



iMOtion

Framing Informal Moments (IM)
in Trainings

Six Myths about Online Learning

In this blog article, the author takes up a number of myths about online learning, along with reported experiences and challenges, and supply these with proposals for motivation and improvement.

From Anne Rise, adult educator, June 2023

Online learning opportunities are increasing, especially after the years of Covid 19 with its frequent lockdowns and increasing “work-from-home” situations.

The increasing awareness of climate changes and minimizing of CO2 are adding to the many reasons for making the best use of modern IT technology, when meeting, research sharing, and innovating procedures. No matter how interesting and refreshing it is to travel to participate in a course, conference, meeting, or to share your knowledge by delivering to these events, it might be more reasonable to save time, money, and climate by staying, where you are and participate virtually in an online or hybrid event.

More and more advanced platforms support with numerous features to optimize the outcomes. With the use of just some of the features available, we might make any meeting or learning opportunity even more efficient and valuable than the traditional get-together, with less expenses and bigger outcome.

As a teacher and facilitator of different levels of leadership learning, from academic post-graduate courses to international girl guide training platforms, and during the Covid 19 lockdowns even facilitating dog training webinars, I have tried several platforms and reflected about the pros and cons of online learning in comparison with traditional on-site learning situations.

What can impact the learning outcome positively; and how can we overcome the challenges, that often occur when you sit in front of a camera and talk to a number of people who, at least when their cameras are on, look as if they are looking at you?



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In our iMOtion project we had a lot of discussions about the pros and cons of online learning. We organised a ‘**discussinar**’ about the topic and you find some of these arguments incorporated below.

Myth #1: Presence: It is best to be in the same room with your fellow learners and the facilitator.

Why do I claim this as a myth? Well, my experience during these years of development of online learning is, that online sessions sharpen the need for participants’ concentration. Further **it enables more people to participate**, even with a slight illness or with physical, economical, or transportation disability. You can save time and money by arranging online events, and have some people participating, who would never get the opportunity to attend an on-site learning training, due to time and expenses to travel from abroad.

Online Learning enables people to participate at least partly by attending recordings of the sessions. Recordings can also be used for repetition, when understanding or the language is a challenge. So not many excuses for not attending are valid.

During the online session, you can still chat and greet each participant directly in the chat opportunity, even without disturbing the facilitator or other participants than the one, you communicate with.

Many participants feel more comfortable in their well-known room, office and chair, so that they can focus more on the topic. They are also not disturbed by e.g. smells, tapping feet, and allergic attacks. It is also a good way to avoid virus exchange, at least the biological ones.

Myth #2: Time: Online sessions must be shorter, as participants loose concentration.

Online sessions do not have to be shorter, but **they are often shorter** than on-site, as people concentrate while looking at the screen and listen through their headsets.

Of course, participants can look at other pages on their individual screens, but they could also look at the agenda, further information about the training topic, or helping each other by finding needed facts.

The trend is towards shorter, more frequent, and more efficient meetings and learning sessions now that transportation expenses are not an issue, and the implementation of the decided and learned activities are easier fulfilled. This can mean that more information is shared in shorter time. In order to digest as well as test and implement the learned, it is useful to have more and shorter online sessions, which also makes trainings fit a busy working day better.

And finally, taking and finishing one topic in one working session, before the next, is more efficient and less stressing. For informal moments that means that in shorter sessions,



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breaks in between are not that much needed any more, but can take place before and after a session.

Myth # 3: Concentration: You easily get disturbed by the surroundings or messages on your screen.

Many workplaces are open plan-offices or special areas where many people work together on different topics and with the use of telephone, computers, and useful discussions.

Multitasking is a deed, many people say – yet, multitasking often ends in ‘more multi than tasking’, as other things happening in your working area can be disturbing.

Some people claim that we are disturbed in our actual task making every 8 minutes – and that it takes about 30 minutes to get ‘back to work’ after a disturbance. No wonder that we feel that tasks are piling up!

So maybe you actually concentrate better in online learning situations, where the screen and headset can help keeping you focused and leaving out disturbances. I have seen on sports activities that some sportspeople wear a headset, when warming up for the next challenge, to concentrate better on their task.

For online meetings the opportunity for the minute taker to write online can support the concentration of the participants, as they can follow the notes and thereby avoid losing track.

Myth # 4: Eye contact is essential when dealing with sharing of information and opinions.

Indeed, eye contact is one of the most convincing gestures when teaching, instructing, and facilitating both very factual as well as sensitive topics. Who has not been in doubt about the truth of something told by a person wearing dark or even mirroring sunglasses?

On the other hand, when given on-site lectures, the participants often look more at a projector screen, a board, or at our own notes than in the facilitator’s eyes.

So why do we feel that we lack eye contact in online sessions, when we actually have eye contact with several people – though tiny squares, yes – and even the power point screen, and the agenda at the same time? Could it be that having multifocus means that the brain has not decided which eyes to have contact with? Or is our brain feeling that the eyes look at a screen and not the pictures in the screen? Do we look more at our own face at the screen than the others? (Your own profile photo can be left out as a choice in most programmes.)



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One thing I know is that when I participate in a session that is using avatars – e.g. Second Life – I may look at the avatar’s eyes, but I do not feel the eye contact, even though I suppose the person ‘behind’ the avatar is looking at the eyes of my avatar. That feels unpersonal, while I have taught myself to feel close eye contact with others in an online session. If I feel the contact is weakening, I interrupt the session with a story, a joke, or I suggest a small exercise, where I can watch the reactions of the participant in the little square. I realise that any kind of change in voice, picture, position, or attitude is calling back eye contact from the participants. A good facilitator ‘interrupts’ the session frequently by asking individual or group reflections, inviting to give comments or questions in the chat, or by reminding the audience of a mutually experienced fact or story, earlier in the session.

I am looking forward to the day, when Internet connections are so strong, that everybody is able to have their cameras on during the whole sessions – then it feels almost like being in the same room.

Talking about cameras, there is another challenge, when people use more than one screen to their computers, and the camera is placed at the screens they are not looking at. This technological issue is easy to solve, as we may ask participants to change or move camera.

Myth # 5: Group activity is difficult in online settings.

I must admit that I was terrified when arranging my first lesson with group activities, using break out rooms. Today I use break out rooms more and more, both as team activities, and to make more people active and articulating. I can easily re-arrange groups if group members are missing, and I look forward to arranging a ‘café discussion’ with partly rotating groups. And the best of it all: when I want participants back in the plenary, I just push a button, and they are back. Think of an on-site session, when participants going back from a group room make excursions to the bathroom, coffee machine, or just walk and talk on their way back – and the polite participants and the facilitator wait for everyone.

An advantage about break out rooms is, that it does not take much time for the facilitator to go from one room to another – just a click. Often the group members hardly recognize the facilitators in the room, and they can leave again without disturbing the ongoing activity too much.

I have had success by making an extra break out room as ‘the water tank or coffee room’ or participants’ free chatroom – where I never go as a facilitator, but they can go and meet and feel free to talk. This room can also be open before and after sessions and thereby make everybody feel that they are ‘almost together’. In this room, brain teasers or topics related with extra information can be made available.



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If you are creative, you can reorganize well-known physical team activities into on-line versions. When running a blended learning training, you organise some parts of the team building games on-line and then bring the outcomes to the on-site sessions.

Group activities like 'Walk and Talk' can be arranged, using mobile phones and Facetime, Messenger, or WhatsApp.

Myth # 6: Technology is scaring!

Many of us suffer from CKA (Computer Key Allergy). We are afraid of what will happen, when we touch the wrong key, and especially when we hit the Enter key.

Think back to, when you learned to drive a car or use a new electric kitchen machine. Did it explode? No, and every time we meet new things, that are invented to help our lives, we hesitate to try. Well, children don't – they just try, and learn by doing so.

I am impressed how often I 'just try' and succeed and people say: "Wow, I didn't know it is that simple". Of course, there is not only the national language barriers, when working with computer technology – there is also a special terminology and numerous icons to learn. But if we are willing to enter into this world, we will learn that icons and terminology were obvious to the inventors, and we will become familiar very soon.

Children can be our role-models. Nowadays they are born into the computer age, and they do not need to know the programming language. They touch and learn, and thereby teach us to be just as curious and try out.

Another benefit of online learning activities is the ability to easily share screens and even take over somebody else's keyboard, and to record the lesson. So easy to repeat and repeat, until you can use the most advanced features of the many online learning programmes and assisting opportunities.

There are many more myths: These were some of those I meet most frequently, when I explore the brave new technological world.

We just invite you to be curious and try out.

Talking about benefits on online learning

In another blog article, I will reflect on benefits of online learning in order to convince the sceptic part of the global population.

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