



## Co-Facilitation

3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday Assembly

Silvia G. Webster: Welcome everyone to today's 3rd Thursday Assembly. We are only 15 minutes away from the beginning of our discussion. I will be your facilitator today as Nadia is busy delivering trainings across Canada.

A quick intro for those who don't know me. I'm a social entrepreneur, creative facilitator & trainer based in London. I am originally from Rio and I have been involved with PYE and its Creative Community for 7 years, setting up the partnership in Brazil and as a lead in other programs - particularly in the UK with our partner LIFEBeat. Very happy to be here and looking forward to our exchange.

We always like to begin by sharing our GOALS for the session and here they are:

- 1) Share our experiences and practices in co-facilitation
- 2) Learn ways to develop and enhance your co-facilitation practice
- 3) Gain a better understanding of what works and what doesn't in co-facilitation, based on our shared experience
- 4) Reconnect and have fun!

Silvia G. Webster: In order to achieve the goals for this session (posted above) here are some suggestions for agreements to make our time together flow really well. Be sure to add what you need or want to the list AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS.

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, lift-up vibe.
- 2) Share at your level; Everyone is welcome, no matter their level of experience as a facilitator or community organizer. All questions are important, and all answers (or further questions) are valuable. It is also okay and important to respectfully disagree with each other.
- 3) Show your presence, by LIKING and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to REFRESH your browser fairly often. Also, answer any questions in the COMMENTS below the question to keep the conversation organized.
- 4) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!)

Silvia: okay, so there are only a few of us on I think but let's get started with our first question. For those tuning in now and later, take a look at the CHECK-IN question below and our GOALS AND AGREEMENTS.  
QUESTION 1) What are the qualities you most appreciate in a co-facilitator?

**Katie Jackson:** I think it's really important to allow space for each other. People who know how to do that really well and to hit that careful balance between stepping forward and stepping back are so appreciated

**Silvia:** Thanks Katie. Very true. I also appreciate that, and I love working with someone who takes the time to prepare.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** Ah, very thought provoking question! Some qualities which I appreciate most in a co-facilitator are:

1. Trust in me (if I am their co-facilitator)
2. Willingness to give and receive feedback.
3. Knowing when to hold back and when to pitch in
4. Constantly connecting with each other through the process of facilitation.

**Silvia:** Yes Nilisha Mohapatra. I think trust and feedback are so inter-linked. What are some ways to build the trust in ourselves and each other in order to be able to give and receive feedback?

**Nilisha:** Something that has worked for me to build that trust is to connect with them before the workshop and understand their approach and intention w.r.t the workshop. Discussing each other's comfort zones and finding out where we might need to support each other, has really allowed me to understand my co-facilitators better and be able to trust them, and myself, in the process.

**Silvia:** Yes Nilisha - I just posted something very similar to that. Connecting before the workshop works so well for me.

**Michael Beebe:** Being a strong observer of group dynamics and being able to read the energy of the group.

**Katie:** So, what do you do if you feel that your co-facilitator is under prepared? I wonder about ways to handle that gracefully without putting them down. It is very possible that you will have different styles and some people prefer to improvise

**Silvia:** Yes Katie - I agree. I also find that improvisation (at least for me) happens when I am prepared if that makes sense. What I try to do is find quality preparation time together. Preferably in person (otherwise phone/skype). This preparation time allows each style to find its space in the program and helps you tune into each other.

**Nilisha:** I agree Silvia! I feel it is a fine balance between truly believing that my co-facilitator is a capable artist, and being aware that we are learning as well, when we facilitate.

**Shalini Menon:** Openness, energy and vulnerability

**Silvia:** Welcome Shalini! Thanks. I also appreciate those things.

**Nilisha:** Vulnerability! I love that, Shalini. I have found my co-facilitators most receptive when I have been able to make myself vulnerable.

**Silvia:** What are some things you or your co-facilitators do or say to show vulnerability?

**Shalini:** Before the session begins I do a check in with my co-facilitator and openly express my energy levels, if there is something back home or at work that is gnawing at me... or just not sure about a new group or workshop design.

**Nilisha:** My biggest take away has been about owning up. Whenever I know I have possibly missed out on some dynamic or said/done something which affected the group in an unexpected way, I take responsibility for it.

**Silvia:** These are great Shalini and Nilisha. Thanks for reminding me of how important this is.

**Tanaya:** I find myself nodding my head to everything that has been said. Also, in post-facilitation, someone who is open to spending some time reflecting and giving feedback about the experience. I'm very interested in the "knowing when to hold back and when to pitch in" Nilisha. Can you expand on what that may look like?

**Nilisha:** gladly so! The most common area where I have found holding back important is where the co-facilitator is giving instructions for an activity. They may have prepared in a different way and may have a different approach to it, which is why we might feel something is amiss. At such a point, just waiting till the co-facilitator has finished speaking, helps. Then pitching in with a crucial instruction/comment that might add value to the session, can be supportive.

I find jumping in for demos very useful. That way I, with my co-facilitator, am able to set the tone for the sessions. Debriefs are another place when I just know I have to hold back, unless asked for an input. I feel it is about respecting the space for your co-facilitator, and sensing the energy before checking-in. Hope you find my responses helpful, Tanaya.

**Silvia:** Thanks Tanaya. Absolutely, I think there's so much in the pre AND post work we do when co-facilitating. I have some questions specifically around that coming up

**Leon Ryan:** Preparedness. Humility. Able to express the strength in their own personality. Marker/scribing skills.

**Michael Beebe:** For new co-facilitators, a detailed training script with defined roles can be very helpful.

**Silvia: QUESTION 2) What are some tips for on-the-floor communication with your co-facilitator?**

**Katie Jackson:** How about: keep it honest, it's not meant to be a flawless performance, communicate with each other with honesty and allow the group to see you as real people who are working together, communicating and working through any little bumps in the road

**Silvia G. Webster:** Thanks Katie, this is such a great tip. I also feel the more we can connect with that authenticity - the better things flow. I would add to that - being mindful and gracious, especially when you feel you need to complement instructions, add important comments.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** Decide on a sign or signal which we can share/display when we need support on the floor- a look: nod, thumbs up or down. I also like to check before adding something which my co-facilitator is leading.

**Silvia:** Yes! There is so much we can communicate with body-language.

**Shalini Menon:** body language, I even have signs and gestures to communicate "I am tired", "I am not sure what's my next question", "can you take the lead", "I would like to add something to what you are saying"... we work on these prior to the session of course.

**Katie:** That's so interesting - I love the idea of being able to communicate with each other in this way.

**Silvia:** Like developing a new language. Sounds fun too!

**Katie:** I also think dynamics are really important. To keep things balanced it's great to have different personalities on a co-facilitation team, but if you have one extrovert and one introvert then you need to be really good at accommodating for and understanding each other's style

**Silvia:** Katie - that's really interesting. I actually had a question around that. Here goes: How do you find co-facilitating with someone who has a completely different style to yours? Is it helpful? In what way?

**Nilisha:** Katie, I second that. I have struggled with that for sometime. And continue to, in some ways. Especially while facilitating theater activities where I like keeping my energy up constantly and pushing my comfort zone with the demos, while having a co-facilitator who likes keeping it calm.

**Katie:** I usually facilitate alone, but I would imagine that having a different energy in the room could really keep me alert and encourage me to step up and out of my comfort zone. I would feel the need to set strong agreements beforehand about respecting each other's style.

**Silvia:** I am hearing a bunch of good stuff that we can actually cover in the prep and pre-planning. Re-affirms the importance of that time for me.

**Nilisha:** Oh I like that bit about setting agreements about each others style. Would love to try it out! I can imagine how it will keep the dynamic safe between facilitators!

**Leon Ryan:** I'm a big fan of co-facilitators with very different styles. The chemistry should already be established. It's important that both/all facilitators have a presence with the group and respect for each others difference. If I can give away a little control, I open up possibilities for engagement with folks in the room who might bring less commitment to a facilitator(s) who have one dominant personality e.g. is strongly extrovert, ordered, performative, or what have you. I find it helpful to alternate activities and roles, there can be one person free to follow instincts and another to read the room and provide difference.

**Shilpa Setty:** I love Katie Jackson comment on keeping things balanced, and the extrovert and introvert facilitators. I have always facilitated with people who have different styles than me, and I totally love it. It creates a good mix of role modelling for group and helps the group to be more forthcoming in activities as well as reflections. It has personally helped me come out of my comfort zone as well like Katie said.

**Arindita Gogoi:** I think it is very important to establish a chemistry between co facilitators before hand. Also it is important to know each other's strengths and understand each other's styles. In case I need help and I know that my co-worker can rescue me, apart from eye contact I also sometimes verbally request him or her to add anything if s/he feels I have missed something. I would certainly refrain from butting in if s/he is in the middle of something...also I would never gesture disapproval (ideally there should be none because we have planned and designed the session together) in the view of the participants.

Also, one of my co facilitators had a style very different from mine; I am a little verbose at times while he liked to keep it short...sometimes too short. But we both are high-energy facilitators...so we came to an understanding where we would divide our sessions accordingly...those that require storytelling or longer reflections would be mine while he'd take up those in which short crisp instructions would be beneficial. Also we'd do alternative sessions so that the dynamics of style evens out for the participants.

**Silvia:** To keep things moving, here's the 3rd QUESTION but do feel free to scroll down, check-in and answer any questions you would like.

**QUESTION 3: What to do when you think your co-facilitator has taken a "wrong turn" during a session?**

**Shalini Menon:** I often walk across and stand right next to my co-facilitator. Those who work with me often know that's my sign to build on what just happened. I personally don't think there is ever a 'wrong turn'... just an unexpected, unplanned opportunity from which a new opportunity is born.

Silvia: Yes! I love the way you frame that Shalini Menon.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** Shalini, beautifully put. I would also like to think about what does this 'wrong/unexpected turn' mean to me, and check myself for triggers. It is I feel an opportunity for realignment. I have often learnt that approach to activities are sometimes subjective, and I would wait for an opportune moment to communicate with my co-facilitator to find out what their intention was.

**Silvia:** I'm curious to know if anyone else has a similar, or very different approach to this? Has anyone had a more challenging experience?

Thanks Shalini Menon - I also tend to take that approach, of checking in, with myself and with my co-facilitator. I try to practice being genuinely curious as opposed to attached to an outcome or a plan.

**Shalini:** A lot has to do with our own ability to trust your co-facilitator to move or shape a conversation. Once, my co-facilitator forgot the instructions to an activity... obviously that impacted the groups understanding of the task. I didn't dive in as I was confident she will take charge... she did! She paused the whole thing and communicated to the group that she would like to repeat the instructions. The lesson I learnt that day is that there is a difference between rescuing people and empowering them. Often, as facilitators when we make "mistakes" or get into a tough situation with the group... its a gift in disguise.

**Silvia:** Wow, I love the "rescuing" vs. "empowering"! I'm pinning this up on my office wall right now! I also recently had the experience of coaching/co-facilitating with a wonderful group in our youth camp in Rio and more often than not, I practiced trust as opposed to jumping in. The results were AMAZING, not only in how the program unfolded but also in the bond we were able to build as co-workers.

**Katie:** Ha, love that Shalini and Silvia - rescuing vs empowering. That really gets me thinking...

**Nilisha:** Ah, I've been in both places! I've understood over time how rescuing has always been my need, and finally have been able to crack the pattern of situations when I rescue most!

I have always found articulating this very concept of rescue vs empowerment a little challenging. Primarily because I feel it is something that facilitators come to learn on their own, even if they are aware of it. Each of these concepts of 'rescue' and 'empowerment' look and feel so different for each one! In spite of having learnt

about rescuing and having heard from other facilitators, I had to come into my own to understand it. Took a year or more!

**Arindita Gogoi:** Okay...this has happened a couple of times where inadequate planning has resulted in situations where I have reached a point in which I disagreed with the approach of my co facilitator. I cannot say that it was a wrong turn, but seldom it shall happen that you completely are talking the totally opposite of each other. What I do is usually with his/her permission, add another perspective instead of disagreeing because disagreement between facilitators creates disillusionment in participants...but most people are open to a different perspective without challenging the existing idea presented by the co facilitator.

I trust my co facilitators and their abilities a lot. Therefore even if from my viewpoint something is not a correct approach, I try to rationalize that approach in my mind. If it still does not make sense to me then I give my feedback post the session or workshop.

**Silvia: QUESTION 4: How do you best work with a co-facilitator who has a lot more or less experience than you do?**

**Shalini Menon:** More experienced means I ask them if they would like to lead the design creation. I get to learn more. Less experience, I ask them to co create the design (teaching is also learning twice) ... both ways I learn. One is the experienced monk and the other is a person with fresh eyes... both help bring new things to my perspective, skills and ideas.

**Silvia:** When I divide up the sessions in the workshop I find that - if you're more experienced - find out where your co-facilitators are at, what they want to facilitate and are excited about doing. At the same rate, also try challenging and encouraging them to take on bits they are less comfortable with. It can really boost their learning.

**Silvia:** When I am less experienced, practicing a real openness to feedback. This can be harder to practice than it sounds sometimes.

**Zoë NoEnbridge Miles:** I find that this varies so much depending on the personality of the co-facilitator and our dynamic, but generally I have found that a) as a facilitator with less experience I have had to really step up my honesty in terms of expressing my needs/limits/comfort zone/edge, as well as in giving constructive feedback and debriefing in a way that can lead to expanded awesomeness the next time around. And b) when I'm the facilitator with more experience, I have found that the key is to have substantive check in with the co, and to be super cognizant of 'empowering' rather than 'rescuing' as discussed.

**Silvia:** Thanks Zoë - striving for expanded awesomeness will also become a new mantra

**Zoë:** I have a related question about how to handle situations where the co-facilitator requires emotional support during a program (ie. feeling pressure to take care of the co, as well as lead the group).

**Shalini:** For me, a lot goes back to the question, "have we built a strong foundation by setting norms for ourselves and communicating that I will support you today, in every way." How the 'other' feels, often goes back to 'what I feel'... building that rhythm and trusting the process always helps. When nothing works, use the break time to talk... and listen.

**Arindita Gogoi:** I feel there is hardly anything like more experienced or less; I have learnt much more at occasions from facilitators who are less experienced than I am. I try to understand their strengths and usually ask which aspect of the session they are most comfortable with - from design to facilitation to post workshop feedback. I am by nature very adaptive; so I try to work around the co-facilitator's strengths. Also when there is a co facilitator involved I never agree to go ahead with a design that is not unanimously agreeable to both of us.

I also prefer to give and receive honest and constructive feedback. The more pre workshop time we as co facilitators spend in designing through a transparent feedback mechanism, the better our rhythm will be at the workshop during facilitation.

**Silvia: We are about 15 minutes away from our facilitated time here and I would like to post another couple of questions. QUESTION 5: What are some tips you have for a) debriefing and b) giving feedback to your co-facilitator?**

**Silvia:** I like getting comfortable with speaking from an empowered position if I am giving feedback. And the best advice I heard on this (from Peggy Taylor, Charlie Murphy and Nadia Chaney) is to hold people in high regard when you are giving them feedback, speaking from your higher self to theirs. This helps remove anxieties I might have about the process and have a very helpful experience instead.

**Shalini Menon:** One thing I would like to continue, one thing I would like to start, one thing I would like to stop. That becomes a self evaluation of sorts. Then the go facilitator says, One thing I would like you to continue, one thing I would like you to start and one thing I would like you to stop because... sighting examples and observation. The cycle repeats to cover all facilitators.

**Silvia:** I like this Shalini. It reminds me of a framework we also use for the feedback process which is: "one thing I connect with is..., one thing I disconnect with is...". I also agree that just having a real clear framework for conducting the process really helps.

**Shalini:** Oh yes, I remember all the times Charlie and Nadia used to talk about speaking from your higher self! I actually found that useful in my everyday transactions with people... its tough to be aware all the time, but with practice that really helps.

**Danise Elijah:** I really like the start, stop, continue idea. I feel like often many cos I have worked with 80% of my critical feedback were things they also picked up on. I like how this opens conversation and ends in a positive note.

**Zoë NoEnbridge Miles:** I don't know, sometimes I feel like frameworks like 'start stop continue' lend themselves to feeling like the feedback is contrived (maybe the feedback is more nuanced or less compartmentalizable than that). I like to incorporate an element of self-evaluation to establish that this is a constructive space, but most first and foremost, I think it's important to check in with the co before getting into the debrief - when is a good time for both parties? What format is preferred for them? Ex. some people like to get into things right away, while some like time to ruminate.

**Danise:** Zoë I really appreciate your sensitivity to others communication needs. Creating space in that way is important. One thing I like about formatted feedback is that it creates an expectation of critical feedback and an expectation that you will look at what you did well and praise yourself as well. For some who don't have the highest trust or best relationship to feedback, the heads up of a framework can feel safer.

**Nilisha Mohapatra:** About giving feedback, I find it easy when I first check with myself about a similar experience I might have had. I relate better then and am able to bring on my highest self more effectively. I have found framing my statements with a 'I know we are learning' intent, lands softly. Finally, Appreciation:Improvement= 4:1 ratio, if possible.

**Zoë:** Good point, Danise. A framework that includes space for flexibility would work great, I think. It would be nice to see it framed somehow around moving challenges into learning and commitments for next time ("this part felt like it could have moved more smoothly - how can we approach it differently next time?") Moving to a place of collaborative problem solving rather than leaving it at straight feedback can feel empowering and supported even when dealing with challenges that arose.


**Arindita Gogoi:** I prefer the feedback session to begin as a team feedback session. First thoughts that come to our minds...usually those quick responses range from 'unexpected or less expected insight from participants' to 'requires longer time' to 'I felt under confident today' to 'energy levels need to be higher' to 'should not deal with xyz topic post lunch' 'better planning required' and more. This helps me understand what from our workshop had preoccupied our mind. Then we usually talk about participants...their responses and energy levels. And finally come down to each other. First we talk about ourselves...how we felt about ourselves and then ask co facilitators if my actions during the facilitation reflected or were synchronized with, my thoughts. Then we ask each other about areas of improvement and also if any co facilitator disagreed with an approach.

I think it is very important for co facilitators to be honest during their feedback. Also instead of merely critiquing it is important to suggest a solution. Or else at least open a dialogue.

**Silvia:** We are coming to the end of the facilitated portion of the sessions (to recap: we usually run them for 90 mins), but you are most welcome to stay here and add your comments to any questions posted. I will leave you with a final question. **QUESTION 6: What are your top 3 tips for fun & effective co-facilitation?**

**Shalini Menon:** 1) Agree to experiment 2) Agree to take creative risks 3) Prioritize a safe learning environment over everything else... 4) Have beer when the workshop gets over.



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- Nilisha Mohapatra:** 1. Celebrate the success.  
2. Validate each other for each others' creative risks.  
3. Laugh the funny moments.

**Silvia:** Yes to all of these. Makes me want to co-facilitate with you all!

**Zoë NoEnbridge Miles:** 1) Appreciate each other (inwardly and outwardly). 2) Keep yourselves entertained (especially if you've run this program a million times or the content is dry, introduce new elements that are fun and risky). 3) Remember, it's OK to make mistakes.

- Danise Elijah:** 1. Be responsible for yourself and your role.  
2. Communicate openly and from your highest self.  
3. Stay open to new ideas and directions (attached, not committed)

**Nilisha:** Shalini, Beer after workshops

**Shilpa Setty:** I would definitely agree with what is said above

1. Try parts that I haven't done and experience the joy of leading it for the first time
2. Genuinely appreciate and gift the co-facilitator with the feedback of what he/she is amazing at during facilitation.
3. Enjoy the pre planning of the workshop and get comfortable with each other which then sets the tone and makes it more Fun!!

**Silvia Giovannoni:** Just want to give a huge shout-out to those who contributed, dropped by or followed the conversation. There's a quote from somewhere that says "the world belongs to those who show up" and you all certainly did today and made this such an enriching and fun experience. THANK YOU!