



Application for Confirmation of Candidature in an AUT Doctoral Programme - Research Proposal

APPLICANT DETAILS

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PROPOSAL SUMMARY:

The development of relationships between group members is recognised as an important factor in enhancing the effectiveness of online groups. However, little has been written on how to facilitate and develop these online relationships. There is little established practice for the facilitation of online relationship development. Certainly this area has not been described, theorised or guidelines developed to support online facilitators.

Facilitators have found that facilitating online groups is far more challenging than face-to-face groups. Due to a lack of physical communication cues it is harder to build a team online, harder to follow meeting processes, tougher to sort out multiple communication channels and harder to converge.

The use of narrative (also referred to as storytelling) in the facilitation of online groups potentially offers a useful catalyst in developing online relationships. It provides an accessible form for developing inclusiveness, deepening rapport and for people to present aspects of themselves in an environment lacking in information richness.

The proposed research investigates how narrative can be beneficial in online relationship development and how relationships can be facilitated. In addition, the research will focus on developing practical processes and techniques.

The involvement of facilitators interested in this research is critical. They will offer a specific expertise in group dynamics, process development and are best suited to critique their own practice. Therefore a method of co-operative inquiry will be used within a participative approach to investigate narrative in an online group. Co-operative inquiry produces data that has a strong grounding in participant experience and multiple perspectives of phenomena. Co-operative inquiry also aligns strongly with facilitator values of equality, shared decision-making, equal opportunity, power sharing and personal responsibility.

The thesis question is: *How is narrative beneficial in building relationships in a facilitated online group?*

The proposed research makes an original contribution to the knowledge of online facilitation by investigating the potential effectiveness of narrative in online relationship development.

It makes an original contribution to the field of facilitation by investigating the potential of narrative to address some of the difficulties faced by facilitators of online groups.

Practical outputs for the field of online facilitation are the formation and investigation of processes and techniques that can be applied in online relationship building and maintenance.