Appendix 7 Do's and don'ts of online facilitation

Tony Carr (inspired by Nancy White and Gilly Salmon)

Some do's of online facilitation

There are several ways that you can improve your effectiveness as an online facilitator. You may want to add to this list or to expand on what is already here:

- **Have a clear purpose** – Without this your hard work will have no obvious direction and may be wasted.

- **Know your community** – Try to become familiar with their aspirations, aims and culture(s). Establish which issues will influence their use of communication technologies.

- **Know your tools** – You will be seen as a role model by many participants, so you will need to communicate some confidence and competence in your use of the communication technologies that you expect participants to use.

- **Communicate clearly using language that the participants will understand** – This helps participants, including second language speakers of your language, to feel included and effective. It also tells participants that you are making an effort to engage with them.

- **Create an environment that supports both a warm, fuzzy community feeling and productive collaboration** – Most participants want to come away from the learning experience with skills and products that will be useful in their day-to-day work. Moments of connection with their peers support this, but they are not the primary goal.

- **Decide to like your participants** – This choice allows you to make a significant difference, because you will be better able to notice them as people with hopes, fears, strengths and struggles. This will help to motivate you and the participants to persist through any difficulties.

- **Lead by example** – Much of what you want to communicate is tacit knowledge (i.e. it is not enough just to say it, you will need to model good practices).

- **Respond thoughtfully to feedback** – Quite often, participant feedback that initially feels like venting may help you to introduce improvements in a community or course. Sometimes, participants just need to know that they are heard by the facilitator.

- **Value participant contributions** – A community process becomes sustainable when participants start contributing willingly to conversations, and even more so when they are able to initiate and peer facilitate conversations.

- **Use enabling questions to open and revitalise online interaction** – The participants need to find their own answers so, even if you know, it is often best to hold back a bit and ask questions that deepen the conversation or provoke a shift of phase.

- **Support effective leadership within the community** – In the later stages of a course (and in a maturing community), most of the action should come from participants and this includes leadership by participants. These participants will then be able to operate with greater confidence outside the course/ community as well.

Some don'ts of online facilitation

Adapted from: UNDP Waterwiki at
http://waterwiki.net/index.php/Welcome

BRAINSTORM on "How to make a Community of Practice sleep" available at http://tinyurl.com/crvcuz

Here is a selection of online facilitation no-nos from a brainstorm in April 2006 by members of an online facilitation course

- **Communication**
    - Never answer to member mails, and when you answer be very, very critical
    - Write Looooong emails
    - Bombard participants with lots of non-relevant information
    - Give very short answers (yes, no, rubbish, etc.)
    - Give very long answers 'bla…bla…bla'

- **Motivation**
    - Strongly comment on members' mistakes
    - Never give ideas – try NOT to be creative
    - Never help those who have a problem
    - Be very negative about people asking the same thing
    - React once very critical and then not again for 2 weeks or longer
    - React strongly and emotionally like: 'NEVER DO THIS AGAIN!!!! NEXT YOU WILL BE *&^%%$#!!'

- Tell everybody that your expectations will never be met, that you don't believe the group can succeed

- **Management**

    - Never give deadlines, never define task and goals

    - No structured communication, no milestones, never define roles of each member, etc.

- Give people very strict guidelines for contribution or long and complicated (and impossible) guidelines

- Do not give enough time to contribute

- Promise outputs/contributions, but don't deliver