ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Who is the facilitator of a virtual classroom?

The figure of the facilitator in online courses is essential when deciding to move from a classroom course to eLearning, but that's not all. Who is he and what does he do exactly?

The facilitator is born in conjunction with the widespread use of eLearning in the early 1990s to accompany students and trainers in the transition from the real class to the virtual class. Today the task of this figure is far from exhausted, on the contrary, it has been enriched with new challenges. The role of facilitator is always required both by the new sectors of public administration and private companies recently passed to eLearning, and by companies that want to improve the learning experience in live sessions. In all this, what does the facilitator do and how has it evolved?

1. First generation eLearning facilitator and guide for traditional trainers

Some time ago the school reform required by the Buona scuola law, aimed at online training courses as a good practice to encourage learning by making funds available for the training of a facilitator. The one described is an expert in educational technology able to assist teachers who want to turn their teaching resources into an online course. This is what we could call a first-generation facilitator, a teacher or a trainer who, thanks to his technological knowledge of LMS, learning management system, and computer science in general, manages to guide the trainers who are preparing to become instructional designers or employees who must take online training courses for the first time.

2. Second-generation eLearning facilitator and learner involvement

This is the starting point for the second-generation facilitator who, in addition to knowing technically the e-learning sector, also has a personal competence in managing a virtual classroom. Its task is to increase student involvement, contributing to the educational function of eLearning.

During the live meetings where the students of a virtual classroom meet at a distance with the trainer, the facilitator intervenes in different ways:

- use the tools of an LMS, such as the forum, to reinforce the skills learned by the students
- contributes to building educational objectives to be offered to the virtual class
- develops educational content where students are actively involved in live sessions
- launches new activities to keep the attention of the virtual class alive

The tool of the virtual class where students and trainer meet even for short training sessions is more effective if students' involvement is kept alive. The main advantage of the facilitator is that it becomes a reference figure to which not only the trainers, but also the students, can turn for practical questions or content.

3. Third generation eLearning facilitator and corporate training

Once the online training went out of the universities and became one of the major allies of private companies, the figure of the facilitator was enriched with a further dimension, that of coordination.
The role of the facilitator within a company is to:

- guarantee the quality of training and compliance with company needs by collaborating with training and development teams
- identify training needs, promote training for new employees, more experienced figures, managers.
- assist in the development, monitoring and evaluation of training contents

- collaborate with the training team to plan the delivery of online courses (date, time, number of participants ...)

Whether it is an educational institution, a public institution or a company, a facilitator has a decisive role to play in making the training experience effective, given that this figure is able to manage from the technical point of view and personal relationships with trainers, students and the training department of the company.