The **On-line Ordered Meeting** tool structures synchronous online debate finalized to making decisions.
It can be seen as an advanced chat where times and modes of interaction are organized by a set of business-meeting rules adopted to support a fair decision-making discussion.
This tool is useful to support limited groups of people who have to work together synchronously on very specific issues or on bound domains. The idea and the design of this tool were heavily inspired by the earlier work of Doug Schuler and his team, who conceived and implemented e-Liberate, that adopts Robert's Rules of Order as the basis for structuring online deliberative meetings, so that a basic property of democratic debate is fulfilled: the majority, if any, is guaranteed the chance to decide while the minority is guaranteed the right to express its opinions. However, after some test run using e-Liberate (for which we have to thank Doug Schuler) we deemed it necessary to introduce simplifications, mainly to ensure the module's usability for unskilled users, simplification carefully done so as to preserve the basic property noted above, though, of course, it would require more rigorous verification.

In the
On-line Ordered Meeting
tool, every meeting session is based on an order of business that contains all matters to be taken up. Each item is debated through a sequence of specific motions containing participants' proposals.

Only one main motion at a time is allowed, and it may be elaborated through succeeding secondary motions (e.g. amend, vote, postpone, and the like). A participant must take the floor to make a motion, and requests to take the floor are managed with a FIFO queue.

In order to make the online deliberation tool easier and more flexible to use – and following an application principle of Robert's Rules of Order – two subsets of motion have been identified: the first, simpler, is suited to participants who are less skilled and less familiar with Robert's Rules; the second is the complete set of rules that can be used in other cases. The administrator is therefore allowed to configure the set of motions to apply when managing a meeting. A third kind of motion has been introduced, called free debate (i.e. a simple chat regulated by a queue for getting the floor) to allow unregulated debate among participants at certain moments in the meeting; only the meeting chair is allowed to make this kind of motion.

A standard configuration of the On-line Ordered Meeting tool supports three main roles: chair, participant, and observer.

The figure shows the tool's user interface:

- the main box displays the discussion thread (different colours represent different kinds of

motion);

- the actions (second a motion, vote on a motion, request the floor, and release the floor) and the most commonly used motions (like main motion, amend, and put to vote) are immediately accessible via buttons displayed in the “Available Actions” and “Available Motion” boxes (other motions are displayed in a combo box).
- Another box lists the meeting’s participants; this same box is used in case there is no secret ballot on a motion, one vote per participant.

Every participant always knows the current state of the meeting because the main motion and the motion currently on debate are displayed in dedicated boxes. Moreover, an info box guides participants in the use of the tool.