

#MonthlyMyth: Warm up activities have no purpose

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Now and then we hear people say that what you might loosely categorise as ‘warm up’ or ‘introductory’ or ‘getting to know you’ activities are pointless exercises with no real purpose. It is assumed (perhaps?) that they are something facilitators do just because that’s what facilitators do and they like to ‘play games, not because they have any bearing on the issue at hand or any tangible benefit to the group.

We can’t speak on behalf of all these types of activities (perhaps there are some out there that really are annoying, pointless and fluffy!); however, today, with the kind of activities that an effective, experienced facilitator might use in mind, we’re debunking this myth.

MYTH:

‘Getting to know you’ warm up activities are annoying, pointless and ‘fluffy’.

IN REALITY:

When a facilitator plans a ‘warm up’ or introductory activity, it’s very unlikely it has been included just because the facilitator finds it entertaining or likes to make people feel uncomfortable for no reason. Generally speaking, good facilitators aren’t about self-indulgence, and in reality, these activities are beneficial, important and often strategically placed. Their benefits are many, including:

- 1. First and foremost, they help us to meet a core principle of good facilitation** – that participants get to talk **FIRST** before being talked **AT**. There’s nothing quite as disengaging as bringing people in, sitting them down, and commencing a PowerPoint presentation where

they are told 'the facts'. Encouraging interaction and conversation from the start sets the tone for the session, flagging to participants that it's about group discussion not information overload.

2. They help to bring focus to and enhance the readiness of the group. Depending on the activity, they might help everyone to become aware of the different people and perspectives in the room (instead of going around introducing each other), clarify the purpose of the session or the group's task, or help people to prepare themselves to get the most out of the conversation.

3. It gives us (the facilitators) great intel that we can use to tailor the session and ensure it's effective. From a seemingly simple activity, we might be able to get a sense of perspectives, views, hopes and what the group wants to achieve. Some activities also draw out issues, emotion and conflict. All of this is valuable data that helps the facilitator to work effectively with the group.

4. It increases comfort. Often people come together and are unknown to each other, and it can take a while for them to feel ready to work together. When people feel connected and comfortable, they will have better conversations that lead to better outputs.

5. Often, these activities are designed as launchpads that help the group get into the content and understand the process or what the session is about. Sometimes, after asking some less 'meaty' questions, the facilitator will work up to a question that's very pointed and is designed to elicit insights that are relevant to the issue at hand – like 'what does success look like for you?' and 'how comfortable do you feel about X? And what would make you feel more comfortable?'

6. By the time you get to decision making time, the group is ready to go. Conflict, emotion, issues, personalities, concerns – all of them have surfaced and been addressed earlier.

7. Movement gets the brain firing. Sitting for long periods of time is not conducive to clear, insightful thinking. There's no sore bottoms at a MosaicLab workshop!

Phew! That's a lot of reasons ... we're pretty sure there's more, but it's a good start. So, next time you see a facilitator 'fluffing around' with warm up activities, look beyond what appears on the surface and consider all the different ways that activity might be enhancing the groups' experience.

If you're interested in harnessing some of the benefits above in your next session, visit our [workshop design and facilitation services page](#) and learn more about how we can help.

OVER TO YOU

Do you have any more benefits of 'warm up' activities to add to this list? Tell us in the comments below.

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