

“Training Course for Facilitators of Online Discussion Groups and Moderators of Communities of Practice”

By Gabriela Renggli, AGRIDEA

An online training course in e-Moderation, which took place from March 22 to April 13, 2006 has been successfully held entirely online – at www.mynetworks.org.

This fully web-based course is designed for development professionals involved in facilitating online discussion groups or web-based communities of practice. It focuses on the management of collaboration and learning via the internet, of people working in different places around the world. It is providing insight into, and first practice in, moderation techniques adapted to web-based work and in the use of web services for project management tasks. Course providers were AGRIDEA Lindau (<http://www.lbl.ch/internet/index.htm>) and armadillo-media (www.armadillo-media.ch) Lucerne, Switzerland.

Participants 2006

The 11 participants represented 9 international organisations (among them SDC, UNDP, ICCO, NIZA, SKAT, and different NGO's) from 8 countries: Ecuador, Peru, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, Slovak Republic, Tanzania, Nepal. Due to the time zone difference between the westernmost participants (Ecuador and Peru) and easternmost ones (Nepal) – which consisted of 12 hours – it has been very challenging to find appropriate times for the weekly synchronous live audio meetings and chats. The course took place in an open and creative atmosphere – with a permanent intensive and lively collaboration among the participants. This training had a good response – and interesting output (see below) which is still going on.

Here is a brief description of this special training course:

Scope of the course

The training is especially designed for **professionals working in development cooperation** (or other international cooperation settings) who are facilitating online team collaboration – or are planning to start it. The training course is focusing on the management of team collaboration via internet and on facilitation of online discussions or news groups. It is very suitable for working groups or project teams who need to develop their competences and produce results over a long distance. A special focus is put on facilitators of communities of practice. The two course instructors providing this training have professional backgrounds and experiences in e-moderation & e-learning as well as in the field of development cooperation.

Objectives of the course as stated in the course program:

Course participants will....

- get to know methods and techniques of e-moderation for facilitating groups in the internet
- moderate group discussions themselves and reflect about the process
- produce results together and transfer the newly gained knowledge to their own work setting
- be able to evaluate the value of e-moderation for their own work
- develop ideas for possible applications (project coaching, moderation of communities of practice, continuing education etc.)

Characteristics of the course and content

Sequences	Brief characteristics of methodology and content
Kick-off Meeting	Introduction to e-learning and e-moderation, course design and learning arrangement, objectives and phases of the course, forming teams for warm-up activity. Course start.
Moderated group work at www.mynetworks.org	Facilitated asynchronous team work according to a learning path: Forum discussions and free communication using e-mail, skype and/or chat to solve the tasks. Common negotiation of approaches and further steps. Defining milestones and deadlines, presentation of the solution, reflection and feedback about the process. Elaborating concepts according to selected subjects/projects, realising first own projects ideas and starting a transfer-to-practice process.
4 plenary meetings as chats or audio conferences	Synchronous communication: Reflection about and lessons learnt of previous week; discussion and design of upcoming assignments, forming new teams, synthesis of work phases.
Basics about methodology and success factors in e-moderation	Course literature, summary of DO's and DON'Ts in e-moderation, helpful links, software tips and useful tools, examples.

Output and feedback

The course with its “learning by doing approach” was lasting for 4 weeks. While the first 2 weeks were providing a basic training getting from rather simple to more sophisticated stages of participants’ interaction – the last two weeks were dedicated to subjects and project ideas the participants could bring in themselves and develop them for their further work (“transfer-to-practice phase”).

One of the remarkable results – especially under the aspect of joint knowledge compilation – was one group work done during the last two training weeks. As a facilitated team project the participants created a Wiki on e-moderation, online communication and CoP management: <http://europeandcis.undp.org/Water-Wiki/index.php/Workspace/E-Moderator-Course> Everybody is invited to have an online site-seeing of this wiki – and to even discover the embedded learning games!

The course participants decided to stay in contact among each other and formed a small “e-modi-CoP” at mynetworks – where they are still exchanging their experiences and contributing to “their” wiki.

Besides the positive response of the participants themselves about this training – the wiki work was appre-

ciated as well by other well known professionals in online facilitation training <http://www.fullcirc.com/weblog/2006/04/waterwiki-this-looks-amazing.htm>

Course program and information

The course program of March 2006 provides an overview about this training in detail: <http://www.mynetworks.org/tcb/download.php?resourceid=565>.

Further insights and highlights of the first e-moderation training in 2005 is providing a report: <http://www.mynetworks.org/tcb/download.php?resourceid=564>

Other organizational issues

Next e-moderation Training: yet to be determined

Course fee: Euro 790

Course language: English

Course instructors: Dr. Gabriela Renggli (gabriela.renggli@agridea.ch) and Mr. Andreas Schoenborn (schoenborn@armadillo-media.ch)

Course location: <http://www.mynetworks.org> (the course is entirely online)

Full program: Ready for download at <http://www.mynetworks.org/tcb/download.php?resourceid=565>