



ELF
e-learning facilitators:
analyses of their different roles
within different e-learning methodologies and approaches
I/05/B/F/PP-154178



THE ROLES OF E-LEARNING FACILITATORS

SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND TRAINING

REPORT

December 2006

pl.carrolaggi@velay.greta.fr



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1. Introduction

The ELF project has done a survey of the roles of e-learning facilitators and the skills needed to perform the related tasks. How e-learning facilitators have built these competences, how and where they have acquired their knowledge, know-how and attitudes? What kind of learning experience they have had, both formal and informal. Do they find training schemes adequate? Are they satisfied with this training? Does it meet with the expectations of the learners. A three step process has been elaborated in order to write this report: semi-structured interviews (step 1) conducted in each country with a limited number of tutors, questionnaires (step 2) and focus groups (step 3) implemented in each country. The objectives of the semi-structured interviews were to give an indication of the roles and skills of e-learning facilitators. They have been used to elaborate two questionnaires, one for e-learning facilitators, one for e-learners. The questions (cf. annexes 1 & 2) were answered online across Europe and disseminated through the partner's networks. Then focus groups allowed each partner to discuss the results of the questionnaires in their own language, in their own environment. Focus groups were realised through ICT or actual face to face discussions. It appears that the face to face discussions were more successful and meaningful than those made through e-mails. By e-mail each participant contributed, but there was almost no interaction between the participants. The Danish partner formed two focus groups, one face to face discussion group and one that communicated only by e-mail. The moderator phoned those who were to contribute by e-mail. This method was used because of the impossibility of finding a common meeting date for all the participants as it was necessary to have a variety of participants with different experiences and approaches. Focus groups have been introduced on a similar basis in each country. The themes discussed were the same as they followed a commonly agreed on template (skills required, weaknesses, satisfaction, improvement, technical tools, roles, formal and informal learning). Each partner has made its own report of the focus group¹. The aim of this document is to make an integrated synthesis of the online questionnaires with the focus groups reports.

2. E-learning facilitators and e-learners: who are they?

2.1 E-learning facilitators

68 e-learning facilitators, 31 female and 37 male, from 10 countries (France, Canada, Italy, Romania, Poland, Greece, Bulgaria, Mauritius, United Kingdom, Denmark) have responded on a voluntary basis to an online survey. The online address of the questionnaire was transmitted by ELF partners to their staff members involved in e-tutoring but also to similar organizations in their networks. E-learning facilitators are mostly employed by universities and they are quite experienced in this "new" area as 70% have more than four years working as e-learning facilitators. The background of the respondents is shown in the following table.

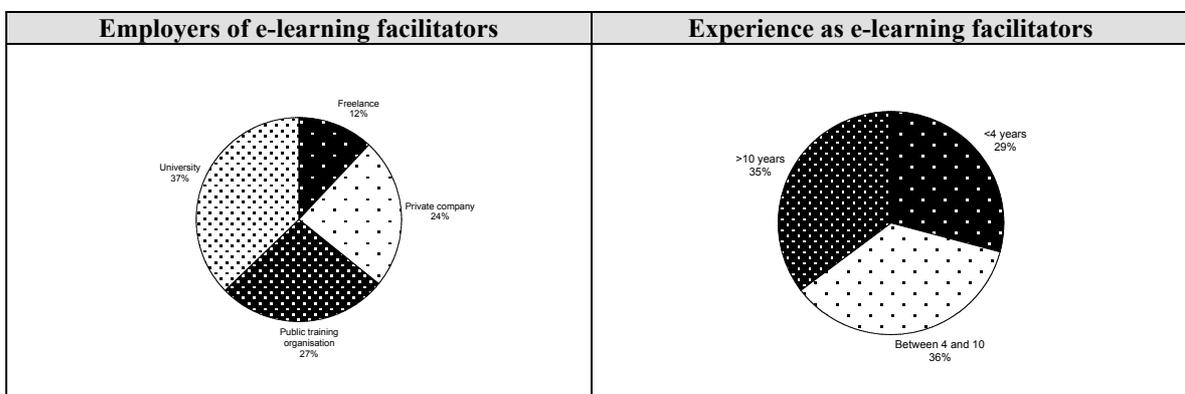


Figure 1: Background of e-learning facilitators

¹ Reports are all publicly available on the project web site (<http://www.elfproject.net/>)

Half of them teach general subjects, the other half, technical subjects. In each category, the variety of the subjects taught or supported is very large as shown in the table below.

General	Technical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ History of Philosophy (4) ▪ Language teaching & Online education ▪ War history ▪ Training English school teachers ▪ Work-based learning - training trainers ▪ Tutoring in SMEs ▪ Competitive intelligence & Knowledge Management ▪ English (as a foreign language) ▪ Pedagogical integration of ICT & Learning Theories & Cognitive approaches ▪ Encyclopaedia of law (basic information about law in general, constitutional, civil, UE law) ▪ Creative activities - exercises and theory ▪ Political subjects & languages ▪ Leadership, management, economics, projects, development of SMV ▪ Counselling for career ▪ Project Management ▪ Gender issues, public administration, interconnection between budget management and quality of life ▪ Learning processes ▪ Language & new technology ▪ Linguistics ▪ Citizenship ▪ Spanish language ▪ Career Counselling ▪ E-learning related subjects ▪ Financial law, Economic law, Social and economic politics, Political doctrines, ▪ Finance, Banking, Insurance (2) ▪ Environment ▪ Management, marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ICT (6) ▪ Computer science - hardware and software (3) ▪ Programming languages, OS, Linux, Php, mySql, c# (4) ▪ Web Technologies, e-Learning, Knowledge Management, Educational Software ▪ Mathematic, computing, science of teaching, ICT ▪ Computer network & administering of network (3) ▪ Computer Science disciplines: C/C++, Java, Web Technologies, Unix/Linux, SQL & Training the e-Trainers ▪ ICT for education (2) ▪ Leadership courses & Technical Training & Sales Training & Software Training & Instructional design ▪ Website designing, script and layout languages, system administration ▪ Web site creation, infography ▪ Digital Media Design ▪ Circuit theory, electromagnetic compatibility, management of information economic systems, basic informatics, management of database systems ▪ Mechanics ▪ Music technology ▪ ICT (MS Office), financial systems & financial management ▪ Nursing staff, clinical training ▪ CCNA ▪ How to use our engines (training for Engineers and Sales peoples) & Our production concepts ▪ Physics, video devices ▪ Mathematical logic & Set theory & Cryptography

Figure 2: Diversity of subjects taught

We have not included several subjects under the same denomination, as was possible with the e-learners answers (cf. Figure 4). The main reason is the existence of some combinations of subjects in which a same facilitator is involved that may appear as unusual: *“Language & new technology”*, *“Political subjects & languages”*, *“Mathematic, computing, science of teaching”*, *“Leadership courses & Technical Training & Sales Training & Software Training & Instructional design”*. Their role there is not considered as the role of a teacher or a trainer or a course designer but as a *“project manager”*, *“a programmer”* or an *“instructional designer”*.

It is interesting to note that the e-learning process in itself is included in subjects taught: *“E-learning related subjects”*, *“Pedagogical integration of ICT”*, *“ICT for education”*, *“Web Technologies, e-Learning, Knowledge Management, Educational Software”*, *“Computer mediated Communications and Pedagogies”*. These can be considered by e-learning facilitators as general subjects or as technical subjects.

2.2 E-learners and e-courses

107 e-learners responded to the questionnaire (52 female and 55 male). They are from 13 countries: Bulgaria (8), Cameroon (1), Canada (1), Denmark (4), France (5), Greece (6), Italy (18), Japan (1), Luxembourg (1), Poland (22), Romania (30), Tunisia (1), United Kingdom (8), no answer (1). Half of them are students and 35 % are employed workers. The figure below shows the repartition of e-learners according to their status and to the type of courses they are taking.

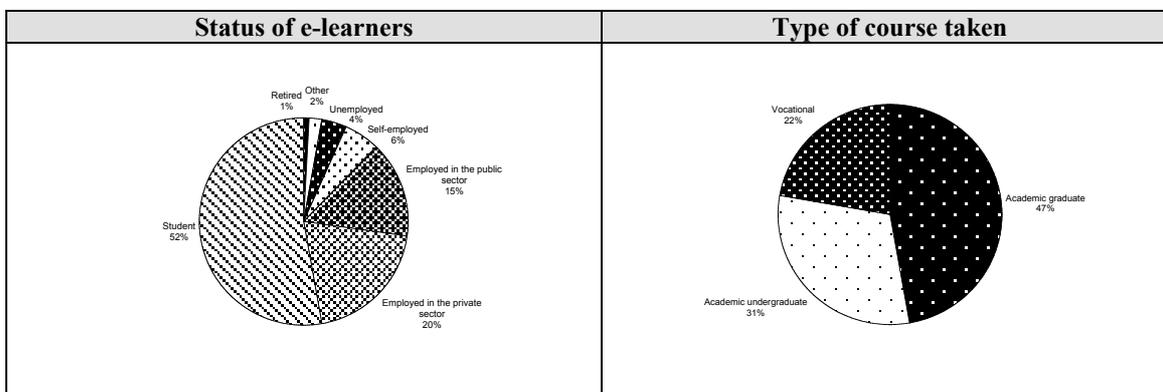


Figure 3: Background of e-learners

Subjects taken are both general and technical with a large majority of information technologies related subjects. As for the e-learning facilitators, the process of e-learning itself is a subject taken by e-learners, either on the technical side (*“How to use Moodle”, “multimedia learning environment”*), or on the pedagogical side (*“e-trainer”*).

General	Technical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Philosophy or History of Philosophy (16) ▪ English language ▪ Trainer, e-trainer (2) ▪ English teacher ▪ History of Poland ▪ Health care workers (2) ▪ Management, marketing (2) ▪ Continuing professional development ▪ Career counsellor ▪ E-learning for call center agents ▪ SME's HR management ▪ Staff development in e-learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ICT (5) ▪ Computer sciences (4) ▪ ECDL (2) ▪ Multimedia learning environment (2) ▪ Data security ▪ How to use Moodle ▪ Other e-learning platform ▪ Internet technologies (19) ▪ Web accessibility ▪ Text processor ▪ Music technology ▪ Cisco CCNA (11)

Figure 4: Subjects taken by e-learners

The duration of their courses varies from some hours (2 hours) to 3,5 years, the average being 104 hours. If we exclude from the average the four courses lasting more than 600 hours, the average duration of courses falls to 68 hours.

Courses usually mix a variety of methods and almost half of them include face to face sessions in blended learning systems. The figure below shows the relative importance of these methods.

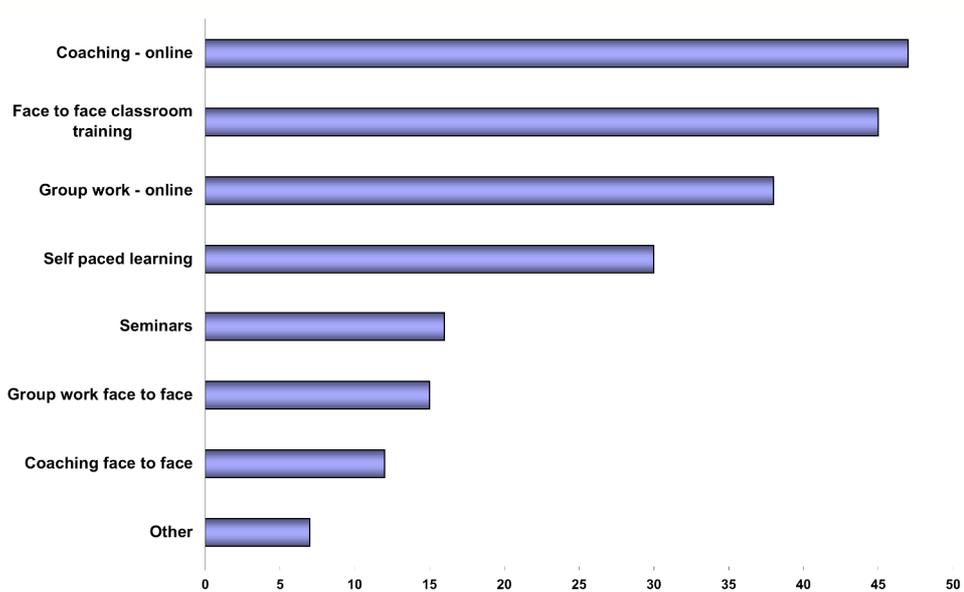


Figure 5: Organisation of e-learning courses

3. Technologies used

3.1. Technologies for asynchronous support

77% e-learning facilitators are providing mainly asynchronous support. The most utilised tool is the mail, followed by learning platforms and forums. The figure below shows the use of the different technologies by e-learning facilitators.

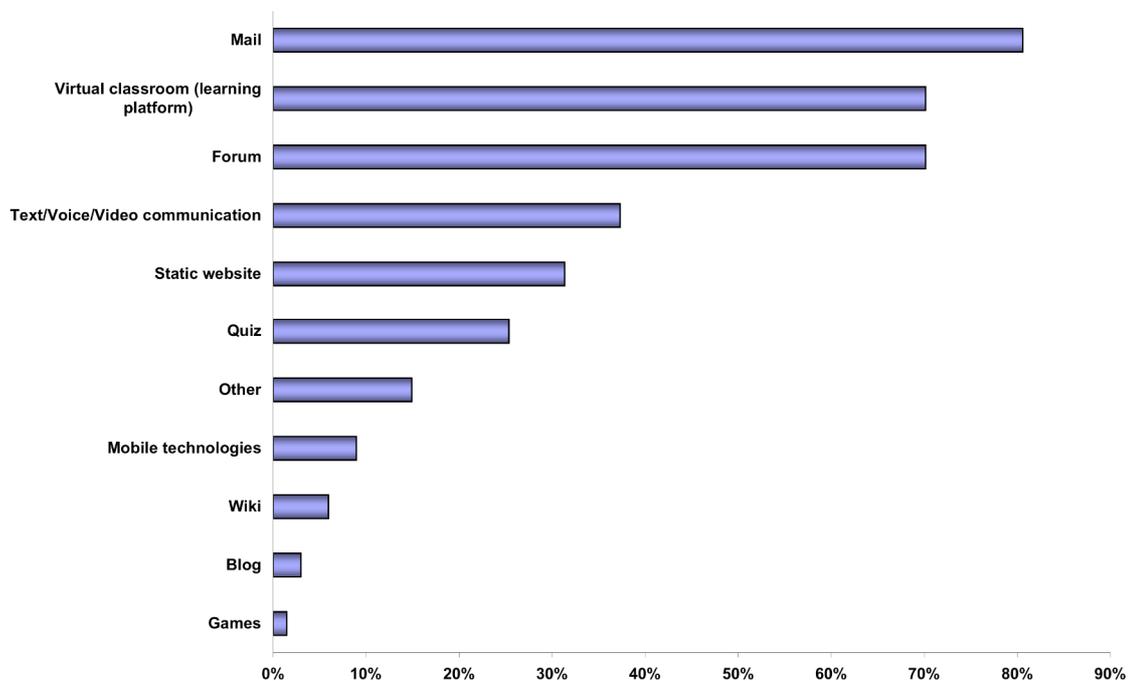


Figure 6: Percentage of e-learning facilitators using each tool

If we look at the technologies that are used by e-learning facilitators who are mainly involved in synchronous activities, they have almost the same relative importance for the more and less important ones. Text, voice and video communication plays of course a bigger role, also with mobile technologies.

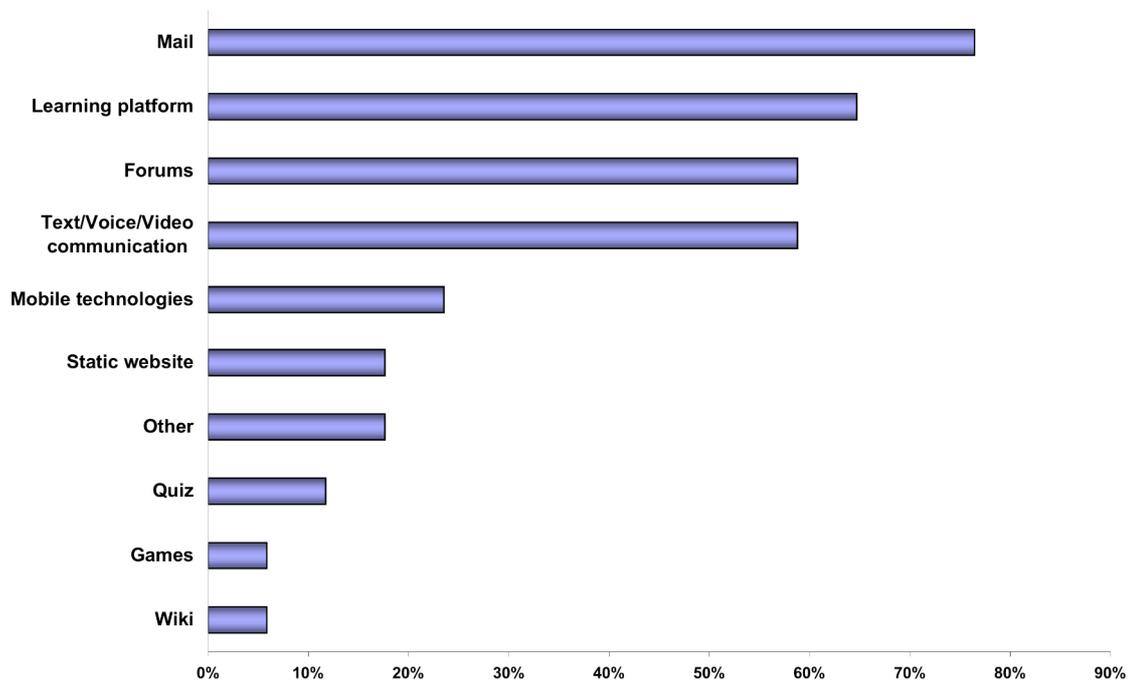


Figure 7: Percentage of e-learning facilitators mainly involved in synchronous activities using each tool

3.2 A combination of tools and technologies

In addition to the tools used for tutoring, other categories of tools can be used. In some cases, e-learning facilitators have participated to the development of the learning platform used in their organisation: *“We have developed our own tools and will continue to do so”* (DK). Some e-learning facilitators also use tools for the preparation of online courses such as authoring tools for developing content. They may also develop Flash animations and video.

The frequent use of e-learning platforms does not eliminate the possibility of the user from taking the initiative to exit from them to gain flexibility. *“I have to say with regret, that this institution does not allow the use of more functional tools, other than those which are provided with e-learning platform. Of course I use materials, which I created by myself or have found in books, newspapers, Internet, etc.”* (PL). It is a necessity for the majority of trainers to organize their own space and to elaborate their additional resources: *“I try to make my materials available to students on web site and I also give the links to another Internet recourses connected with the subject concerned”* (PL).

3.3 Emergence of new technologies

The Figure 7 shows that web 2.0 technologies that are fast developing in the internet environment are not yet very important in the field of e-teaching. Games that seem promising, especially for targeting the difficult to reach, are also almost non-existent. This matter of promising technologies in the near future has been discussed in the focus groups. Only for few e-learning facilitators, emerging technologies that don't have yet many applications in learning may be used more extensively in training: *“podcasting, cell phones”* (DK). Because *“they are more adapted to the needs of the younger e-learners as they are already familiar with these systems on non professional use”* (FR) But still most

e-learning facilitators seems to dream of a tool that will gather all required features: *“platforms that have most of the facilities you need as an e-learning facilitator, i.e. ONE platform instead of different tools you piece together”* (DK).

Existing technologies could be more present. *“Technology which is accessible on the market (discussion groups, forums, chats, e-mails, videoconference, virtual boards) is enough”* (PL) but existing technologies such as *“conference systems and virtual classrooms for online teaching could be used more often in Denmark”* or *“voice chat”* (PL), *“better than the traditional videoconferencing systems are the plain conferencing systems like chats and instant messaging systems”* (FR) also *“more use of authoring tools to develop content where different media is used”* (DK). Also *“Distance control software under IP protocol is an inexpensive tool which is in the process of development”* (FR). *“Video might be used more and can be used in different ways, for instance as part of the content”* (DK) supported by *“internet television”* or *“interactive TV [that] can take everything over”* (PL), all this through *“wireless networks”* (PL). Simulation should take more importance, because if we must keep in mind that *“the choice of the technology depends on the subject taught”* (PL), *“many subjects especially which demands practical skills should use simulators”* and *“the technology which allows building such systems will have impact on e-learning development”* (PL).

But more than technologies, it is the use of various learning methods that seems promising: *“For example we wanted to use the problem based learning approach, but we didn’t employ it because we had no time to develop familiarity with it. We promised to implement it in the near future.”* (I)

4. How to become an e-learning facilitator?

4.1 Formal learning

According to the online survey, less than half of the e-learning facilitators have been specifically trained for performing their role. Training is usually short introductory sessions and is provided by various institutions, private or public, often organized for internal purposes as is the case in the Polish virtual University. Some courses are organized for several companies such as the ones provided by ELF partners: Timsoft run an online course called *“train the e-trainers”* or by software historic players like Cisco Network Academy and Microsoft. 15% of the trained e-learning facilitators have participated to programs organized by American universities (University of Maryland University College, USA, Web Tyco Instructor Online Course). A Canadian teacher has participated in a short training session from the TELUQ on tutoring and communication. Nevertheless it exists across Europe: UK universities organize introductory courses online or face to face, University Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg (online), the university of Florence offers a course *“methods and techniques of web education”*. Around 40% of the courses are face to face group séances in a classroom, a little more than 30% online and a little less than 30% use a blended approach.

Specific training programs are usually short and dedicated to technical aspects: *“This training includes only technical aspects of the e-learning platform”* *“I have participated in training – how to use the platform. There was not too much methodology in this course”* (PL). *“I have participated in one-week training. One meeting in traditional form, where I discovered the technical aspects of the platform. In the rest of the week there were discussions about e-learning and tasks to do. This part was conducted in e-platform.”*

If the technical aspects are discovered through formal training, then most of the job is learned by practising. *‘There was short training on PUV where I was taught the technical aspects of the platform. There was a lack of explanation concerning the organization of the work requirements from the teachers and the way of assessing the students. I have to learn this during my virtual lessons.’* (PL) *“But most of my knowledge I obtain from experience during regular e-classes”* (PL). It is effective as theoretical courses are sometimes disconnected from practice: *“I started with practice too. I attend a course about media and techniques for on-line training. There I learnt what an e-tutor is NOT and what a e-tutor does NOT do; there is no relation between theoretic solution proposed and real, practical problems”* (I).

The Polish focus groups participants, as e-teacher from the university of Lodz, have to pass a training on e-learning platform but in most places, self-learning is the main way to become an e-learning facilitator as is the case among the Danish focus group: *“I am mostly self-taught, but I have been a teacher for many years and I am familiar with technique. Besides that I have participated in workshops and seminars.”* (DK)

Learning on the job seems to give satisfactory results but the best for an e-learning facilitator is to have experienced the other side of the game: *“my experience is learning on the job. An e-tutor has to have been an e-learner, otherwise it is not possible to be aware of e-learners’ needs and obstacles. Having been an e-learner is conducive to self-criticism”* (I).

4.2 Informal learning

Learning on the job remains the most common way to succeed. Access to static information (web documentation, books and printing material) is a source of learning: e-learning facilitators are firstly teachers. If we consider all tutors (Figure 8), it is even the main learning source. But if we consider only e-learning facilitators tutoring technical subjects (Figure 9), practising becomes the main way of learning: *“the best teacher is actual experience. It is very helpful to cooperate with other teachers, especially with those, who have had experience in courses that we carry on now”* (PL). These tutors come from computing background and have learned the use of the tools through trial and error. They also make more use more than their colleagues of the provision of dynamic information (newsletters, blogs, community web sites, podcasts). The participation to seminars and events is low, perhaps because there are few events adapted to this objective. Only the participants of the Danish focus group have mentioned frequently the participation to events.

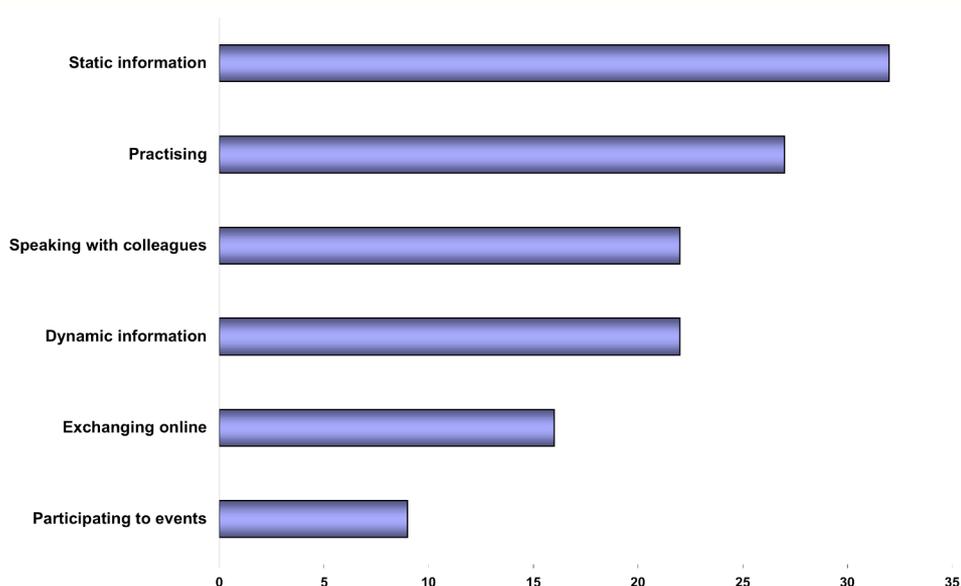


Figure 8: How do e-learning facilitators learn in the workplace?

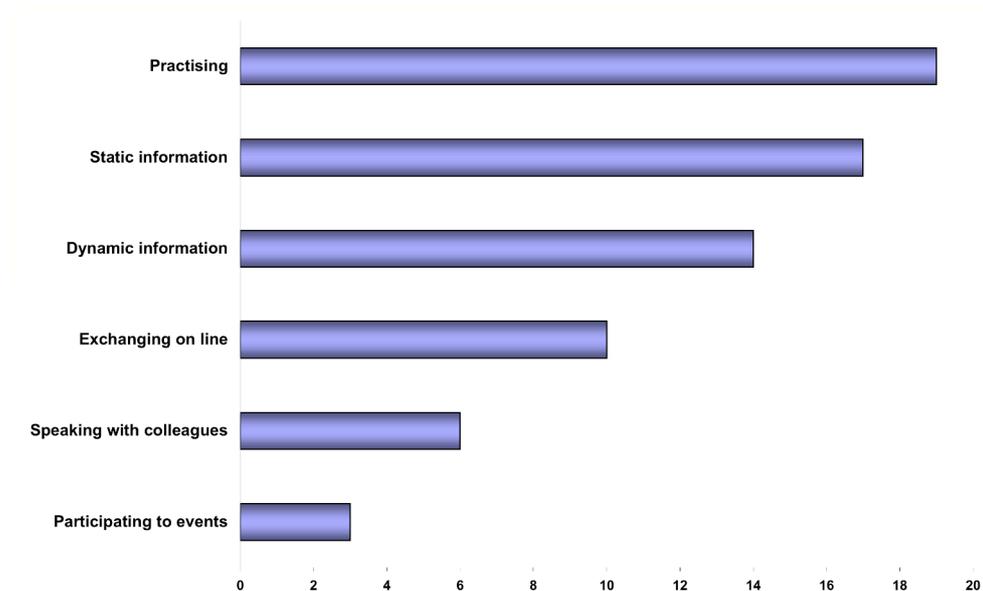


Figure 9: How do e-learning facilitators providing technical courses learn at work?

5. The roles of e-learning facilitators

5.1 What is an e-learning facilitator?

For e-learners, e-learning facilitators are tutors, e-tutors, e-prof or e-professors.

Name given by the learner	Number of occurrences
Tutor	19
E-tutor	18
E-prof (or e-professor)	15
E-facilitator	8
Facilitator	5
Trainer	5
Instructor	4
Teacher	4
Professor	3
Adviser	1
Course leader	1
E-book, E-tutorial, How to, RFC	1
E-trainer	1
Helpdesk	1
Mentor	1

Figure 10: What is an e-learning facilitator for an e-learner? (open question, 87 answers)

E-learning facilitators consider that they are trainers, tutors but also course designers (as mentioned before, many e-facilitators are involved in the whole training process from the course planning and design to the delivery). This side of their work is not seen by the e-learners.

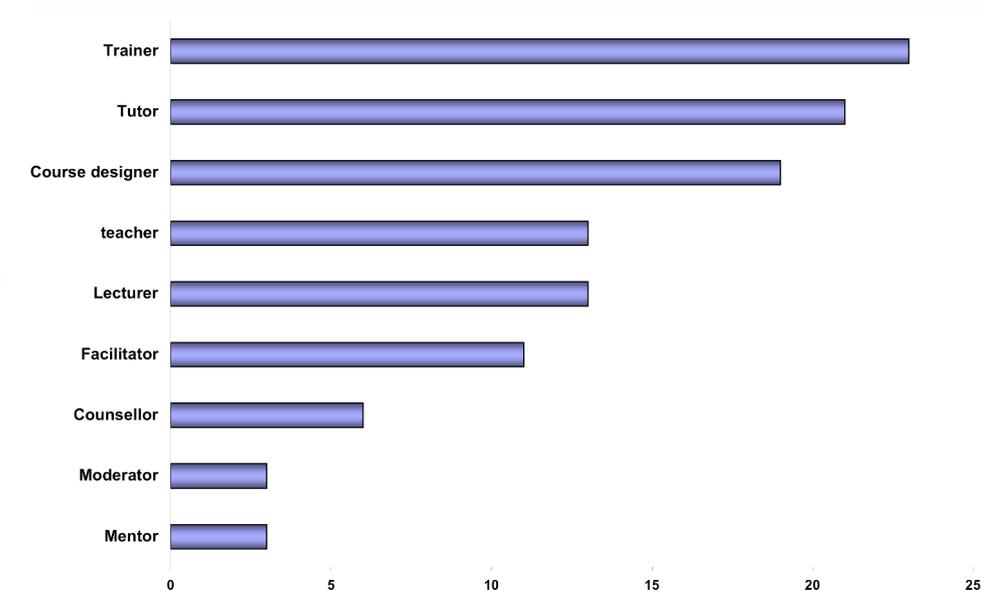


Figure 11: What title or denomination is the most adapted to e-learning facilitator function? (max. 2)

5.2 Main roles of e-facilitators

For learners, the main role of an e-learning facilitator is to explain difficulties and secondly to evaluate their work. The technical assistance on the learning tools used, comes in third position (quite high up if we consider that this role did not exist for classical face to face group teaching).

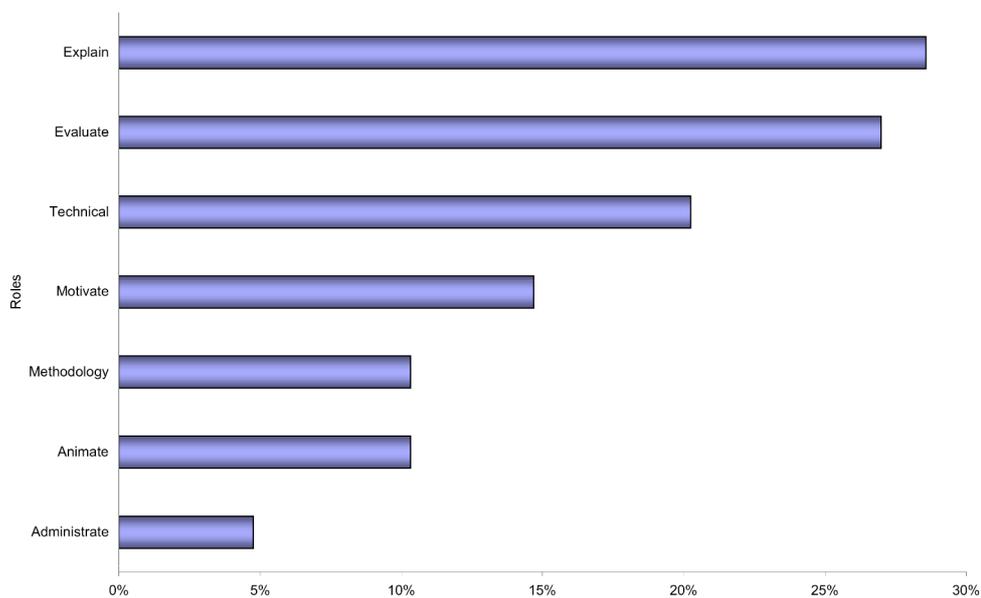


Figure 12: Main roles (max. 3) of the e-learning facilitator according to e-learners.

All e-learning facilitators do not agree with this statement. For some, “*This is the main role of the teacher*” (PL) who “*should be able to deal with the students doubts*” (PL). “*The most important information and the curriculum, the things which students should know, are distributed using on-line documentation. The teacher should not interrupt during the studies, but should help with solving difficulties and inaccuracies in materials. Of course, there are also other duties, including motivating*

the students, holding classes, interesting discussions, etc.” (PL) Explaining can be done by linking the subject to actual hands on experience: “The teacher should help the trainee to understand the material and use this knowledge in practical application” (PL).

For some, “It is important, of course, else the learners do not learn, but I do not know if it is the most important thing” (DK). “...this is only a specific role of the e-tutor, [...] the main role is supporting e-learners to feel in comfort with ICT and this kind of environment: emotional difficulties, insecurities, etc.” (I). “Perhaps [the main role is] not to explain difficulties, but to design the course, i.e. the content and the activities so that the difficulties will be explained and the e-tutor will monitor and assess the learners’ performance” (DK). “It should be combined with the role of initiating the learning processes” (DK). In fact “what is interesting is HOW the e-tutor “explains”, the issue is how the e-tutor presents the difficulties.” (DK). Perhaps the role of the e-learning facilitator is not directly linked to the content: “The most important is how to motivate students to systematic work” (PL). Anyhow, motivation is linked to the smoothing of difficulties because “if the student was at a standstill during the lecture, and if he did not receive any help, then he would become discouraged or would stop or continue without a good understanding of previous parts of the material” (PL).

5.3 Activities of e-learning facilitators

Most of e-learning facilitators are performing various tasks in addition to the online tutoring. They can design courses, write courses. They have a role in the teaching process but also in the process of preparing and organising the courses including providing technical support and solving administrative problems. There are no significant differences between activities driven by e-facilitators whether they are supporting general or technical subjects nor academic vs. vocational. The Figure below lists the tasks expressed by e-facilitators as an answer to an open question (in this tonality are the answers of the “general” e-facilitators). The majority fulfil a wide scope of tasks but all centred on the learning process: they are real “e-learning facilitators”.

Focus is on	Tasks of e-learning facilitators
Technique	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I support people in using ICT tools for the e-course ▪ Technical
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teacher (2), Instructor ▪ Training trainers ▪ I teach and I manage documentation repository. ▪ Conducting classes & examining
The learning process (from management of tasks to engagement within the learners’ path)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Giving tasks to complete ▪ Correction of tasks, answering some technical questions, answering pedagogical questions ▪ Moderator ▪ Trainer and supporter ▪ I support learners in their learning process (3) ▪ Online tutoring ▪ Having a scaffolding role from a social, emotional and didactical point of view ▪ I reply to the questions and I'm present in the forum. ▪ Providing learning support for students, evaluating their learning progress. ▪ Evaluating, clarifying, prompting to activity ▪ Moderator of the discussions, chat moderator ▪ Organizing the activities & Training or presenting the topics / content & Follow up on the learners & Advising the learners ▪ Answering students questions and supporting their work. ▪ To support courses ▪ Course leader (1+3) ▪ Relation with trainers and tutoring of learning paths to facilitate the distant process ▪ Tutor and facilitator ▪ E-moderating & e-facilitating ▪ Mainly I moderate discussions and evaluate the work of my students. ▪ I moderate a law education platform, giving topics to discussion, moderate

	discussion, checking tasks, answering students questions, sometimes making presentations
The content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Course designer ▪ Course developer, Coordinating content development in the countries we operate in ▪ Making courses, counsellor, research ▪ Content development of written materials ▪ Designer of content
Involvement in content creation and course delivering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Course designer & Lecturer ▪ Course designer & online tutor ▪ E-mentor & instructional designer ▪ Content developer, moderator ▪ Learning facilitator, course designer ▪ Instructional design, lecturing ▪ Teach people and sometimes build contents ▪ Moderator, counsellor, designer ▪ Tutor & course designer ▪ Moderate, write content ▪ Write courses, facilitate online courses ▪ Course designer & Counsellor ▪ Interaction, content ▪ Developer of programmes, teacher, coach ▪ Create online modules, moderate online conferences ▪ Content creator, moderate interaction, correct assignments ▪ Manage contents and support e-groups
Fulfilment of administrative functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management and teaching ▪ Administrator & Moderator
From coordinating tasks to implementation of the overall process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helping tutors to design the online version of their traditional courses ▪ Scientific Project Leader ▪ Project Manager & Programmer & Instructional designer ▪ Tutoring learners & implementing online courses & Mediatisation of contents & pedagogical engineering ▪ Teaching in the open university & Development of educational content for the open university & Research for the open university & Supervising students & Professor-counsellor, tutor-counsellor

Figure 13: List of activities performed by e-learning facilitators.

Introducing a time measurement is a way that hierarchies rate the relative importance of activities on the e-learning facilitators' side. Developing content is the activity that takes the most time. It is not surprising when we consider that e-learning is a still a new way of learning and organising courses, that technologies are changing constantly and that there is a permanent race to have the content matching with the current technology (eg. books, audiotapes, videotapes, presentation software, closed proprietary multimedia, static web sites, dynamic web sites, blog, wiki, podcast...). It is surprising however from a pedagogical point of view that would tend to consider task design as being the most important while it is quoted as the smallest activity.

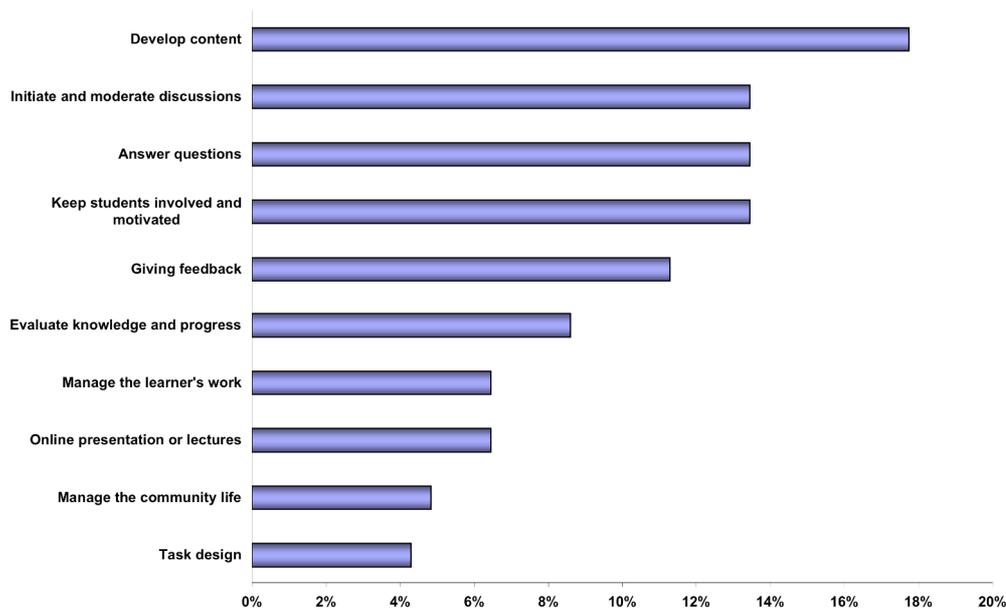


Figure 14: Main activities (max. 3) of e-learning facilitators.

6. Skills and competences

6.1 The importance of soft skills and the need for personal qualities

E-learning facilitators are firstly teachers or trainers. It has been confirmed by most of the participants in the various focus groups except for the French group that makes a difference between the trainers responsible for the content and between the e-learning facilitators who support learners in fields in which they are not necessarily specialists, *“they have to transfer the knowledge and information in a way that recipient or recipients have no problems with understanding and utilizing”* (PL) and of course *“the method of teaching is important”* (PL). Pedagogical skills are needed as a way to transmit knowledge to learners and that is better done if e-learning facilitator have an *“understanding of how people learn (methods and processes)”* (DK). Human skills refer first to communications skills. The competences required are *“presenting, coaching, moderating”* (DK) and also *“the ability to cooperate with students”* (PL).

The step from soft skills to personal qualities is easily done. E-learners need a lot of qualities: *“enthusiasm so that the e-tutor can encourage and motivate the learners”* (DK) but also *engagement, involvement, empathy, patience* and the ability to *“listen” to other people, to radiate kindness and interest for the learners and their progress* (DK).

And it is important to establish a relation of trust and confidence: *“learners can rely on the e-tutor (trustworthy) according to schedules, information-flow, follow ups”* (DK). *“There is a need to be able to motivate the learner and to make him/her confident”* (FR).

A global knowledge of the learner is required: *“I think that we should get to know the distant student also from the other side, such as his interest, actual problems”* (PL). It is important *“to know learners situations, their background, the context in which they learn”* (DK) because *“empathy created by technology (monitor as a barrier) is very difficult. It is very important to feel by what kind of inhibition the student is guided. Based on this, You can use proper motivation and induce the student do break his barrier”* (I).

6.2 Smoothing the ICT artefact

E-learning facilitators are “*between tools and people. Starting from the simplest contact with another person, through motivation to work, finding appropriate tools which help, the way of assessment, creation in the virtual world of real relationship between people, between student and the teacher*” (P). They need to have the “*ability to understand mechanisms behind the ICT platform... to understand needs and problems users can have in relation to the electronic environment that can seem cold*” (I).

ICT cannot be described a tool that facilitates interpersonal relations: “*e-tutor tries to break the ICT’s cold mood. He/she makes mediation between persons that don’t know each other. He/she uses contents in order to build dialog and in doing this, at the same time, he/she engineers the production of shared knowledge, stimulating debate and reflection. In this process asynchronous time is very important. The way to pose the question is fundamental, if the e-tutor gives the topic importance, analyzing its meanings, its implications, etc. The e-tutor has to give importance to meanings and senses of users’ contributions. s/he has to support the improvement of awareness of people, providing them the chance to become a collective subject, in order to overcome the barriers between people that are often created by the ICT environment.*” (I)

Learning is also a group process and e-learning facilitators have a role in building and strengthening the group. “*It is important to listen and to care for both the individual and the group. The e-tutor is the catalyst of personal relations: stimulating the thinking process allows interaction with other people, everyone has to play their part with their own thoughts and reactions, beginning with self-introduction which enables every member of the group to make the acquaintance of each other.*” (I). This requires specific qualities such as “*openness [and] sensitivity to the rhythm of the group and the way it works*” (PL).

To conclude, “*the e-tutor is the “game-master” which includes competencies such as 1) having perception in regards to learning and the learners participating in the learning activities 2) seeing that there is enough input for an understanding – and feeling – of a community in the virtual learning environments – it is the e-tutor who has to establish this and reassure the learners. That is also: establishing a frankness and dynamic atmosphere*” (DK).

6.3 Skills needed for solving problems

Among the learners (42) who have reported problems (44) successfully solved with the help of the e-learning facilitators, only a quarter are problems directly linked to the content of the course supported by the e-learning facilitator. In the table below, we have tried to make a classification of the problems encountered linking them with the variety of roles performed by the e-learning facilitator.

The problem is linked to...	Number of occurrence	Example	The role of the e-learning facilitator is to...
...the content of the course.	11	<i>The understanding of the concept of the Present Perfect tense</i>	...be a content specialist.
...exercises and tasks.	12	<i>We had case studies to resolve and generally the tutor gave good feedbacks about the situation</i>	...provide regular feedback.
...technical tools used to support the e-learning process.	7	<i>Access some parts of the platform and get answers regarding information on the platform</i>	...offer technical support (eq. hotline).
...the efficacy of learning with technologies.	4	<i>How to have group discussions with email</i>	...use technologies to support collaboration, interaction, better learning.
...the organisation of the training action.	7	<i>Tells me which courses I have to do</i>	...organise and administrate the learning path.
...the learning process.	3	<i>Gave me confidence in my work and encouraged me</i>	...support the learning process.

Figure 15: Classification of problems.

7. A need for improvement

7.1 What e-learners think?

Half of the learners find it perfect. They think that their e-learning facilitator doesn't encounter any difficulty in performing his/her role. The two additional limits mentioned are both linked to communication: communication between the group and bilateral communication with the facilitator. The two difficulties to be secondly mentioned are linked to a failure in the organisation: the e-learner feels alone because the e-learning facilitator is not present enough and he doesn't answer questions as quickly as he should to satisfy the learner (who has probably in mind the scheme of face to face courses).

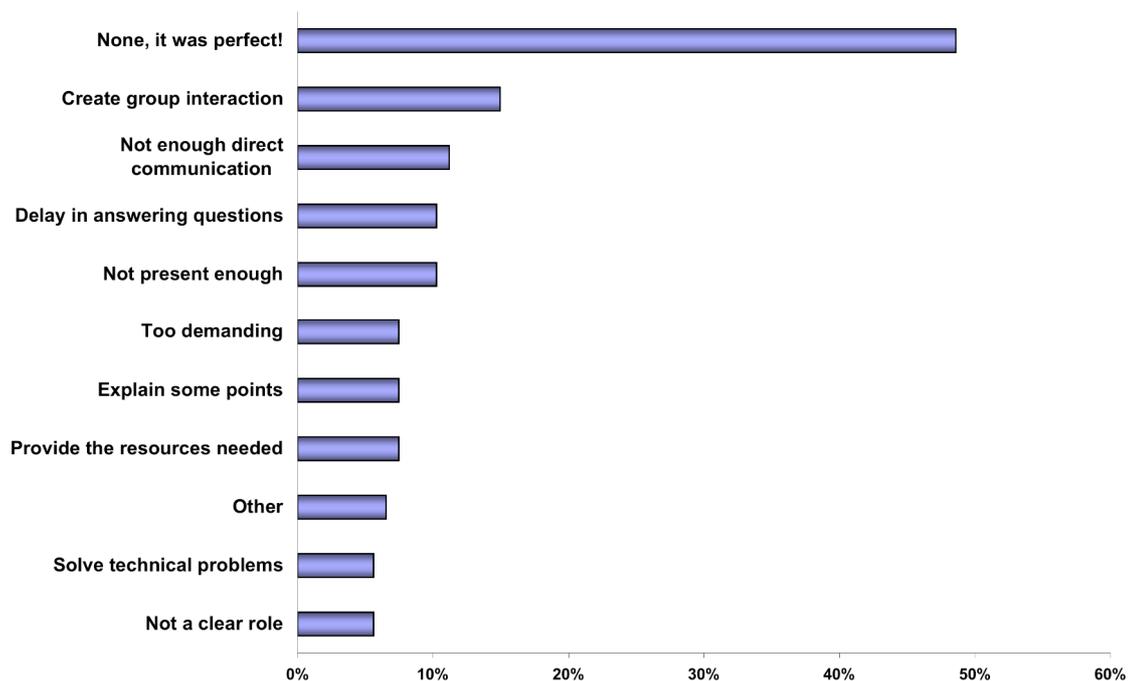


Figure 16: E-learning facilitator weaknesses in relation to the roles they have had to perform²

7.2 General expectations of e-learners

It seems from these figures that the full satisfaction rate is lower than in traditional training. It is not clear if a lower satisfaction is due to the nature of e-learning (in that case, e-learning would always be underestimated) or if it is because e-learning is a new concept (not yet stabilised and still in the stages experimentation). It is true that *“the largest part of communication is not verbal. If this channel of information flow is limited, the level of satisfaction decreases”* (PL) and that learners *“need better and*

² Several answers were possible but of course when it is perfect there is only one answer. In the category “Other” are the following statements: *“all necessary documentation is only in Internet”, “sometimes it is difficult to get explanations by text message, and it is maybe better to have a phone call instead of 10 mail exchanges...”, “Delay in communication due to technical gear. Learning this way is different and less interactive. It's not fair to compare it with classroom training. Seen from an e-learning standpoint this was very good.”, “It was almost perfect. Unfortunately, there were many interesting subjects that the course tried to cover, but the time was too short for learning so much information.”*

direct contact with the teacher” (PL). The only way to soften the difference would be to reduce the distance relation supported by technologies and *“the solution will be blended learning – distance plus face-to-face”* (PL).

This point of view is perhaps forgetting that e-learning is very recent and that technologies are still not very powerful, being in their first years of existence. People don't know e-learning and *“people like what they are used to”* (DK). In all countries e-learning is not yet widespread: *“e-learning is still not very common”* (DK) and *“in Poland e-learning is not so popular.”*

There are also probably differences of practices (from the organisation side) and expectations (from the learner side) between the systems in which e-learning is included. Is it part of commercial service for companies or is it included in traditional university curricula? The service to the final user may be different as underlined by a Polish e-learning facilitator: *“Colourful commercials of companies which earn on e-learning give promises to the students that it is wonderful way of education. Thanks to great independence and because they can organize the time themselves when they want to learn, e-learning is more efficient. From my experience, I know that this way of studying requires much more work, that is why the satisfaction rate is lower. Students have very little awareness how much effort they should put into studying. My satisfaction rate in e-learning in comparison to traditional teaching is lower because of the salary. E-learning is a very interesting and promising form of education, but at this moment not very profitable, and the level of salary in Poland is very low.”*

Learners are more or less familiar with technologies and they can be less satisfied if they are less familiar. *“In the formal educational institutions the situation differs... the students – i.e. young people are more familiar with technology and they are used to seeking information when they need it and to what extent they need it”* (DK). Perhaps age should be taken into consideration: *“young people might prefer e-learning and learning on demand while elder people prefer traditional training”* (DK).

And learners may have various expectations about what training is for: *“...in companies and institutions people who are not used to participating in courses very often would prefer face to face group courses, amongst other things, in order to meet people, get input and ideas. And people who often participate in courses, networks and meetings will prefer e-learning because it is flexible and time-saving. Perhaps your position in the organization is decisive.”* (DK) *“Social contact is important for many people and if e-learning is a substitute for face to face group training, people might have reservations about e-learning”* (DK).

In Poland, *“the persons who choose e-learning, expect quick results for a low cost... education for them is one of their daily duties. It is not so important. That is why they have worse results and the level of satisfaction is lower.”*

It depends on the context, it depends on the learners and their expectations but also, *“It depends on the course, if it is active or passive, if the e-tutor is well acquainted with his/her tasks, if the training approach fits with users' typology and users' needs. Then it depends on the e-tutor's availability (even in synchronous time by appointments), from the effectiveness of feedback made with trainers and tutors. Of course a blended structure will result in full satisfaction”* (IT).

After all, perhaps the satisfaction rate is not so low: *“The man, who is sitting daily in front of computer for about 8 hours in a short period of time can become discouraged and can have low level of satisfaction”* (PL).

7.3 Increasing satisfaction

If there is a need to train e-learning facilitators to develop their *“human skills: encouraging, motivating, organizing”* (DK), practice is also required: *“and they have to try repeatedly to gain experience”* (DK). *“A basis could be that e-tutors became e-learners for a while – and then participate in an e-tutor training programme”* (DK).

An e-learning facilitator needs to be trained but his work requires *“preparation and organisation of the course [...] – as well as communicating to the e-learners what is expected from them. Sometimes an e-tutor must teach learners how to learn in order to change learners' attitudes to their learning – they*

have to understand that e-learning differs from traditional face to face learning” (DK). Some techniques are useful to improve interaction. “The discussion should be held in smaller groups... that should force activity and openness” (PL). “The e-tutor must prepare the communication forms (models) and the topics to discuss. And as a moderator the e-tutor will be “visible”. The e-tutor might also make contact with the learners who are not active” (DK). “Another key factor, is having a good knowledge of each individual learner. The facilitator has to be able to put a name to each face. The videoconference over IP may be helpful to maintain this link” (FR).

Probably not all activities are compatible with group interaction: “It is necessary to join e-training with real labs and a description of the task which requires cooperation within the group” (PL). In France as far as adult training is concerned, “each learner follows a different objective, a different course, and is trained at different times”. So there is no group. To counterbalance this feeling of isolation, some e-learning facilitators, because they think that group interaction is important, try to create discussion groups, sometimes outside of the set training hours. They can even organise tea, so that the learners have informal exchanges beyond the learning process itself. Group interaction can also be facilitated by the physical organisation of e-learning. In France, most adult learners have access to computers in distance learning centres. In these centres they get to know each other and they develop co-training strategy. The ones who have more facilities to learn and to understand dedicate some time to help the others. Technical problems or lack of tool knowledge may create positive effects as the first support to a learner is often another learner.

But usually “technology might be a barrier for both e-tutor and learners” and “it is important that both e-tutor and learners are familiar with the tools, else they won’t use the tools and then there will be fewer activities” (DK) because tools may be helpful to create group interaction: “video, sound, better tools for work” (PL).

Training, preparation and organization are important but the status of the e-learning facilitator has also to be considered. What are his duties? Does he have time enough to prepare and tutor? “...it needs a lot of effort from the teacher. It is obvious, that reducing the time in which the student has contact with the teacher makes it impossible or very difficult to build the relationship” (PL).

“To create interaction in the group the teacher should be engaged. To achieve this he or she needs to spend a lot of time, usually much more than in traditional learning. If the salary is quite low, e-tutors don’t have the motivation to work with students” (PL). Salary appears though to be a strong motivating factor able to play a role on the involvement of e-learning facilitators because “from my experience e-learning needs more time and work in comparison to the traditional system...” (PL).

In France also e-tutoring may be more time demanding than face to face training. “Many tasks of the facilitator are not part of the planned training path. They spend some time to help the learner elaborate a professional plan. They may be intermediate with some public institution in charge of employment and social support – eg. the employment agency, the financing bodies, how to fill a form. More and more there is a need to tutor the e-learner in the globality of his/her situation regarding employment and/or job evolution and not only on certain subjects.” It may be linked to the learners that are not students but adults, employed or looking for a job, both situations for which administrative task are huge (financing the training, complying the legal requirements...).

7.4 Skills and competences to develop

7.4.1 A will to develop organisational and technical skills.

E-learning facilitators would like to develop all skills and the knowledge of the area. The Figure n°17 below shows the relative importance of each skill in comparison with the others, of what e-learning facilitators would like to develop. They probably put a little emphasis on technical skills because they estimate that they are mastering the human skills. It is interesting to note that e-learners require first from their e-learning facilitators human skills (cf. Figure n° 18) and they think that e-learning facilitators could improve their work by developing the communication aspect (cf. Figure n° 19) – that is probably integrating human skills as well as organisation skills (the need to be more present).

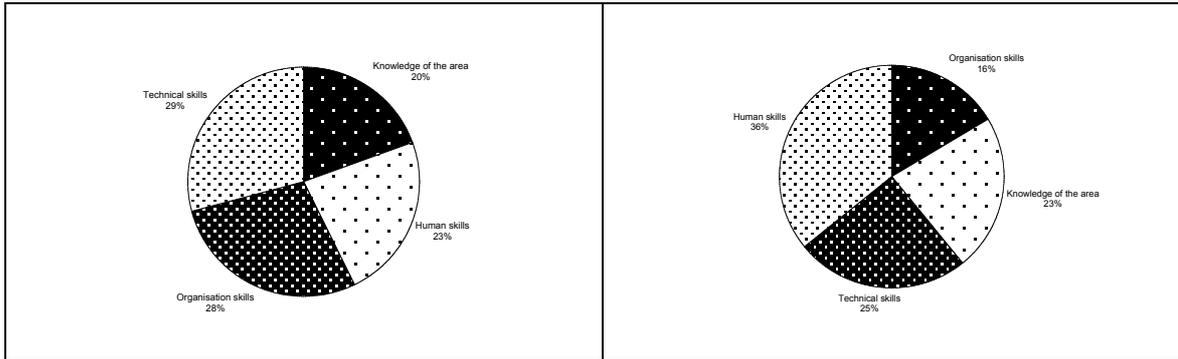


Figure 17: Skills that e-tutors would like to develop³

Figure 18: Skills required by e-learners⁴

Human skills are usually considered in relations with ICT because *“it is hard to manage relations with ICT”, “it’s hard to manage the course community and to keep students involved in their work”*. It is also related with the knowledge of the learning preferences of learners and to learning processes: *“I’d like to improve my knowledge in learning processes in order to manage them better and better”*. Under organizational skills, similar needs have been expressed under *“team leadering”*.

It is worth underlining that under the technical skills, only very few needs are directly linked to tools: *“I need to learn for example file formats, better use of mail and forums”*. They usually refer to larger needs: *“more modern methods”, “more online methods”, “e-learning methodology”, “online teaching methods”, “better e-learning methods”, etc.* In e-learning, technologies have a role that cannot be isolated from the process. Even if IT must be understood and if a technology has to be performed by e-learning facilitators: *“the Instructor must be familiar with all rapidly evolving new technologies”* because *“Computer world is very dynamic and the knowledge has to kept up to date”*. More precisely *“W2.0 tools”* need to be integrated in learning processes. This has been confirmed by the focus groups.

“Technical aspects remain very important as when there is a problem, everything goes wrong. It is important to plan alternative solutions with analogical tools like a fax and a telephone for when the computer fails. A facilitator who doesn’t master the technique has difficulties to make the learner confident” (FR). *“E-tutors might have a lack of knowledge of technological tools and the employment of these. Therefore they focus on that”* (DK).

³ Several answers possible (18% of tutors have provided more than one category of skills).

⁴ Only two answers possible. *“Technical skills”* were mentioned as related to tools, *“Human skills”* were developed by interpersonal communication and community management. 102 learners have responded (only 20 have given one skill).

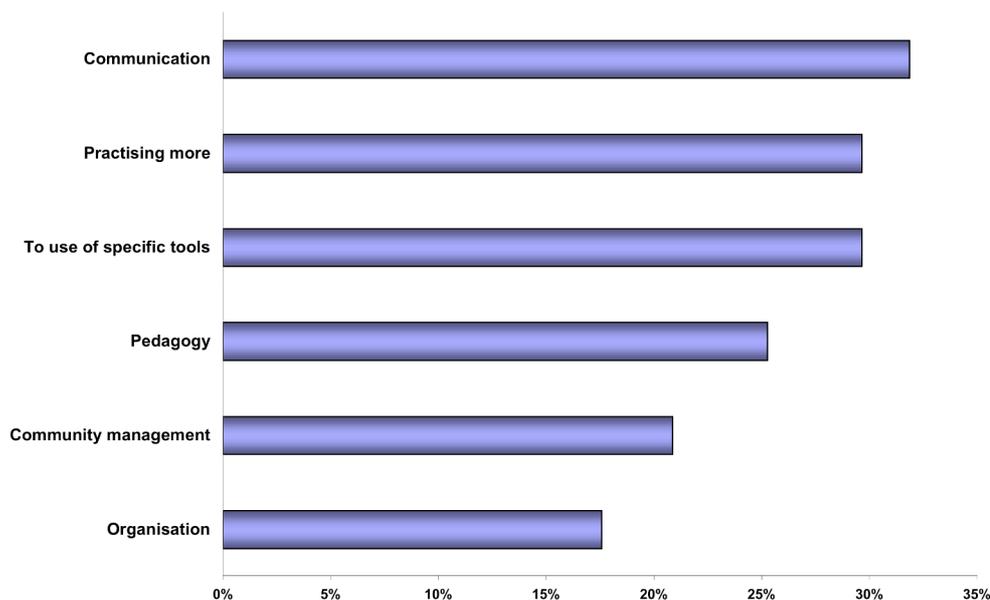


Figure 19: How could/should e-learning facilitators improve their skills? (max. 2)

7.4.2 The self-representation of e-learning facilitators

If e-learning facilitators tend to think that they need to develop skills more on the technical and organisation level, “maybe it is a problem of self-perception” (I). It is probably difficult for a teacher to say “I do not know how to comport myself when dealing with people”, hardly any teacher will ever say this” (PL) because communication skills are the core skills of every form of teaching. “If e-tutors are used to training face to face they have human skills, whether these skills can be transferred to e-learning or not. Therefore they might focus on and spend times on how to organize e-learning processes and to be familiar with technology” (I). As “applying technical tools in relation to training is unknown or “the new thing” many e-tutors perhaps have no experience. Therefore focus is on the technical issues. And organization of e-learning concepts/courses might differ from their normal way of organizing courses and the like“ (DK). “Many e-tutors have a human sciences education, so they can be assumed to have human skills, but not much technical knowledge” (I). Also “the learners need more “security” and initiative than in face to face training, and at the same time the e-tutor needs more tools to remedy these needs – the more tools the more possibilities for all-round discussions and communications” (DK). “Teaching on-line requires systematic work. That is why, if somebody has technical and organizational problems at the beginning, he could have difficulties with adopting the new way of teaching“ (PL).

“When [e-learning facilitators] mention technological and organisational skills it may be from a pedagogical point of view: how to organize activities where learners are very active and (perhaps) responsible for their own learning and how to apply technological tools to promote learning and in a way which is easy for learners and tutors” (I). “Pedagogical methods, including knowledge and understanding of learning principles and how to combine pedagogy and technological tools” (DK) are needed to provide a better service to the learners.

Technical and organizational skills seems easier to learn and develop. “Human skills have more personal character. They require, apart from knowledge, experience in pedagogy and skills of adopting to the rhythm and the way of transferring information and getting knowledge. These skills are hard to learn” (PL). “ICT platforms are all similar and when you have learnt to use one of them there are not any real problems” (I).

If it is the majority, it is not the case among e-learning facilitators who have participated to the Polish focus group who were all very familiar with IT. They use computers in their daily work and teach subjects connected with computer science. “That is why we don’t have problems with technical and

organizational skills”. “Personally I would like to have interpersonal scholarship. I feel good in the technical and organizational aspects” (P).

7.4.3 Influence of the subjects e-tutored

The table below shows that the field of subject taught has an impact on the perception of the skills e-learning facilitators need to develop. In general subjects, they estimate they need more technical and organisation skills: everything is OK when one has knowledge. In technical fields where e-learning facilitators are usually coming from IT related subjects (they should have already mastered the technical side of e-learning), the differences between categories of skills are less visible. There, it is the knowledge of the area that is more needed (it is probably due to the fact that IT are changing constantly and that they require constant updating on the teacher’s side – which is not perhaps so much the case with philosophy or languages – where the work is different).

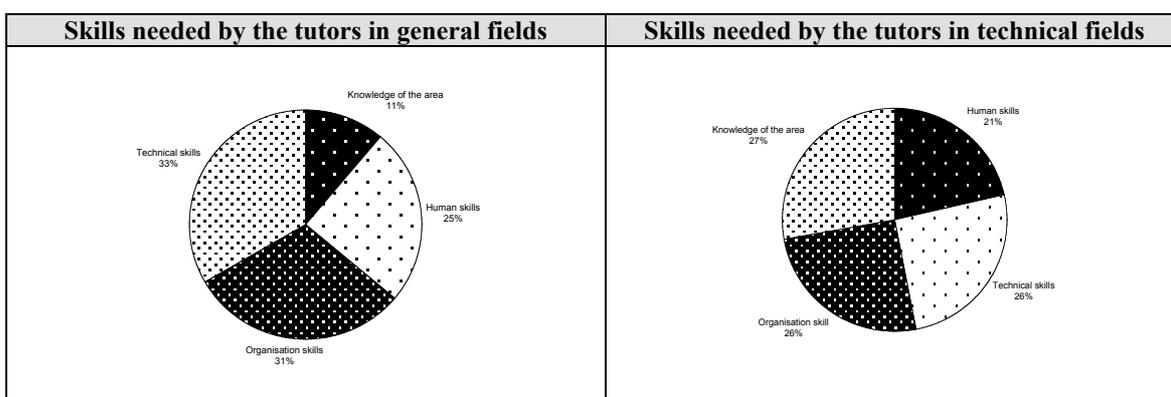


Figure 20: Comparison of skills needed by e-learning facilitators according to the subject taught

7.4.5 Should training of e-learning facilitators be improved?

Most e-learning facilitators that have been specifically trained are satisfied with their training even if sometimes some improvements could be given: “I needed more information about how to structure an e-course” (I), “to visit concrete online courses” (RO), “how to manage learners” (UK), “modern technology” (UK), “Nobody teaches you about differences in communication and management in distance learning” (RO), “I missed organization skills, which I acquired on the job” (I).

But of course a “better quality” (PL) of the training proposed to e-learning facilitators is needed, not only focused on the technical aspects of the platform used: “It should be known what kind of content we want to teach, what kind of tools we have, how we will verify the knowledge, how to make teaching and learning easier and pleasant” (PL). Training should be negotiated with the teachers (PL) and “should be related to the specific courses and contexts in which e-tutors act” (DK). Permanent feedback and guidance are as useful to trainers and teachers as they are to e-learners: “it is important to get constant feedback during the course from persons experienced in methodology”. “The help from the persons experienced in methodology, could be very useful in comparison to self learning (which takes much more time)” (PL). “Another important part of my training is the continuous feedback I have during my work by the course manager, it is a kind of guidance on the job. Then it is important to study books too.” (I) All the actors involved in the learning process should be involved in the training of e-learning facilitators. “There are very important constant meetings of all the people playing roles in the course: authors, designers, platform managers, teachers, course managers, etc. This is important at the beginning for the development of the course and all the course long, for the feedback that works as guidance on the job too.” (I). In France also, most of the e-learning facilitators insist on the necessity of setting up groups to elaborate and/or adapt the e-learning resources. A collective elaboration is a guarantee of a better appropriation by the group of trainers and facilitators.

7.5 Improving the organisation

Pedagogy and technologies used are closely linked and if we can improve this with *“a good knowledge of the technological tools, how to apply these according to the different activities in a course”* (DK), it is also important to consider along the way *“pedagogical methods, including knowledge and understanding of learning principles and how to combine pedagogy and technological tools”* (DK). To understand this interpenetration *“training and practise is important”* but it is also necessary to involve the teacher in the choice and adaptation of the technology. The tools have to become his own tools.

Time is needed before the training process but also during the process itself: *“Perhaps a good knowledge of the learners is a basis for providing better service. In face to face training you will soon find out the potential of the learners. It takes a little longer in e-learning”* (DK). *“Give the students what they expect – teachers should be more often visible on the e-platform. From my experience e-learning needs more time and work in comparison to the traditional system.”* (PL) And some e-learning facilitators may feel that they don't have enough time (because of their status or in comparison with the money they earn) to dedicate to the learner: *“The problem is salary (in our university) of e-teachers, when you take into consideration coefficient between salary and duties. Money has great influence on motivation in every field also in didactic. Instead of better teachers, who resign from their work, people with less experience or motivation give lessons. They do only minimum necessary, and the level of the classes is decreasing and the full satisfaction rate of the students also”* (PL).

8. Conclusion

Several factors play a role on the quality of the e-learning services delivered as perceived by the learner. The traditional relation between learners and teachers and between learners is affected by technologies and tools. We are still at a stage where learners and teachers try to adapt themselves, their behaviour and their organisation to the available technologies and tools. They both have to adapt on a first degree (how to use such a tool, *“If I need to send this, what is the procedure?”*...), they also have to find solutions to turn around the technology made available for them (*“If I cannot do this, I have another option, I will use my personal mail box because the maximum capacity allowed by the e-learning platform is not enough”*). They also have to adapt to the many small problems that occur when one uses technologies (software compatibility, crashes, viruses, etc.). Finally teachers have to adapt their pedagogy that is strongly influenced and modified by the technologies and tools that they can use (and that often doesn't depend on them because they are just told to use such systems). Technologies are not mature, teachers and trainers are not used to technologies and tools, both learners and teachers are not used to work at a distance. Obviously, to make things easier for everybody, there is a need for a new role called the e-learning facilitator who should really be there to facilitate the overall process. Our survey shows that behind this denomination, there is a large variety of persons, with different backgrounds, with diverse activities to achieve this end (from course elaboration to administrative management). They are usually trainers and teachers with complementary tasks to manage at a distance. If they seem to do their best in their context, there is of course, a need for professionalisation, to make them more confident of managing distant learners, for planning e-learning courses, for using specific tools and in particular for designing adapted tasks. This goes through the implementation of formal training paths, through the organisation of short seminars that allow e-facilitators to meet and exchange views about their practices and through the development of shadowing periods. The development of specific networks maintaining active online communities, producing reference materials is also a way to contribute to the existence, formalisation and thorough professionalisation of this e-facilitator function. But more than everything, there is a need to think about the systems differently: involving e-learning facilitators and learners in the planning of the system, providing open solutions that give space to private initiative and that make adaptations possible. Time must be measured differently: creating group interaction, constructing and then managing individual relations with learners, requires more time than in a face to face group where each student can easily imagine he has a one to one relation with the trainer.

9. Annex 1: Questionnaires for e-learning facilitators

1. Name
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Country
5. Town
6. Fluent in English? (y n)
7. In which organisation you work? (university, private company, adult training organisation, freelance)
8. Number of employees (1-20; 21-50, >50)
9. Turnover (<1Meuros, 1-2 Meuros, >2Meuros)
10. Where do your learners come from? (SMEs, Large companies, Public organisations, Individuals, Educational institutions)
11. What title or denomination is more adapted to your function? Max. 2 (e-tutor, e-facilitator, trainer, lecturer, moderator, teacher, counsellor, course designer, mentor, tutor)
12. How long is your teaching experience? (>4 years, 4-10, >10)
13. What subjects do you teach? (General, Technical)
14. Please specify topics:
15. What is your role in the e-learning activities?
16. What is the type of courses e-tutored (academic undergraduate, academic graduate, vocational)
17. What are the 3 main time consuming activities? Choose 3
18. (Designing courses, Developing content, Online presentations and lectures, Initiating and moderating discussions, Answering questions, Keeping students involved and motivated, Managing the community life, Task designing, Giving feedback, Monitoring progress, Managing the learner's work, Evaluating knowledge and progress)
19. What is the most useful skill in your activity? Max. 1 (Technical skills, Human skills, Organisation skills, Knowledge of the area)
20. What skills would you like to develop?
21. Your tasks are mainly? (Synchronous, Asynchronous)
22. Precise your choice:
23. What tools do you use mostly? Max. 5 (Mail, Wiki, Forums, Static web site, Blog, Text/Voice/Video communication, Forums, Virtual classroom (learning platform), Games and Simulations, Mobile technologies, Quizzes)
24. Who do you work with? (I work alone, Other e-tutors, Technicians, Trainers or teachers, Companies, Content developers)
25. Main diplomas obtained in initial training: (>=master, bachelor degree, < bachelor degree)
26. Did you participate in continuous training? (Yes, No)
27. Have you been specifically trained to become an e-learning facilitator? (Yes, No)
28. Where have you been trained? (organisation and course name)?
29. If so, how was this training organised (face to face, online, coaching...)?
30. What main skill did you improve when training as an e-learning facilitator?
31. What did you find to be lacking in your training? (Organisation skills, Human skills, Knowledge of the area, Technical skills) - Please specify:...
32. Do you know formal training schemes to train e-tutors? List them.
33. How do you mostly learn in the workplace? Tick the 2 main important propositions (max. 2): By participating to events (seminars, fairs, exhibition...), By exchanging online (mails, forums, chat...), By accessing dynamic information (newsletter, blogs, community web sites, podcasts...) By speaking with colleagues or managers at work, By accessing static information (book, web documentation, manuals...), By practising and solving problems
34. Describe an activity that you have to perform and that in your opinion could be improved. (describe, comment)

10. Annex 2: Questionnaire for e-learners

1. Name (optional)
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Country
5. You are: (a student, unemployed, retired, employed in the private sector, employed in the public sector, self-employed)
6. What is the title of the e-learning course you took part in?
7. What is the duration of the course? (in hours)
8. Type of course (academic undergraduate, academic graduate, vocational)
9. What kind of institution was responsible for the course? (university, adult school, public, private, your company)
10. How do you call the person in charge of facilitating your learning process (equivalent to an e-facilitator)?
11. How would you describe the main roles of your e-learning facilitator? (max. 3)
 - Helping me to solve technical problems,
 - Explaining me some difficult topics (answer my questions)
 - Evaluating my learning (monitor my progress)
 - Motivating me
 - Helping me to organise my learning (methodological help)
 - Animating group interactions (with other learners)
 - His/her role was mainly administrative
 - Other (If other, please specify:.....)
12. How was the course organized?
 - Face to face classroom training
 - Seminars
 - Self paced learning
 - Coaching face to face
 - Coaching - online
 - Group work face to face
 - Group work - online
 - Other (If other, please specify:.....)
13. Which technological tools were used?
 - Virtual classroom (platform)/Mail/Forums/Static website/Voice/video communication/Wiki/Blog
 - Other (If other, please specify:.....)
14. What were the main learning objectives?
15. What are the main skills you require from your e-tutor? (Max. 2)
 - Human skills (interpersonal communication, community management...)
 - Organisation skills
 - Technical skills (related to tools)
 - Knowledge of the area
16. What were the e-tutors' weaknesses in relation to the roles they had to perform?
 - S/he was not present enough
 - S/he was too demanding
 - S/he had difficulties to create group interaction
 - The delay in answering my questions was too long
 - S/he had difficulties in explaining some points to me
 - S/he had difficulties in solving technical problems
 - His/her role was not clear
 - There was not enough direct communication
 - S/he couldn't provide me with the resources I needed
 - None, it was perfect!
 - Other
17. In your opinion, how could e-tutors' necessary skills be improved? (max. 2)
 - By following a training on communication
 - By following a training on community management
 - By following a training on organisational skills
 - By following a training on the use of specific tools
 - By following a training on pedagogy
 - By practising more
18. Describe a problem that you have faced and that your e-tutor helped you to solve with success.

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