

Flow workflow interviews

preliminary findings

WMF Design Research | Jonathan Morgan | July 2015

Goals

1. Learn about a variety of community processes

- what they're for
- steps involved
- who participates
- what works well, what doesn't

2. Get users' initial reactions to Conversation Patterns

- do they understand the concept?
- are they receptive to it?
- how might it work for the processes they participate in?

Methods

Interviewees

- 4 admins, 1 non-admin, 1 steward
- all highly active editors
- mostly English Wikipedians

Protocol

- Part 1: semi-structured interview focused on understanding process
- Part 2: introduction of prototype/wireframe, open discussion

Processes reviewed (so far)

Articles for creation	EnWiki	p5
Articles for deletion	EnWiki	p5
Deletion requests	Commons	p2
Featured Article Candidate	EnWiki	p3
Featured Article Review	EnWiki	p3
Peer Review	EnWiki	p3
Request for Comment	EnWiki	p1
Request for Closure	EnWiki	p1
Administrator Intervention Against Vandalism	EnWiki	p4
Administrator's Noticeboard - Edit Warring	EnWiki	p4
Dispute Resolution Noticeboard	EnWiki	p6
Steward Requests for Permission	MetaWiki	p2

Current process challenges

notification is ad hoc, labor-intensive

bots, userscripts or gadgets handle notifications for some processes, but many messages still have to be posted manually

often interested parties don't get notified when process is initiated or concluded

template messages need to be posted to many different places: article space, user space, WikiProjects, noticeboards

often they need to be subsequently updated (to record outcomes)

Recommendation: This is an area where Flow can create value. In addition to posting templates to pages, consider making Echo notifications that are configurable on a per-CP basis

decision-making is time-consuming

deciding how to resolve a discussion, and justifying that decision, takes a huge amount of time and energy

counting votes seldom factors in; closers need to read through all the arguments, comb through the relevant diffs, read the relevant policies, and then justify their decisions with a succinct summary

Recommendation: Prioritize readability of threads; be mindful of concerns about too much “chrome” in message/thread headers. Perhaps make it possible to pull out/tally policy citations?

most discussions are meso-structured

Most process discussions have standard sub-headers; some of these are created at thread initiation, others are meant to be added later

Some have standard names (example “Oppose”), others follow patterns like “Review from <USER>”

Different subsections have different ‘rules’ - for example, one may be for voting, another for discussion

Recommendation: Provide support for sub-threads; allow username/pagename parameters to be passed in to thread titles; allow certain sub-threads to be added to the thread mid-discussion

backlogs everywhere

Most processes are backlogged. Anything the Flow team can do that helps make process “throughput” more efficient (without sacrificing discussion quality) will be a HUGE WIN

Community concerns

Exception handling

location matters

threads occur

- on noticeboard subpages
- noticeboard sections
- on article talk pages
- on policy talk pages

location varies *within* the same process and *between* processes

threads may or may not be transcluded in one or more other locations

Recommendation: Robust config options around where the CP is initiated;
explore options for supporting/replicating multiple transclusion of discussion

even closed processes are open

some processes that can/should nominally only be closed by admins are actually frequently closed by non-admins

some processes that can/should be closed by anybody should only ever be closed by people with particular roles (not user rights)

- example: FAC delegates, DR “volunteers”

Recommendation: Config options for user-right closing and by list-based permission

Undermining process

!voting isn't voting (except when it is)

the comments are the important part: if you make it too “easy” for people to vote, they won't comment as much, which undermines the process

Recommendation: Config option to specify minimum reply length if certain tags are used

closing comments aren't (just) summaries

placing summaries at the top discourages deep reading: people need to read the whole thread to understand the closer's decision

Recommendation: Explore other placement options for the summary/decision (other than topic header/side rail)

Next steps

working with lower-fidelity wireframes

interactive prototype was too good :)

- appeared feature-complete; people wanted to click on everything. Made it hard to guide them down the garden path
- they didn't grasp the difference between configuring a pattern and participating (not enough context)
- harder to map this onto other, non-AfD processes
- participants latched onto places where prototype didn't match current process (example: reply tag options)

Recommendation: Will work with paper wireframes (pattern config + mock thread) at WM. Participants will be encouraged to write/draw on them to highlight issues or suggest changes and additions

recruit participants from outside EnWiki

anecdota suggests different communities approach the same processes differently (p2: “Hebrew Wikipedia is more voting-focused”)

non-Wikipedia projects have different content, policies, processes, priorities (example: WikiData property proposals)

Recommendation: Researcher will actively seek out these users at WM

Full report

to be published on wiki ~week of July 27

Questions for the team

- what kind of information is most helpful to include?
- what other research needs do you anticipate for this project, and when?

Possible pilot deployments

EnWiki is not the initial focus for Flow Workflow deployment, BUT...

Co-op, Teahouse, Dispute Resolution Noticeboard may be receptive to a time-bound, research-focused pilot

Questions for the team

- do you think piloting in these spaces would be useful?
- when might you be interested in starting such a pilot?

Questions for me?