



A Critique of How Workshops Are Held

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Received 2021 September 11; Accepted 2021 September 21.

Keywords: Iran, Kermanshah, Workshop, Medical University

All faculty members have probably participated in a number of workshops. From the late '80s until now (more than 32 years), I have participated in many workshops (more than 300 workshops as participants or presenters) in various subjects and different places (Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, other universities in the country and abroad). In this article, based on personal and professional experiences, I have made a brief overview of the process and manner of holding training workshops in Iranian universities of medical sciences (1).

The Oxford Dictionary defines a workshop as follows: "A workshop is a type of interactive training in which participants engage in a variety of learning activities instead of listening to a lecture or presentation. In general, there are two types of workshops: A general workshop is set up for a diverse audience, and a closed workshop is set up to meet the training needs of a specific group." (2).

Interactivity and performing various educational activities are the characteristics of the above definition. Workshops are held on a variety of topics, all of which are time-limited, and aim to teach practical skills, techniques, or ideas.

A workshop is a short-term training program designed to teach or introduce a practical topic to participants which can be used in their work or daily life. Most workshops have several features in common: they are usually short-term (from one hour to several days), small (usually 6 to 15 participants), and participatory (allowing people to participate and listen to their opinions). They are often designed for people who work together or are in the same field and are held by people who have real experience in the subject matter.

The participatory nature of the workshop activates the participants, influences the orientation of the workshop, and provides an opportunity to practice techniques and skills. Workshops are generally informal. That is participa-

tion and discussion, not a teacher presenting material and being accepted by the participants. The presentation of the workshop should not be limited to one person, but the use of people as facilitators (teamwork) can greatly expand the facilities of a workshop and make the work easier for the presenter and participants. Workshops are also limited in time, they are often held in a single session, or several sessions over a period of time (two sessions a day, a few weekends or a few weeks). These restrictions vary according to the subject and the audience. Although a workshop may end with the delivery of pamphlets and suggestions for more resources to study, unlike other courses (which depend on a large amount of study and other projects such as articles, presentations, and classroom activities), it is usually independent (3).

There are three main stages of planning, preparing, and implementing a workshop. Planning is based on purpose, type of audience, workshop size, time available, and content. Preparation is related to procurement, materials needed, information used, and evaluation form. Implementation stage is mentioning the introduction, introducing the content of the workshop, observing the planned time, and presenting the materials (4).

Early in this period, most workshops were more formal, serious, participatory, and team-oriented, and the time was insufficient (3 to 5 days). As we progressed, the time of the workshops decreased and interactive sections, practical activity, questions and answers, and group work became less and less, and even the end-of-course evaluations decreased over time. To the extent that a working group is now almost eliminated in the workshops, more brief topics are presented and the duration of most workshops is reduced to about 2 hours. So, the top and bottom of the topics are cut and the presentation speed is increased. There is no longer about doing homework and giving feedback to participants. In addition, holding com-

plementary workshops is generally forgotten (such as the supplementary research methodology workshop). Overall, the workshops seem to have turned into lecture sessions. For many participants, getting certified takes precedence over actual learning and skills development.

These changes may not be too problematic for the workshops that offer an idea. Because they only introduce a topic and give clues to the participants to continue reading. But they have a very negative effect on practical issues such as research methods, proposal writing, article writing, software work, statistical analysis, and sampling. At present, the use of the workshop has been reduced to the introduction of the subject and they do not have the necessary efficiency in creating and improving skills. Even incomplete learning and inadequate skills resulting from these workshops can have unpleasant consequences. According to the famous proverb "Half-doctor kills life and half-mullah destroys religion."; the risks of this type of workshop may outweigh the benefits.

This problem is exacerbated during the outbreak of coronavirus and the wider use of e-learning. As the workshops are held in the form of webinars, the small effect of the presence of the instructor and being face-to-face with the participants to remove some ambiguities has also dis-

appeared for some interested participants. Although webinars have undeniable benefits (and in this case, it is possible to write an independent article) and are helpful during the coronavirus disease period, the other conditions of holding workshops in webinars are not observed at all.

Footnotes

Authors' Contribution: Mansour Rezaei prepared all work and manuscript.

Conflict of Interests: There is no conflict of interest.

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