Learning Wiki Style

An accumulative record

Wiki's potentially allow anyone in the group to edit any branch of any part of a tree of web pages, creating an accumulative and evolving 'knowledge base', on a common subject. That allows a community of people to collaborate, each person at their own pace, each plugging in their contributions from their own different perspectives, to build a more whole and informed multi-dimensional and interactive web of evolving useful content.

Say you have 10 people fairly active in a community group, but doing different things at different times, and say, posting their follow-ups on the last meeting's agenda. With a Wiki you do that right on the agenda page itself, as the follow-ups are done. Group meetings then become a continuous process, open to all. Each active person might also have their own page, for observations to offer for discussion, or record and update the links and changing shape of their special interest… allowing simple 'side bar' comment from others, perhaps.

The 4D sustainability model this page is linked from was designed in part to be used this way, as a diagram of a collaborative learning process for sustainable design projects, so that groups of consultants, the handful of designers responsible, or a network of community stakeholders in the project, each with different views and interests, could all work on building and shaping different parts of the design, combing the opportunities they see and putting things together, to inform each other's work.

The technology has some hurdles, like any software tool a nuisance to learn and discover what it's good for, but the real trick may be to design how the 'living document' is viewed and used.

there needs to be a definite 'style' of participation the individuals involved share as an image and process.
the structure of the 'tree' of information should easy to understand and fit the task
spending the time with the group to get the 'process' right, making careful changes and keeping everyone 'on the same page' are needed for any new kind of collaboration. A Wiki is not a 'discussion' exactly, more a sort of group 'building' process that takes some new collaboration skills, an accumulation of successive revisions to a page.

If the idea is to combine the different points of many views, there's the hazard of that being counter productive. With writing being kind of private thing for most people, it may be hard to know how to supportively edit someone else's work. There's also a need to coordinate the levels of interest. Having some people write so much that it becomes immediately out of date, hard to edit, and only updated by erasure could be a problem, perhaps.

Ideally, every participant would 'stay current' and get to see the whole stream of revisions, either by emails as they occur, or on a special web browser page they visit regularly. For the labor of editing and discussion to not become a burden, the economy and relevance of writing, not just filling space, seems key.

Model Scenarios

The permissions could be set up for one person to have sole control over the main page, with every participant having separate pages for which they have sole control, having side bars in which others may comment… The rule could be 'only constructive comment, no criticism'.
If there were a group 'template' for sub-groups to use, the administrator(s) and core group could actively lead the exploration of the issue, setting up initial content in areas they want to find participants to contribute to, and draw them in to participate. Active participants as they become familiar with the process and the 'style' of the group, could then be added to the core group.

Sources

Search the web for the experience other groups have had with collaboration tools… Product development seems to be one popular area.   'Wiki Style' is being invented more slowly for small work groups than for the advanced ones. Please froward tips or links. The best complete resource for Wiki style is Wikipedia, a very advanced community.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Style_guide