

Fun and Games: Eliciting Participation in Collaborative Content Design

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Technique	A Fun Exercise	Document•A•Palooza	Collaborative Writing (Wiki)
Site	http://telr.osu.edu	http://telr.osu.edu/carmen-help	http://telr.osu.edu/carmen
Challenge	An organization in transition.	Big software upgrade, little time to document it.	Lots of information, lots of target audiences.
Method	A modified cardsort to identify focus areas for the site.	A team event to test the old documentation against the new CMS.	A wiki to identify and discuss information for the new site.
Participants	TELRL's Executive Director, Directors, and area managers + 2 from outside	The CMS team + multimedia specialists + a few Help Desk agents	The CMS team
Elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of tasks, skills, and topics culled from past and active projects and the existing site. • Participants assigned in pairs. • Facilitators to provide instructions, observe, and take notes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scheduled date and time. • Assigned tasks. • Paper copies of help pages. • Instructions to mark all changes. • Food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wiki seeded with content from any existing sources. • Wiki access for participants. • Lists of assignments and deadlines.
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper management was involved from the beginning. • Different perspectives showed the big picture; we found reasonable convergence with extra depth in specialty areas. • Sorting by skills and tasks helped clarify services we advertise and things we do internally. • Pair discussions helped identify phrases to use and those to avoid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide coverage of material jump-started revision plan. • Old pros caught existing documentation errors and found subtle twists in the new system. • Novices brought a fresh perspective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iterative editing and review produced useful, current, and focused information. • Containing discussion and drafts in the wiki made the editorial process more transparent. • The wiki served as a testing ground for the site's structure and headings—if the team doesn't get it, no one else will.
Lessons Learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair your participants carefully. • Allow more than you'd think time for discussion, but set a time limit—1 hour wasn't enough. • Try to give your participants closure, even though there are no right answers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never assign review tasks to the system manager and the event organizers. • Easy tasks are simpler and take less time than you think; hard tasks are more complex and take more time. <p><i>Corollary:</i> Put fewer people on each basic task; give <u>far</u> fewer tasks to those with complex tasks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistence and someone to nudge the contributors are necessary. • People don't always adopt the information you'd expect. <p><i>Corollary 1:</i> Assign sections if crucial reviewers don't volunteer.</p> <p><i>Corollary 2:</i> The wiki is not a democracy—everyone is invited to make their case, but some opinions will matter more.</p>
Bonus Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exercise revealed different goals and opinions between and within pairs, which we could then bring into the open. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free pizza. • People outside the core CMS team got to “see how the other half live.” • A novice chose to adopt the CMS as an intranet for student employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the wiki effectively fueled interest in a larger wiki initiative.