Facilitating Dialogue Workshops

24 tips from experts

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Introduction and acknowledgement

This booklet is intended to be your companion in your facilitation journey. Danmission produced this booklet with the help of four experts and young professionals working in the field of dialogue and workshop facilitation, who were kind enough to share their experience in the form of short questions and answers as tips for anyone wanting to facilitate a dialogue workshop.

The booklet is divided into three sections: before the workshop, during the workshop, and after the workshop, and each section includes a selection of tips from each of the experts.

All the questions and answers are based on 24 videos that were filmed with the four experts and from which this booklet was born. These videos are available on the online Dialogue Toolbox Platform and can be accessed through the QR code here attached.

Thank you

Dr. Pierre Filfili, trainer and facilitator with 35 years of experience in Lebanon and abroad, in the public and private sectors and in civil society.

Ms. Mireille Hamouche, Deputy Director and director of peacebuilding, mediation and reconciliation programs at Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue since 2015.

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About Danmission

Danmission is a 200-year-old independent faith-based organization affiliated with the Danish National Church. Danmission works in several countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East through partnerships with religious institutions, civil society organizations, international organizations, academia, and private sector. The programmatic work focuses on three overarching themes rooted in the vision of sustainable existence and peaceful coexistence.

Website: **www.danmission.org**
Facebook and LinkedIn: Danmission Middle East

About Dialogue Toolbox

www.dialoguetoolbox.com is a unique and easy-to-use tool for individuals, groups or civil society organizations that helps them build and facilitate intercultural and interreligious workshops with dialogue exercises both in English and Arabic. It was created by Danmission as a hub to ensure the documentation and sharing of experiences and knowledge on working with dialogue. The platform also features many dialogue-related materials (articles, guides, publications) free to read and download.

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BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

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What is the importance of facilitation? Why is it needed?

Each one of us, you and me, works throughout his/her life to develop and grow. And throughout facilitation, or whenever we are sharing an experience within a process desiring a specific outcome, we really tend to look forward to growing within a process.

Facilitation helps with four main ideas:

1- Sharing experiences between every participant and every individual, because every experience is unique and has a lot to be shared.

2- Building bridges and connections between each other.

3- Embracing diversity.

4- Enhancing creativity.

What should I do to help build confidence in myself as a facilitator before starting the workshop?

Several things contribute to supporting confidence building before starting the workshop and put the facilitator in a state of reassurance:

On the technical level:

- Getting to know the culture of the society in which the session is taking place and respecting customs and traditions.
- Getting to know the participants before the workshop in terms of background and level.
- Good preparation of the training material and the outline of the session.
- Arriving at the hall before the participants and taking care of the logistics in preparation for their reception.
- Receiving the participants one by one, which makes it easier for the facilitator to break the ice.

On the emotional level:

- Calmness is necessary, such as calming the nerves before the session through some breathing exercises or others.
- Inner motivation and high self-esteem.
- Simplicity in dealing with the participants and considering the workshop as an opportunity to get to know others and their experiences.
- Satisfaction with the outer appearance.
- Knowing that error is normal, as we are human beings, and having a smile and positive energy as our constant allies.

What are the technical preparations that the facilitator should make sure of before the session?

Before the facilitation session, the facilitator must first familiarise him/herself with the number of participants and their level. Second, s/he must prepare the content and material of the facilitation session.

As for the technical preparations, we will present some of them:

> The facilitation sessions hall

i.e., its size and the distribution of tables inside it

> Other rooms for group work

> Resting rooms

> Putting the training files in front of each participant

> Audio-visual tools

such as a computer, a display screen, and slide shows

> A flipchart and pens

> Minimising the sources of disturbance, ventilation, and air-conditioning

> Stationery and tools needed for each session

Everything related to technical preparations is done in coordination with the training coordinator.

What are the technical details to know about the region where I am giving a workshop?

While implementing workshops, whether

physical or **online,**

sometimes we take certain details for granted.
Therefore, before our session,

we should check the availability of certain services, such as electricity and the availability of a projector.

we should also make sure that the participants have good internet connection.

Sometimes we use platforms that require a very good connection, which is not accessible to all participants. Thus, we need to find alternatives that require lower internet bandwidth.

If we are facilitating an online workshop, and we want our participants to benefit the most from the content we are providing, it is good to have **technical support** accompanying us throughout the session, in order **to avoid technological glitches**.

5 What do we need to know about the participants before they come to the workshop and why? What difference would we make by knowing some of their characteristics beforehand?

One of the facilitator's tasks is to identify the cultural and educational background of the participants, as well as their experiences and expertise in field work.

The most important things to know about the participants are:

- Level and educational attainment
- Years of experience in field work
- Age
- Training courses they have attended previously
- Characteristics
- Needs and challenges related to the session content

All these things contribute first **to preparing the contents and level of training**. Secondly, **they contribute to the preparation of the training plan**. They also **contribute to the preparation of concrete examples, arguments and proofs**. In addition to **helping with the preparation of activities and exercises**. They also **help the facilitator in preparing the training materials**. And most importantly, **knowing the participants ensures that the sessions are appropriate for them and their needs**, rather than being theoretical and general.

How do I build the objectives of the facilitation session? How do I find the appropriate contents for the session?

The objectives of the facilitation sessions are nothing but the expected outcome at the end of the sessions. They relate directly to the people i.e., the participants, their needs, and their expectations. These goals should be specific and measurable.

Why do we set objectives for facilitation sessions?

First, to determine the contents: the contents of the facilitation sessions or the training contents. Secondly, to define the training methods, and to define the training programme. Finally, to facilitate the measurement of the facilitation sessions.

There are three types of objectives for the facilitation sessions:

Knowledge-related objectives
such as disseminating facts and information.

Attitude-related objectives
such as taking positive attitudes on a particular issue.

Skill-related objectives
such as life skills or technical skills.

When formulating objectives, we must first take into account **who the actor is**, secondly **what he/she will do**, thirdly **what are the conditions and the situation**, fourthly **what is the content**, and fifth **what is the required level**.

Thus, when we set the objectives of the facilitation sessions, it is easier for us to put those contents into place.

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What is more important in a facilitation session: safeguard the process of dialogue or reach a certain desired result from the session but putting the process at risk?

Before entering any dialogue session, especially if the dialogue is between people of different religions, we as facilitators must **be prepared for the possibility that we may not achieve the desired goal from the first time**.

We must keep in mind that the dialogue is more important than any result we want to achieve.

Therefore, the dialogue process is our priority. Because in the end, if this process does not meet the needs of the people present with us in the session, we will not reach the desired result.

So even if we decide that we want to reach a certain result in one session, **we must accept the possibility that it may take more than one session to reach it**. Thus, the priority should remain maintaining the smooth flow of dialogue between the participants, even if the desired outcome requires more time to be achieved.

Mireille Hamouche

Should the facilitator be more people-oriented or task-oriented?

Interfaith dialogue and the peacebuilding process are not a job.

This idea must be kept alive in our minds as facilitators before entering any activity of this kind. So, I have to know that the training I'm participating in or the discussion session I'm facilitating is a very small part of a long-term process. Therefore, for this process to succeed, it must **always take into account the needs, expectations, and aspirations of the participants who are with us in this dialogue**.

Our priority should be that **the dialogue resembles the people participating in it and meets the needs and aspirations** based on which they came together.

So, people are always more important than any task we want to complete.

Mireille Hamouche

DURING THE WORKSHOP

What are the ethics of facilitation that the facilitator should always respect?

One of the definitions of professional ethics is:

"The system of ethical principles and code of practice that represents the standard of proper professional conduct".

The facilitation profession's ethics are related to various levels:

1. The facilitator and the facilitation profession:

The facilitator realises the importance of his/her own self-development by constantly being aware of all developments in the field of training and by working on continuous self-culture in his/her field of specialisation. The growth of the professional facilitator positively affects the level and fields of training in general.

2. The facilitator and the participants:

The facilitator should pay attention to the privacy of the participants, to professional secrecy, and to not discriminating between the participants.

3. The facilitator and other facilitators:

The facilitator seeks to respect the other facilitators in their presence or absence and never criticizes them. The facilitator does not attribute certain works to him/her if they were prepared by other facilitators, as intellectual property is one of the important foundations for facilitation.

4. The facilitator and the training institution:

The facilitator respects the work methodology of the training institution with which s/he works. S/He requests the approval of the training institution before using its materials or references in other projects.

5. The facilitator and the society:

The facilitator respects the values, beliefs, and customs of the society to which the participants belong, as well as the values and customs of all societies and does not seek to criticise or insult them.

10 How is the safe and positive space described in facilitation, and how do I build it?

The safe space in facilitation has two aspects: the logistical aspect and the moral aspect.

The logistical aspect:

The facilitator must ensure that all technical preparations are made before the start of the facilitation sessions, such as the seating arrangement of the participants and others.

The moral aspect:

- The facilitator should respect the social and cultural background of the participants,
- Take into account people with special needs,
- Reduce the formal atmosphere,
- Encourage free expression of opinion,
- Not discriminate between the participants,
- Commit to professional secrecy,
- Respect the privacy of the participants,
- Add some energising exercises to create a fun atmosphere in the hall,
- Respect all opinions,
- Respect the differences between the participants,
- Call the participants by their names,
- Finally, s/he should have social and emotional intelligence.

What are the main elements to take into consideration while facilitating any session?

> **"Every negative experience holds the seed of transformation "**
>
> – Alan Cohen

I personally say that every experience is an opportunity to grow, to discover. So, when talking about any facilitation session, keep in mind to experiment, to discover; discover yourself, give a chance to others to discover themselves, and discover "You" between each other. Play! Make it an opportunity to learn from because there is no ultimate, rigid facilitation technique.

It's always the process that makes us grow.

What are the principles of interactive and active participation that the facilitator should respect during facilitation?

Active learning is an educational philosophy that relies on the learner's positivity in the learning situation and aims to activate his role in learning through research, work, experiment, and self-reliance in obtaining information, acquiring skills, and forming values and trends.

Active learning theory is based on the fact that participants:

- Learn through applying and sharing,

- Do not like to listen and receive information for a long period of time,

- Learn in different ways,

- Prefer to exercise constructive criticism during participation,

- Learn easily if they are present in an atmosphere of participation and cooperation,

- Prefer to replace the equation of knowledge = power, with the equation of knowledge = technical assistance,

- Value feedback on their performance and behaviour.

Finally, fostering dialogue, discussion, and experience is the best translation of active learning.

What are the characteristics and competencies needed in any facilitator? Part 1

Any facilitation requires from the facilitator a set of competencies and skills that can be divided into two categories:

The first category is communication:

When talking about communication, I mean

the words that we use

the eye contact

the posture

and even
the analysis
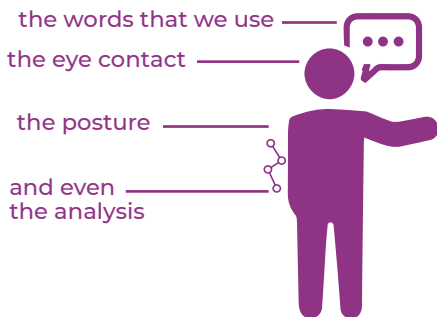
All those skills help the facilitator to create linkages between the participants themselves and the participants and the facilitator.

To ensure proper communication flow, I personally use multiple intelligence techniques in any facilitation. I make sure to use different methods:

visual

auditive

making people go
around and play
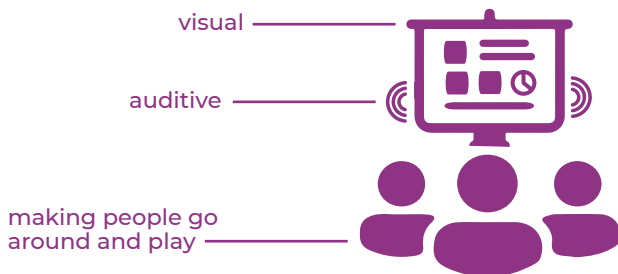
to make sure to include everyone and to feel that every person's participation and engagement really matters.

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What are the characteristics and competencies needed in any facilitator? Part 2

The first category was about the communication skills. The second one is about **being organised and prepared.**

You can never go into a facilitation without:

- **preparing your subject matter,**

- **knowing it well,**

- **and making sure to know who your participants are.**

What helps me personally is having a draft agenda.

- **Why a draft?**

  Because as a facilitator I have to be very flexible. I can see how the participants are interacting and I must adapt accordingly.

  This is a strong skill that every facilitator should have or should acquire, to be able to engage every participant in a different matter.

What are the facilitator's verbal communication skills that provide a good facilitation environment?

Communication in facilitation sessions is the core of the session.

It falls into three channels:

Verbal communication

Non-verbal communication

Written communication
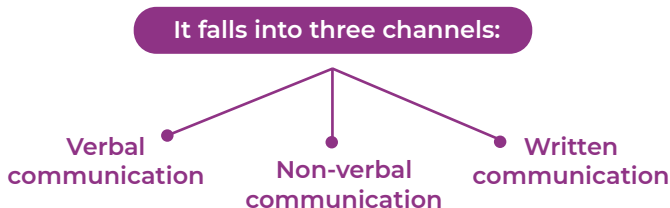
We will focus on
verbal communication, which falls into **two aspects,**

a technical aspect

a moral aspect
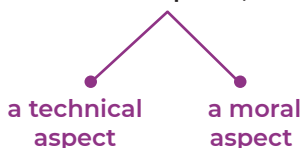
Regarding the technical aspect,

we recommend that the facilitator **starts his/her conversation with confidence**, and that **s/he makes sure that the participants are listening**. S/he should also **adopt a language appropriate to the level of the participants**.

As for the moral aspect,

we advise the facilitator to **respect and not offend the feelings of the participants**. Second, to have **the ability not to transform rational discussion into emotions and feelings**. Third, to adopt a **positive approach with respect for the human dignity of the participants.**

How do I develop my non-verbal communication as a facilitator to attract and motivate participants to participate?

Non-verbal communication is the secret of the facilitator's profession.

- The facilitator should **pay attention to the way s/he looks** in order not to exclude anyone from the participants.

- S/He also must **go along with what the participants are saying by nodding his/her head** to confirm that s/he is present with them and that s/he is ready to respond.

- Then s/he must **pay attention to his/her voice** because the voice is part of non-verbal communication, and it includes tone, rhythm, articulation, and volume.

- S/He must also **pay attention to the direction of his/her shoulders** in order not to exclude anyone.

- It is **preferable not to sit behind a table** so that it doesn't constitute an obstacle between him/her and the participants.

- The facilitator must **move between the participants**, respecting the necessary distance between them.

- There must be **a harmony between the speech rhythm and the walking rhythm**.

- Finally, s/he should **pay attention to his/her outfit** as to respect the culture of the participants.

What is the role of the language used in facilitation?

While giving a training session in a certain country, it is important to ask

what language the participants speak

in order to avoid using terms that might not be understood by everyone or by people speaking certain dialects.

It is also important to

avoid using stereotypes and generalisation.

It is good to note that we should

avoid mixing foreign languages together in order to be understood by everyone.

For example,

I was once giving a training session in one of the countries we work in and I used a term which had a negative meaning, while I used the same term later on in a different country, and it was perceived in a very positive way by the participants.

18 How can I be culturally appropriate as a facilitator?

It is very important to be culturally appropriate when giving a training session or delivering a workshop. And in order to do that, there are a few tips to keep in mind:

- First of all, it is very important to **know the culture of the area we are giving the training in**, and it is also important to understand the different traditions available in this area.

- Also, it is important to **refrain from using any culturally inappropriate examples** that may cause certain controversies.

- **The activity details should be adaptable and flexible**, in terms of being able to change them to fit the training setting or the culture we are delivering the training in. The main goal of the training or the objective of the session should not change. However, the small details of the implementation can be adapted to fit the situation we are in.

For example,

if we are doing an activity in which we need a female participant to lay down on the ground to be drawn, this may not be accepted in all areas we might be implementing in, therefore, it is good to know that we have alternatives, and in this case this can be having the participant stand in front of a wall instead of having her lay down on the ground.

Adriana Bou Diwan

How to deal with any tension between the participants?

Before starting any activity or any agenda, it is very important that the facilitator and the participants agree on the rules of the session.

The rules of the session are important because

they constitute for us as facilitators the reference we turn to when

any difference of opinion   **or**   **tension arises**

In peace building and interfaith dialogue sessions, there are times when discussions take place around sensitive and personal issues, ideas, and beliefs, and thus tensions can arise.

Here, the rules of the session ensure that the difference in viewpoints and discussion about these differences will remain within the limits of **mutual respect** and ensure that there is space **to reach an understanding** within the minimum limits of respect.

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What are the priorities of the facilitator when tension happens between participants and why?

In any activity or gathering that brings together participants from different backgrounds and religions, it is normal for a conflict or a difference of viewpoints to arise, this is legitimate. In this case, the most important thing the facilitator should do is **maintain a safe space**.

What does "safe space" mean?

It means that people feel safe, that they are certain that other participants do **not pose a threat to them**, no matter how different their points of view are. But safe space also means **being comfortable with the idea that we can make mistakes**. As a participant, I know that the ideas that I present and the opinions that I bring with me to the session **may be true or false**, and I have the space to confirm or correct them without any problem.

Mireille Hamouche

What can be done in case there is a strong disagreement between the participants?

When there is a difference of opinion between the participants, the first step that the facilitator takes is to **ensure that the discussion proceeds smoothly**. Sometimes the differences are simple and do not hinder the progress of the discussion, and therefore it is possible for any participant to clarify his point of view since any topic has multiple points of view, and **there is no such thing as right or wrong**.

However, if the difference in viewpoints is so severe that it hinders the progress of the discussion, in this case **the facilitator proposes a short break** and continues the discussion separately with the concerned participants to reach a compromise, not an agreement because as we mentioned earlier, there is no right or wrong.

What is important for us is to reach the conviction of both parties that each subject has several points of view, and each person has his own experience in this matter.

Mireille Hamouche

AFTER THE WORKSHOP

What are the evaluation items based on the Kirkpatrick model in training, and how do I apply them to assess work progress on the one hand and learnings on the other?

To evaluate facilitation sessions, Donald L. Kirkpatrick published in 1959 the four levels of evaluation.

The first level:

Reaction:

through which the facilitator can know the opinion of the participants about the objectives, the contents, the methods, and the facilitator in general.

The second level:

Learning:

It is linked here to measuring the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes presented in the program. There are many different measures to identify the output, including pre- and post-tests.

The third level:

Behaviour:

that is, the extent of improvement in behaviour and the ability to apply the learnings in the field of work.

The fourth level:

Results - Impact:

that is, the effect resulting from the participant's performance on his/her work or his/her environment in the long run.

Dr. Pierre Filfili

Donald L Kirkpatrick first published his ideas in 1959, in a series of articles in the Journal of American Society of Training Directors. The articles were subsequently included in Kirkpatrick's book "Evaluating Training Programs" (originally published in 1994).

23 How do I assess myself after the workshop? What are the items for a self-assessment? What are the future steps to develop my facilitation skills?

A template for monitoring and evaluating the trainer's performance (it can be used as a self-evaluation for the trainer):

The Trainer's Performance	Notes on Performance
Behaviour and communication of the trainer during the training session	
1. S/He welcomes the participants and tries to call them by their name	
2. S/He shows respect for the participants and follows a professional behaviour in dealing with them	
3. S/He allows the participants to ask questions and answers them	
4. S/He listens attentively to the participants	
5. S/He Adopts a good standing posture while conducting the session	
6. S/He makes eye contact with the participants most of the time	
7. S/He speaks in a voice that is clear and loud enough to be understood by everyone	
8. S/He uses active methods to encourage participation	
9. S/He brings the discussion back to its original path in case of deviation from the topic	
10. S/He uses questioning and paraphrasing to ensure that participants understand the topics presented	
11. S/He adjusts the rhythm of the session to the participants' comfort	
12. S/He possesses self-control during a discussion	
13. S/He is proficient in the use of audio-visual tools and training equipment	
14. S/He provides the necessary materials about the training subject	
The trainer and the content of the training session	
15. S/He clearly presents and explains the objectives of the session	
16. S/He explains the importance of linking the topic to the participants' experiences	
17. S/He presents the content of the session in a logical and orderly manner	
18. S/He has extensive and sufficient knowledge about the material s/he is presenting	
19. S/He begins and ends sessions on time	
20. S/He respects the session plan while conducting the session	
21. S/He reviews and summarises the main points at the end of the session	
22. S/He encourages the participants to draw conclusions by analysing the answers	

Dr. Pierre Filfili

How can the facilitator develop the characteristics needed?

When I imagine that I have developed all the characteristics and skills needed to facilitate the best session ever, I should know that I still have a long way to go.

No one has the perfect characteristics and skills developed. It's a continuous journey in which each one of us should be working on a daily basis to do better within a facilitation session. Each person can develop his/her own technique to track the progress. I personally use a very simple technique:

I track my progress through a journal.

After every facilitation,

- **I go back to my journal.**

- **I write the important key points that I have achieved, the strengths, and the points that I need to work on.**

- **I always refer to the participants themselves, who give me constructive criticism.**

So I go back to my journal, look at my patterns and put new goals on how to develop for the next session.