult to manage. Yet, starting and staying on time are important for completing all the content and fully experiencing the learning strategies.

If you fall behind, you have to make up time without sacrificing the quality of the learning experience. The learners will notice if you take longer than scheduled for an activity. Some will worry that the learning is compromised, and others will be so busy making sure you take a break at the right time that they will miss the learning!

You must also manage the time for facilitative discussion and various learning activities. It is very easy to respond to a question and then go down the garden path of various topics. Related? Yes. Important to meeting the objectives of the course? Well, maybe.

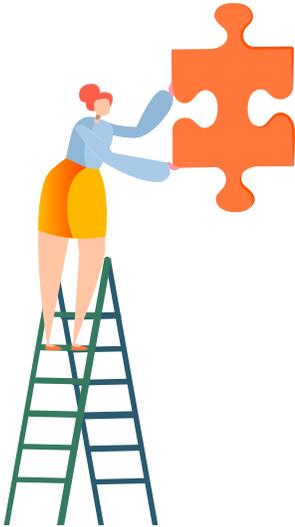
Role Model for Positive Behaviors

You must always—without exception—maintain a positive and professional demeanor; this is a critical part of your focus on process and is equally true for the virtual classroom. While it can be tough, seek positive solutions to constructive conflict; try to see the other's point of view. Your modeling of professional behavior is critical to having a successful program. Professional behavior must also be exhibited in the facilitator–online participant relationship. All communications should maintain a professional demeanor.



Content Expert

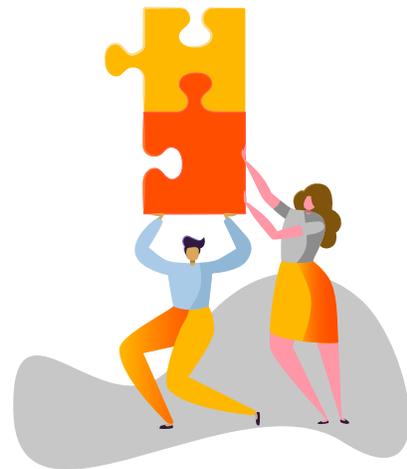
Being an expert in your content is part of your task. To some extent, facilitators have credibility by virtue of standing before the group or engaging learners in an online or virtual environment, and you will not want to lose that credibility. The participants expect you to be a content expert, someone who's able to speak beyond the script of the leader's guide and make the content relevant to them.



How do you do this? One way is to ask and answer questions. You ask questions that take people deeper into the content than they currently are. By then taking their answers and going further or demonstrating an application, you demonstrate your grasp of the content. You can have the same impact by answering questions completely, when appropriate. The familiar technique of handing it back to the group ("What do you think about that?") can work for only so long. At some point, participants want to know what you think and why. This is an opportunity for you to enhance your stance as a content expert.

Consultant

In your role as a consultant, an adviser, or a coach, you are tasked with helping the participants complete a critical task: to make sense of the concepts and apply them to their jobs within the context of their environment. This is the task part of learning, which goes beyond having learners complete action plans or a performance contract. You must help them see the implications of new knowledge and skills for their performance, that of their team, and that of their business unit (process of learning). After all, the ultimate purpose of your course is to close an identified performance gap that is important to the individual and the organization. This role is critical regardless of the learning environment. Although easier in the face-to-face or virtual classroom, the online learner also should have access to the facilitator to ensure that the training transfers to their performance on the job.



Facilitators Have Several Knowledge Competencies:

- the organization (for example, its strategies, objectives, markets, customers, competitors, and products and services)
- adult learning principles
- learning theory and how it is applied to learning
- training evaluation
- needs assessment for a specific seminar or workshop
- organizational, job, and individual performance indicators
- instructional design and development
- diversity awareness as it relates to the implications of participant differences on learning
- methods and tactics to get organizational buy-in and support for learning
- group dynamics
- tactics for coaching and feedback
- technology and software for facilitating in an online and virtual classroom.

Creating the Climate for Learning

Critical aspects of creating a climate for learning include setting up the room and adjusting physical environment factors before the learning event, preparing yourself for the facilitation experience, greeting the learners as they arrive, making the learners feel comfortable as they arrive, and conducting opening activities.



Facilitator Self-Assessment Role Inventory

Use this self-assessment to reflect on your effectiveness regarding the various roles of a facilitator and to evaluate areas for improvement. Below are statements regarding the role of the facilitator. Using the scale provided, indicate the extent to which you fulfill that particular role.

For areas rated 2 or below, identify specific actions you plan to take to improve in that area.

1. not at all
2. to a very little extent
3. to a little or some extent
4. to a great extent
5. to a very big extent
6. to the full extent

RATING

ROLE	1	2	3	4	5	ACTIONS
Creates and sustains an environment conducive for discussions and idea generation.						
Develops group cohesiveness.						
Manages group-involvement processes.						
Promotes the development of action and follow-up plans.						
Establishes timing as a ground rule.						
Starts sessions on time.						
Manages the time to ensure all agenda topics are covered in the allotted time.						

RATING

ROLE	1	2	3	4	5	ACTIONS
Stops on time.						
Asks in-depth questions.						
Uses a variety of questioning techniques and types to generate discussion and facilitate a deeper level of thinking.						
Shares experiences that enhance credibility.						
Uses appropriate jargon for the topic and participants.						
Maintains a positive, professional demeanor.						
Helps participants to understand key concepts as they relate to the topics being discussed.						
Helps others to identify problems.						
Intervenes appropriately when things go wrong.						
Uses a systematic approach.						

RATING

ROLE	1	2	3	4	5	ACTIONS
Uses time efficiently.						
Listens actively.						
Deals constructively with disruptive behaviors.						
Shares objectives with the group.						

Sources:

McCain, D. 2015. *Facilitation Basics*, 2nd Edition. Alexandria, VA: ATD Press.
 ASTD. 2008. *10 Steps to Successful Presentations*. Alexandria, VA: ATD Press.

