

The Participation Culture

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I am lurking on the OpenMoko mailing lists. This is an educational experience for me. Although I have participated in many heated discussions concerning Free software, I have never watched such a high-profile full-fledged Free software project start from the ground up.

It's fascinating watching different sorts of geeks interact.

For instance, currently there is a debate concerning the necessity of a hardware-specific emulator for the purposes of development. As the hardware itself isn't stabilized, one group assumes a full hardware emulator will be of little use emulating a moving target. Another group argues there is no way to properly develop without a solid emulator.

Both sides are correct, of course. There is utility in early participation, with rough edges and downright dangerous areas. The early adopters help define the shape of the project. But there are other early adopters who wish to spend their time coding applications, not fiddling around with changes in the development environment.

The tone of the debate can be somewhat rude, occasionally. Not all participants are polite at all times. Some people are sometimes sulky, others may become a bit grumpy. Others maintain Real Or Simulated Respect (ROSR) at all times. The various lists sometimes border on ordered chaos, with everyone going in different directions, following the path that interests them most.

The curious thing is, *this all works*. Somehow, everything fits together.

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