Understanding Complex Rules and Regulations with the Help of IT

The Case of UNDP

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Abstract

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UNDP is facing the problem today of how to communicate complex rules and regulations to their employees. The aim of this report is to improve efficiency and enable employees to quickly familiarize themselves with the rules and regulations that apply to them. It looks into the problem by performing interviews and questionnaires among members of Human Resources at the BES team located in Copenhagen and also staff members of UN distributed all over the world. The analytical framework comes from research within the field of CSCW and CSCL in order to understand how learning within large organizations functions. HCI is used as the theoretical framework for improving usability of the suggested system. Based on a set of requirements made from the user studies and a comparison of several technical alternatives the prototype BES Answers is suggested. The idea behind BES Answers is to create an environment where staff share, discuss, refine and propagate the cognition of HR rules for collaborative learning and cooperation in their work.
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1 Introduction

Every company or organization has its own rules and regulations that affect its personnel. Transferring this information in words has quickly become a lengthy and complex task. Thick piles of papers are appealing to few employees since the overwhelming amount of information becomes a barrier that prevents learning.

Even if the employees do read through all the files, they still find themselves lost in the vast information. This means that the process of learning is highly inefficient and gives rise to many questions. Answering these questions is in many cases repetitive work that should not be necessary if the learning process was efficient.

This leads us to the question how we can improve the efficiency and learning curve with the help of information technology. In this paper, the author has looked at this process at United Nations Development Program (UNDP) human resources department in Copenhagen – handling over 4000 employees.

The newly employed at UNDP are today given a document covering close to 150 pages and one task of Human Resources (HR) is to make sure that the employee understands the information in there. This thesis has tried to do an evaluation of the current “welcoming package” and in the end proposing a better one in order to achieve both efficiency and a high level of knowledge among the employees.

The evaluation has been done by performing interviews and questionnaires among the employees at UNDP. A combination of different theories in the fields of Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW), Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) and Human-computer Interaction (HCI) have been applied on the empirical data in order to analyze and suggest an improved version.

1.1 Background

In this part the author described the role of UNDP and the parts of its organization that is relevant in this case. This section also tries to problematize parts of how the massive organization UNDP’s processes works today.

1.1.1 UNDP

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the United Nation’s global development network and the world’s largest multilateral source of grant technical assistance institution. It is an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. They are active with staff in over 166 countries, trying to provide those countries with their own solutions to various challenges on both global and
UNDP provides expert advice, training, and grant support to developing countries, with increasing emphasis on assistance to the least developed countries. To accomplish the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and encourage global development, UNDP focuses on solving complex issues such as extreme poverty, primary education to everyone, combating HIV/AIDS, reducing child mortality, ensuring environmental sustainability and so forth. UNDP also encourages the protection of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women in all of its programs. [1]

1.1.2 BES

Beneficial Entitlement Section (BES), a unit within Human Resources in UNDP, located in Copenhagen, handles the benefits and entitlements for staff of UNDP and other UN agencies. They are currently responsible for over 4,000 staff members around the world, primarily working for UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UNU international staff members.

As part of the Office of Human Resources (OHR)/Staff Administrative Services (SAS), BES provides HR administrative services in accordance with the Staff Rules and Regulations. The BES team serves as HR focal points for the above mentioned staff members throughout their contractual period, from initial appointment to separation from service and events in between. [2]

In this role, the BES team not only administer the benefits and entitlements of each staff member, but also provide guidance, assistance and support to the staff members regarding the various aspects uniquely related to being an employee of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UNU respectively. [2]

1.1.3 Problem Description

When new staff is offered a contract within UNDP, they need to be informed of the benefits and entitlements that apply to them. This is today done through the "Offer of Appointment" package and the website http://sas.undp.org/.

The "Offer of Appointment" package which is also called "the welcome package" contains five parts: "Salary Detail", "Contract", "Step by Step guide", "Conditions of Services" and "Staff rules"(HR rules). It is given to the employee in the form of 148 printed pages.

"Staff rules"(HR rules) is a complete set of rules and regulations for UN staff and provisional staff. "Step by Step guide" is a user manual instruction and "Conditions of Services" is an index of the "Staff rules". These are files distributed today in Word format. Human Resources employees (HR) from the BES team send out the five documents in Word or PDF format by emails to new staff.

Another way to view the staff rules is to browse on the newly built website http://sas.undp.org/. The website is in simple HTML form which presents only bare text from the file "Conditions of..."
Services” and couple of links to relevant forms and external websites such as to a travel agency.

Figure 1.1 The homepage http://sas.undp.org as of today.

UNDP staff (Staff) can download forms from the website but they still need to send it back by email to HR. The website kind of relieved staff’s burden of going through thick piles of documents to find the one they need since all the information regarding HR rules is today there on the platform. However, the website is still, in other words, a simple electronic copy of plain texts. Staff still has a hard time to find the information quickly or fill the forms in the right way. The homepage has neither provided efficiency nor made the contents easier for staff to understand. Therefore, the problems to provide answers and information to over four thousand staff members worldwide about the rules and regulations that apply to them efficiently and accurately are only on the verge of being solved. Modern technical solutions can very well be of good help in this case as in many others.

1.2 Aim

The aim of the thesis project is to seek ways to communicate complex rules and regulations to UNDP staff members with the help of IT. The fundamental idea is to create a prototype that can be used as a model for similar systems.

Specifically, the project aims to:
1. Further understand the problems the staff has with the current systems.
2. Design a model in order to give improvements based on findings from point 1.

The research questions are raised with the intention to discover inspiring solutions to enable staff members to quickly familiarize themselves with the benefits and entitlements that apply to them. The outcome is the author’s vision of a "welcome package" for new UNDP staff.

The author will see if the process new staff entering the current system can be viewed as a learning process in order to use some of the advances within the field of CSCL as well as CSCW and HCI.

1.3 Delimitation

This project is limited in several ways. First of all, it is mainly interested in how newcomers in the organization familiarize themselves. Hence, the documents, processes and others not related to the “welcoming package” are not included.

Secondly, only preparatory and planning parts are included. The task does not include the more technical aspects of implementing a system and hence it is delimited in the sense that mainly the design and planning phases of an IT project are covered in this thesis. Neither will the tools used be evaluated in this report.

It would be desirable to perform observations of users in various forms. However, this has not been possible due to time and travel restrictions and hence not included in any results presented here.
2 Method

To be able to further understand the problems as well as to study the user groups, the author performed interviews and questionnaires among the staff at UNDP.

2.1 Interviews

Interviews were carried out face to face and one to one at the Human Resources (HR) department of UNDP located in Copenhagen, Denmark. Four HR staff members from Benefits and Entitlements Section (BES) were quality interviewed.

All of the four interviewees interact with UNDP staff every day and deal with all kinds of questions regarding rules and regulations from UNDP staff. Thus, all of them can be seen as representatives from the HR team. Their opinions and experiences can reflect the common problems to an extent that is helpful in this case.

Below are the basic questions for the interviews, there were questions added to or changed according to different interview contexts:

- What does the staff care the most about regarding rules and regulations? What kind of questions do they ask often? Among those questions mentioned, which ones are the most frequently asked?
- Which user groups ask often? Which ask seldom? Can you define those user groups?
- Can you suggest a good scenario I can use to observe the users habits later?
- Do you have any suggestions on improving rules and regulations or anything you wish could be changed?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

2.2 Questionnaires

After talking with the HR staff members, the author decided to investigate the end users which were done through a questionnaire.

The author had little impact of the selection of the respondents of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was planned to launch among three groups of objectives: those who are newly employed; those who have been employed for a while and those who are going to be employed but have not received the “offer of appointment” package yet. The intention was to learn and observe how staff conceives the information and their learning habits. However, due to UNDP staff is distributed all over the world, it was impossible to sort those three groups out and carry out the questionnaire in each group. Therefore, the following plan was adopted.

Questionnaires were implemented on the platform http://www.surveymonkey.com/ and were
sent out to in total of 400 staff retrieved from the database: 200 latest hire (to look at recent newly appointed staff with limited prior UN knowledge) and 200 latest reassignments (to capture from staff that has been within the UN system for a while). The number of respondents was 75 (18.75%) which is a little bit low in order to generalize much but has still been important input to this work.

Among the responses from those 75 people, there are answers not applicable. The first two questions were to track how long time staff has been working for the organization: “How long have you been working for UNDP?” and “How long have you been working within the UN common system?”, since the BES team does not only administer UNDP staff, but also staff on behalf of other agencies. However, this has led to ambiguity. The question could be stated simply as “how long has the HR rules and regulations applied to you?” but due to this design issue it was difficult to decide how long the rules and regulations had applied to them. Therefore, when dividing the users into groups of how long they have worked, answers from 5 respondents were removed in order to improve reliability of the results. Also, in some parts the respondents not answering has been excluded in the presentation of the results but this should be stated when that is not the case.

The questionnaire is presented in the appendix in detail.

2.3 Literature

Also previous research within the fields of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) and Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) were studied. From the results from the empirical part, together with the theoretical framework, the requirements of a new model could be decided that the new system can be based upon. HCI was chosen as the theoretical framework for user interface design and to improve usability of the suggested system. From HCI the author has also borrowed general guidelines about implementing a system such as the one suggested in this thesis. The usage of these guidelines might be hard to prove scientifically but the awareness of their presence has contributed. One such guideline is the eight golden rules regarding interface design that will be described later on.

CSCW and CSCL were chosen due to their ability to explain complex relationships in organizations as well as explaining how learning within them works.
3 Theoretical Framework

In the IT field, much research has been put up in order to make work more efficient with the help of IT. The author has decided to take a close look at Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) which was coined in the 1980’s. It is a broad term that might lack a clear definition but the focus is on group work where there is a shared information space and a need to adapt a new technology to an organization (or possibly vice versa). It is a research field that should also focus on articulating the cooperative work (like who does what, how do we assemble that to a result and so on). [3]

A research field in very close relationship to CSCW is CSCL which focuses much more on the learning process, mainly in a school environment. However, CSCW and CSCL nurture each other so I will also include this here in my research overview.

3.1 CSCW

Definitions of Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) have been given by many researchers and most of them are very similar. The field was coined in the 80s by researches from three different fields: computer science, information science and social science. In the most general form, CSCW examines the possibilities of computer-based technology support for humans in group work and collaborative communication. [4] In many researchers’ work, they have been putting great emphasis on group work and social activity. A similar term “Groupware” is often used when discussing about CSCW. However, it is slightly different from CSCW in the way that Groupware only concerns with real computer systems while CSCW focuses not only on the technology support but also social effects. [5] Greif argues in his early work that future technology systems will have the function to provide collaboration and groupware to some extent. [6] In many ways one might argue that he has been very right, for example with the growth of social media, e-mail and other collaborative tools. Contrarily to traditional technical systems which mainly focused on individual user experiences, groupware systems aims at supporting groups and communities involved in a task or a goal to communicate, collaborate and coordinate. It is thus important to consider the two sides of CSCW constantly: computer technology and social group work. [7]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1 A decomposition of collaborative interfaces. [8 p. 414]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Same place</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous local (face-to-face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Different place</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When discussing collaborative work it is common to divide the different types of mediation tools
to be used in a matrix dividing them by time and place as visible in Table 3.1. This can be one important distinction to make and may also help understand the success of different systems that has been implemented, such as e-mail. One key concern for systems trying to improve learning is their inability to be successful regarding adoption rates. [8]

There are several problems to face when designing a collaborative system. The first problem is that it is difficult to capture the requirements for collaborative systems since no one knows clearly what everyone need. The requirements can also change alongside the application of the system. Another problem is that it is hard to find a balance between effort and benefit when designing a collaborative system so that the users will actually be motivated to accept the resulting system and start using it actively. Some CSCW projects in the past failed to support group work as intended because they have been neglecting that those systems should also be considered as a complex socio-technical system rather than just a technical system. It is important to think about how to shape the social system around than just design a technical system. [7]

### 3.2 CSCL

CSCL has its roots within the educational fields ranging from school systems to museums. Its main focus is how to combine technology and education to improve learning. The technical part of CSCL is focusing on IT and different software and so forth that can help stimulate what is known about education. The educational part is viewed as a collaborative or social process which is interesting since it has moved away from considering learning as something individual. One important distinction that is made is between cooperative and collaborative learning where CSCL is, of course, viewing education as something done in collaboration, together. In cooperation, the idea instead would have been to work individually and then assemble or collect the works. Some of the results from CSCL point out that the small groups are the most suitable constellation of learners for studying how meaning is created and hence also where much of the more rewarding study have been done. [9]

CSCL is also highly involved in cognition and the group activity of constructing new understanding within the context of learning instead of working. In order to have a meaningful understanding a learning process has to be seen as a process of building this understanding rather than merely transmitting known fact. Tools for this are more about discussing, debating, arguing and other forms that helps to build up a deepened understanding. [10]

Through history CSCL has developed a rather multi-disciplinary method for work. There are both experimental, ethnomethodological, psychological, iterative design traditions within the field, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. [9]

### 3.3 CSCL and CSCW

CSCL and CSCW are often tied up together by researchers. It is meanwhile important to note that
CSCL assists collaborative group in discussing to build knowledge that is the shared creation and property of the group while CSCW supports cooperating individuals in contributing, sharing and archiving of knowledge. [10 p. 163] CSCL is about discussing but does not support forming a result or reaching a decision, this is done by CSCW.

The term mediation becomes of interest in this thesis. In CSCL or CSCW, a software environment provides a medium for collaboration. It plays an intermediate role in the midst of the collaborators. [10 p. 16] For example, compare how the choice of mediator in Table 3.1 would affect how the communication and interpretation of information is done.

To describe the term mediation, in more general terms, let’s think about a classic situation when someone is looking for help on understanding laws. A juridical system of attorneys, lawyers and judges plays a mediating role in interpreting complex laws into something that a normal person could understand and be affected by.

This is the same when employees looking for help from HR staff members when they got lost in piles of rules and regulations. HR staff members took the responsibility of being a mediator who converts lines and lines of boring text into something that employees understand.

The term perspective has a lot of meanings. In the human world, we usually refer it to literal or figurative perspective. In the field of computer science, perspective represents the computational results selected to display for different users, in other words, the view users see when they get in touch with the virtual world which appears on the screen. [10 p. 124]

A user can be connected to several computational perspectives. Take the popular social network Facebook as an example, one perspective we mainly interact with is Profile. From the Profile perspective we see all the records of things we do. Also, we are connected to the social perspective such as Home. We learn and see what others do and are able to interact with them on the perspective Home. The system allows us to change from different perspective as we want.

Stahl (2006) introduces the term group cognition which in brief includes looking at the group as a unit of analysis rather than the group member. He claims that the introduction of computer support can “help us transcend the limits of individual cognition”. [10 p. 1] I will use this knowledge here in order to argue that it is important to look at groups of users rather than the individual user.

Negotiation between users as a way of learning is another aspect of Stahl’s work. It is not only about individuals voting for what they agreed on based on their preconceived ideas. Negotiation is a group process that builds up knowledge artifacts and forms a consensus that the group has reached a shared understanding of this knowledge and that is ready to display for others. [10 p. 29]
3.4 Human-Computer Interaction

Within the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) one studies the interface between man and machine which becomes relevant in this case where an IT solution functions as a mediator between humans.

*Usability* is a wide term that might be difficult to define. ISO’98 defines usability as "The extent to which a product can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specified context of use." [11]

It is a quality attribute that indicates the ease of use, efficiency and other parameters of the interface. According to Jakob Nielsen there are five elements used to judge a system’s usability: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors and satisfaction. Learnability is to judge if it is easy for the users to accomplish basic tasks when they encounter the design the first time. Efficiency is to judge if users can perform tasks quickly once they learned the design. Memorability is to judge if users can re-establish proficiency after a period of not using the system. Errors are to judge if users can perform tasks correctly and if it is easy for users to recover from the errors. Satisfaction is to judge if users feel pleasant to use the design. [12]

Benyon discuss usability from a balance perspective where the four major components in his PACT framework need to be balanced. The four components are people, activities, technology and context as visible in the figure below. The arrows indicate the relationships that need to be optimized in order to achieve a usable system. The arrow between people and technology has to do with interface design while the other arrow indicates the importance of putting the combined user and system into its context. [13]

![The People-Technology system](image.png)

Figure 3.1 Usability aims to achieve balance [13]

People vary greatly in characteristics and how they use the system. Physical differences can lead to different aspects of ergonomics and accessibility needs to be taken into account. Psychological differences could include spatial ability (how easy to find the way around a new environment),
language skills and so on. Mental models is one way to discuss the difference between people as we all build up our own model of how interpret the system. Mental models are always incomplete, unstable, not accurate and with no firm boundaries. [13]

Activities vary just as much in their nature. Some features of an activity could be the importance of timing, complexity, safety and the required level of cooperation. One important aspect to consider here is how to deal with mistakes and errors in the design. [13]

The context seen from a physical, social and organizational aspect is where all the activities take place. This is a wide term where everything from social norms to environmental considerations and must be taken into consideration for a successful implementation. [13]

Technology is the mediator consisting of hardware and software and here important aspects from a design perspective is the input and output. [13] In order to create a good interface design that is usable, eight golden rules of interface design which is one example of many frameworks describing best practice within usability studies. “These principles, derived from experience and refined over two decades, need validation and tuning for specific design domains. No list such as this can be complete, but it has been well received as a useful guide to students and designers.” [8 p. 74]

1. **Strive for consistency.** It is important to stay consistent regarding layout, processes, terminology and so forth. This means that we have to follow a similar pattern in all parts of the system. However, it is also difficult to achieve and often exceptions are made regarding this rule.
2. **Cater to universal usability.** The system should be designed to support different users’ needs. This means providing tutorials and explanations for beginners and shortcuts for those experienced users who want fast pace.
3. **Offer informative feedback.** The system should be able to provide feedbacks for different user actions. For actions that are less importance or taken quite often, feedbacks can be modest. For actions that are important or taken occasionally, feedbacks need to be detailed and substantial.
4. **Design dialogs to yield closure.** To make it clear to the user when a sequence of actions has been accomplished, the system should put those actions into groups and specify their timely order. By doing this, users will feel satisfied and relieved when they have finished something and will be ready to move to the next sequence of actions.
5. **Prevent errors.** The system should be designed in a way that users are less likely to make errors. When users do make errors, the system should provide simple and clear instructions and direct users to fix the faulty part instead of asking them to redo the whole action.
6. **Permit easy reversal of actions.** Providing the function to make actions reversible will lighten the anxiety users have when exploring new functions, in order to make them willing to explore the unfamiliar functions.
7. **Support internal locus of control.** This rule identifies the need for the operator of a system to feel that he/she is in control and that the system responds to the action being made. As Gaines mentions, the user should be the initiator of an action, not respond to them.
8. *Reduce short-term memory load.* The short term memory is for example as long as how quick you forget about a phone number after you dial it and finish a conversation. Scientifically, it is a storage of “seven plus or minus two chunks” of information. This limitation decides the requirements that we should try as much as we can to relieve users’ memory, by making displays simple, sequence of actions consolidated and so forth.
4 User Studies

In this part, the author presents the results of the interviews and questionnaires performed in order to understand the current system. It also contributes to observe user habits and the requirements of the system. The author analyzes results from the user studies so as to give suggestions for a new system.

4.1 Interview Results

Information gathered from the interviews at UNDP and also follow-up e-mail conversations are presented in this section.

4.1.1 Users that HR rules and regulations serve

UNDP defines its users into three categories: Professional staff (P-staff), General staff (G-staff) and Contingent workers. There is a wide range of focus, tasks and responsibilities regarding what they do. However, in very broad terms, it can be summarized that G-staff are support staff, often administrative or technical in nature, and P-staff are more managerial, advising, strategic, etc. Contingent workers can belong to either category, depending on why they are brought in. [14]

The basic requirement is that P-staff have a level of education corresponding to a master degree. Many years of experience could previously make up for not having a master degree, but this rule has been tightened since the new promotion guidelines that came a couple of years ago. So it would be very difficult to get a P post now without a master, but there are old P-staff who do not have this level of education. [14]

G-staff are usually required to have only secondary education (like high school) and perhaps some technical skills, certificates, etc. This could pertain to custodians, drivers and so on. UNDP does not have many of these as they pertain mostly to G-staff in country offices. While post-secondary education is not a requirement for G-staff, it is often listed as an asset and unless you have many years of experience, in reality, it would be difficult to get hired without a bachelor’s as many college-educated people, both with bachelors and masters, apply for G-level posts. [14]

As for the contingent workers, the requirements would depend on the requirements of the job they would do. The staff rules however do not apply to contingent, or contract, workers as they are not considered staff members. Some have separate guidelines and others are considered a procurement arrangement, rather than a staff hiring arrangement. BES does not service these contracts. [14]

In conclusion, the staff BES serve have a master degree or above in general. They are all highly educated and fluent in English. To understand complex terminologies documented in the staff
rules is not a big issue for them.

4.1.2 Frequently Asked Questions

According to HR staff members, questions users asked most about regarding rules and regulations can be generalized into three categories: recruitment process, salary and travel. The source of the information below is from the interviews the author performed in Copenhagen in 2010.

4.1.2.1 Recruitment process

The normal process of recruitment is illustrated as below:

![Figure 4.1 The normal recruitment process](image)

Staff that commonly did raise questions regarding the recruitment process was the newly hired. They wanted to know when they could get started on the new job and when to resign from the old job. They paid very little attention to the whole recruitment process after they had received the welcome package. Some of them did not hand in the medical clearance and other documents which needed to be done first to get the letter of appointment. It also happened that they did not fill in the documents in a good way, so HR had to ask them to re-fill it. It is common that HR has to remind the staff many times to fill in the documents first by email with a specification of the deadline.

HR wishes staff to follow the process and read through the files that are handed out to them. HR said it felt like only 1% of the staff read the rules and regulations. They were used to look for help without doing any homework. HR staff members copy-pasted the relevant lines on those rules and regulations to staff by email. But staff still did not read it carefully.

4.1.2.2 Salary

All of the four interviewees talked a lot about frequently asked questions concerning Salary. The distributions of salary depended on different duty stations and contract types. Salary deduction was the most frequently asked one above all. Staff had difficulties to understand their salary deduct. HR staff members explained that this could happen in many situations. For example: Some people have their salary raised but at the same time allowances lowered according to certain rules; They have been applying for the same allowances at different working places or positions; Some fees are paid not monthly but seasonally which can be referred to as rental deduction.
Other questions regarding salary could be about Rental subsidy and Dependency Allowances. Staff had difficulties to understand the different items such as post adjustment and retro adjustment on rental subsidy documents. They wondered why things were adjusted as such.

Questions regarding Education Grand were seasonally popular since many staff applied for school for their children during summer time.

### 4.1.2.3 Travel

After Salary comes Travel, one of the interviewees emphasized that Travel should be high up on the list. Frequently asked questions regarding travel can be concluded into Transportation Cost and Visa problems.

Questions regarding traveling usually include much personal information. For example, staff asked if they could order business class for specific flights and if UN could pay for the trip.

Staff also called in when they felt concerned and worried about lump sum for their travel allowances. For instance, when staff needs to buy travel ticket for their reassignment trip, UN usually has two solutions: Give staff a certain amount of money to look for the transportation ticket by themselves; Find and book the transportation for the staff. UN prefers the first option since it is more convenient. In this condition, sometimes users get much more than they actually have to spend.

### 4.1.3 Grouping users

The four interviewees had quite different answers to this question; however, they all divided users into groups according to how long they have worked for UNDP. Those who have been hired for years are more experienced with regulations and rules so they have fewer questions regarding it compared to the newly hired staff. They usually only ask about Annual Leave and Home Leave. On the other hand, they demand more than they are entitled to. They like to compare with other staff and ask why they have not got the same benefits as their colleagues. In this case, it is quite necessary to state clearly to the old staff that they cannot get anything more than they are entitled to.

Newly hired staff especially those who have the first contract from UN ask often because they are not familiar with rules and regulations. They ask about the recruitment process and then home leave and travel tickets.

Also UN agencies who travel a lot and those who recently get relocation can ask many questions.

### 4.1.4 Suggestions from interviewees

Below is a list of suggestions from the interviewees regarding things that could be improved:
• Give information to staff gradually instead of pushing all to them at one time. But in that case there might be some information missing.
• Structure the system better. The most important information should be put up front. Irrelevant information should be cut down.
• Simplify the languages and unify the terminologies on those files. It is too heavy for staff to read and understand.
• Easier to search for information. Staff should be able to customize their own system with the information that is helpful for them.
• Remove the gap between HR and staff. The trainings HR gets are very different from those staff gets.

4.2 Questionnaire Results

The major findings from the questionnaire are presented below.

4.2.1 Learning Pattern

In order to analyze the result and see if there is a learning pattern of staff in accordance to the time HR rules and regulations applied to the staff, the author divided the respondents into four groups. Staff who has been working for the organization:

• Less than one year, 12 people
• 1-5 years, 21 people
• 5-10 years, 21 people
• More than 10 years, 15 people

Data is collected from the question regarding how long HR rules and regulations have been applied to them and how familiar they are with the rules and regulations.

A graph was made by the author to show the percentage from each group on different answers.
The graph shows the longer staff has been working within the organization, the more familiar they are with the HR rules and regulations.

Another thing to notice here is that for those who have been working within the organization for more than 10 years, still more than fifty percent does not feel familiar with the HR rules and regulations. This implies that people find it difficult to feel familiar with the material and this is a serious issue in the current system. Let us move on to more in detail what they experience as problematic.

4.2.2 Experienced problems with the current system

There is a difference between what HR staff members believe to be the major concerns with the current system and the issues raised as comments in the questionnaire. The staff answering the questionnaire used words such as complex, confusing, not user-friendly, unclear, inconsistent and so forth in order to describe the current system.

Below is a selection of answers from the questionnaire grouped by the author. The user quotes in each group does not necessarily belong to the same question as other answers in the group. This is stated at some places. The reason for this is to review and identify groups of problems that many users seem to share.

4.2.2.1 Concerns regarding information

- Overwhelming
Several respondents claim that the vast amount of information available in HR rules makes them feel like being in a labyrinth. They claim it to be confusing and frustrating to read the rules that are overly complicated. One main issue is that they feel that reading this gives them less time to perform their other tasks.

“It is highly frustrating and counterproductive knowing that it is completely possible to make this labyrinth into a clear short concise document.” [15]

- Low legibility

As most of the staff says that they have no problem understanding the language, others claim the language being written in highly academic terms and that it is hard to read.

“Language should be less technical, clear and unambiguous.” [15]

- Information not updated

Another common complaint was that there are too many different sources of information and it is common that there are different versions or not updated to a current version.

“Incredible for 2010! Most have not been updated, some are still to be filled sent as old badly scanned document (i.e. Annex III for Travel). None took the time to prepare them in Word and update the information. All the forms should be online and updated urgently. In terms of image, duplication and cost are too bad for UNDP.” [15]

- No hierarchy or high-lights

To many users, not all the information presented in the HR rules share the same priority. There are parts that users care and ask about more. There are also parts that users find more difficult to understand than the other ones. However, the information is not put with hierarchy or highlighted now. There is a lack of hierarchy and high-lights.

“The forms and circulars need to be linked clearly in the letter of appointment provided. Deadlines for each action need to be also clearly highlighted.” [15]

- Irrelevancy and Inconsistency

51.7% of the questionnaire respondents say no to the question “In general, when you look for the HR related information you need, can you find all the relevant information to your question?” [15]

They say that information is scattered around different sources and they need to refer to so many links.
“There are too many documents, saved in separate places. The storage is not intuitive. There is actually too much reading. Perhaps an online e-learning module is needed.” [15]

“Too much information available on too many locations. It is too massive to make something relevant out of it without spending too much time on it.” [15]

4.2.2.2 Concerns regarding forms

- Too many forms to fill in

Staff feels that they have to fill in too many forms. Especially regarding the recruitment process, the staff says that the process is too complicated to follow and there are too many forms to fill in. In contrast to what HR complains in the interview that staff doesn’t follow the steps and doesn’t read the information.

“Too many forms to complete when starting a new contract! Some of them are not even clear what to do.” [15]

- Repetitive information filling

Staff complains that there are too many forms asking for same information and that the information should be stored in the system so they do not have to fill it in again and again.

“Extremely time consuming in filling out with each reassignment. There is quite a bit of repetitive information and not always easy to fill out.” [15]

“Complicated and too much paper-work that needs to be filled out over and over again. It seems the different parts of the UN system do not share information with each other. This is also the case within the same agency sometimes.” [15]

“Only ask me to fill out my personal details once. Normally I have to fill in my name, address, DOB etc and that of my dependants about 20 times. There must be a more efficient way?” [15]

4.2.2.3 General concerns regarding the current system

- Unclear and Ambiguous

Many staff wants to know if their salary is calculated in the right way, if all benefits are calculated and granted, and in specific how their salary is calculated.

“I know my benefits and entitlements but sometimes difficult to know if you have received all entitlements or not due to lack of breakdown of sums.” [15]
“Never understood what are the shipment entitlements and how is it calculated.” [15]

The current salary form staff receives does not provide information in detail. Some terms are not explained clearly. Staff wants those things to be clarified.

“Many entitlements are not described in Letter of Offer; and no reference material provided.” [15]

“Have even no idea what are total benefits and entitlements.” [15]

Staff wishes to have restrictions and requirements clearly stated in the documents and a checklist of what have to be done so they know that they have fulfilled everything.

“Have a clear indication before the start of a contract and the end of a contract on what needs to be completed in order not to miss any benefits. Currently, these requirements are confusing and HR needs to provide a simple checklist of all that is needed.” [15]

Staff does not want to spend too much time on finding out if everything is correct but at the same time they want to make sure that it is. They also want to make sure entitlements were paid on time.

They need someone to confirm what they do and tell them they have made the right step.

“In general there are good information sources available online but sometimes it makes me feel better if after all the research there is a human to confirm that I have come to the correct conclusions, in particular if it is about large expense such as rental subsidies or education grants.” [15]

- Lack of simple solutions and examples

Each individual usually see their own situation as special and there seems to be a difficulty at understanding how to apply the rules and regulations to that situation. This leads to many questions being raised about the users own situation and simple examples of real situations are something requested from several replies in the survey.

“Though the background documents provided were quite exhaustive, they do not have simple answers to most of questions.” [15]

Staff wishes there to be examples on different issues other than long paper information.

“Many things change from offer letter to actual contract and this is not always clear why and how.” [15]

It is necessary to provide users with more help on those frequently asked parts and more explanations on those parts that are a bit harder to understand.
- Inconvenience for new users

New staff does not know what to look for. They also think it is difficult to find where information is located and some wish for a new staff orientation in the form of face-to-face session.

“You have to already know your entitlements to know what to look for. It is difficult for new staff.” [15]

4.2.2.4 Poor and inconsistent service

Some complain that the system is non-transparent, and that there are long delays from HR staff members in order to receive an answer. Some also feel that questions asked are not carefully read. Due to this, some state that they prefer to ask their colleagues for help.

“And in particular, I never find one HR person that can answer all HR questions but rather have to go to many different colleagues. Also, I have received plenty of inconsistent guidance from various HR colleagues/sources.” [15]

“It would actually be much better to have someone to talk to but it is never really clear who this person could/should be. The intranet search is not always very helpful.” [15]

“Although high turnover of staff gives the impression that the answer provided depends on who you speak with and how familiar they are with the policies.” [15]

There were also some more general considerations worth mentioning in the quotes below. Essentially, the claim is that the work can be more proactive and the usage of technology more efficient.

“A more proactive approach towards explaining the conditions of service to staff.” [15]

“Use technology the way we should. There are tools out there that could end the sometimes ridiculous amount of paperwork that UN staff needs to do. Not only would the system be more efficient but we would also be able to decrease the numbers of staff just dealing with paperwork today. Those funds could be more wisely spent on people in need in the field.” [15]

4.2.3 User habits

4.2.3.1 Time

On the question how long time are you willing to spend on looking for HR related information, staff chose quite differently. [15]
As can be seen from the graph, about 1/3 of the staff does not want to spend more time than couple of minutes; 1/3 of the staff is willing to browse for half an hour and 1/3 of the staff can spend one hour or even hours on looking for HR related information.

This can be perceived as most of the staff is willing to spend time on learning HR rules. However, there is also a quite large amount of the staff that does not have the patience to. We have to consider all types of users and to provide convenience for those so that they can get quick information.

Besides, no correlation has been found between the answers to this question and the previous one regarding how long the HR rules and regulations have been applied to them.

4.2.3.2 Approaches

On the question “How would you like to approach the HR related information? (Multiple choices)” the answers were divided as shown in the figure. [15]
From this graph we can see that UN staff is quite conservative regarding newer technologies such as social media and that there are three dominating mediums: online resources, call center support and online chatting. It is also interesting to note that not a single user was interested to have information via available social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook.

There was also possible to add additional possibilities, and these were:

- To have a to-do list/check list
- Regular email with clear answer
- A well organized and updated web page as well as updated printed manuals updated periodically

### 4.2.3.3 Language

Although UN staff are all well-educated as discussed earlier and should have little problem reading English, the survey also showed that some users would still prefer to have the information available in their mother tongue. On the question regarding which languages they would like to have the information available in, the most selected languages were Spanish and French.

### 4.3 Conclusions drawn from the User Studies

Some conclusions can be drawn from the user investigations that will be important to state before we move on to the next sections explaining a new solution.
4.3.1 Group users after employment time

From the user studies, it can be concluded staff that HR rules and regulations apply to are in general high-educated and there are no greater problem understanding the complex terminologies documented in the files but a more simple language is always more desirable. However, multilingual support could be one step of improving the general understanding of the information. Staff can be categorized into different groups according to the way they learn HR rules and regulations and the type of questions they raise. In order words, different users have different focuses on HR rules and regulations in different periods of their employment. Especially for new staff that is not so familiar with all benefits and entitlements, they feel it is difficult to find where information is located and wish there can be some kind of orientation. The current system does not provide facilitations for different user groups’ needs.

Hence, to segment the users after how long time they have spent at UNDP seems to be the correct approach in order to understand the need of the users.

4.3.2 View the solution as an e-learning platform

The way staff entering the system develops can be viewed as a learning process. Staff becomes more familiar with HR rules and regulations along time. However, for some of those who have been working for the organization for long, they still claim a low level of familiarity with the rules. This implies that people find it difficult to become familiar with the material and this is a serious issue in the current system. [15]

Staff’s wish lies more in having answers to the questions they raise precisely explained rather than changing the way rules and regulations are presented. In other words, making the welcome package look “cooler” is not going to facilitate the staff’s need in the longer perspective. Thus, the realization that it was just as crucial to look at we can maximize the group intelligence of these highly educated people through the presentation of information. In other words, understanding HR rules and regulations can be viewed as a learning process where the technological solution provided by UNDP functions as a platform.

There is a variance in how long users is willing to spend learning the rules and regulations and this is something we have to take into consideration as the current system is failing in this respect.

4.3.3 There is a gap between HR and staff

In the questionnaire, many answers imply that HR staff members and staff have a hard time communicating with each other. HR wishes staff to follow the process and read through the files that are handed out to them. They feel the documents are self-explanatory and there are many obvious solutions to the questions. On the other hand, staff feels confused and they think there are too many forms and information distributed everywhere. The explanations and solutions
were not delivered successfully to the staff.

HR staff members have to answer a massive amount of repeating questions over and over again and thus it is difficult to achieve efficiency. Getting to know each individual’s situation and answering those questions repeatedly should not be the aim of or consume HR staff members’ time.

From the staff’s point of view, every question he/she raises is a new question to him or her. HR needs to realize this, which is difficult since they are not in the same position and deals with these questions on a daily basis. Moreover, staff complains that the system is non-transparent; there are delays from HR staff members; and the guidance they get from various HR staff members is inconsistent. They feel that questions asked are not carefully read. Some staff prefers to ask their colleagues for help. This should be seen as an opportunity and not a threat since an experienced colleague might have had similar experiences and can help and guide their colleagues. It is important to take advantage of this and the symbiosis between HR staff members and experienced coworkers.

4.3.4 Users prefer traditional forms of presenting information

UN staff is quite conservative on technologies. Not a single user was interested to have information via available social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook. This in some ways implies that they prefer to have it presented in a more traditional form. Presenting the system with new technologies is not so appealing to the staff. As mentioned previously some users prefer to have information available in other languages such as French or Spanish.
5 Requirements and Solutions

In this chapter, technological aspects are introduced and evaluated to some extent. Also some more concrete requirements are presented.

In order to understand how this system works let us move back to the theoretical framework. That the medium of choice in this work will be some sort of IT solution is already defined. However, in order to make this successful it is necessary that we provide general structure to the kind of tasks that are expected to be performed by this system. What to users are interested in are mainly three things, to perform necessary steps such as providing information, to receive information about which rules that apply to them and to use the system as a medium for asking questions they might have.

In order to understand how tasks are done, the author proposes the following general framework:

![Figure 5.1 Structure of a process.](image)

The figure above explains the structure of a *process* with a defined start and finish, such as the recruitment process. Each process consists of a number of *steps* which in turn has an owner that is responsible for fulfilling the *tasks* necessary. There are also decisions points where the next step is decided by the choice in the decision. The performer of each task is a human controlled *user*.

To this framework information, questions and answers can be attached so this will be the basic structure of the system independent of the technological solution.

Answering a question can be viewed as a process. In today’s system, based on the information provided earlier it can be explained as below:
There are for example three alternatives of where to ask for information. There are also several steps included if it is necessary to fill in any forms which can be seen as a sub-process. To improve today’s processes and also to provide quick and relevant information is crucial.

This is a very general process and in order to be more concrete it is necessary to map all the processes available in BES’s which is beyond the scope of this report. Instead, the following section will propose requirements for an improved system to handle these processes.

5.1 Requirements

Derived from the user studies the requirements of the system can be decided. In order to do so in a structured way, the author has divided the more general requirements gathered from the user studies into parts. After explaining the requirement, the more technical requirements are specified and can be seen as suggestions of how to create an efficient, feasible solution.

5.1.1 General structure

As mentioned above, the framework of choice that minimizes the gap between the system and the real world is illustrated in Table 5.1. Hence some general requirements can be decided:

1. The system should allow for simple creation of processes, containing of:
   
   a. Steps - a general container of the tasks that can be grouped according to who performs them, at what time and for what purpose
   b. Paths - Connections between steps describing in which order they have to be done.
   c. Tasks - An action such as filling in a form or reading through materials.
   d. Decision points - A choice between multiple paths.

2. Users - a password protected and role specific user account should be possible to create on the site in order to have access to certain processes or parts of them.

3. The system should allow the following interaction forms:
a. Online resources - the information should be available on the Internet.
b. Call center support - there should be a possibility to ask questions and receive answers by phone.
c. Online chatting - it should be possible to interact in real-time via the system.
d. Printed version - each piece of information must be possible to export and print.

5.1.2 Perspectives

The system should provide convenience for different kinds of users, information tailored for different user groups to improve usability. Different perspective should be displayed for different users:

One example is to display information regarding annual and home leave for those who have been hired for several years and information regarding recruitment process and travel for those newly hired.

For those newly hired, an orientation should be provided to familiar them with the HR rules and the system. Provide a more proactive approach towards explaining the conditions of service to new staff.

1. A database solution allowing users to save their personal information is necessary.
   a. This information should be used if possible when it is necessary to fill in personal information.
   b. Users do not have to fill in all the information at one time.
2. The system should also have the possibility to record what the user have browsed to give suggestions on which topics that can be of their interest.
3. The system should have the possibility to provide adjusted user perspectives.
   a. This should be able to be setup depending on how long time the user has worked at UNDP. As an example does this means that there should be one perspective for the newly employed displaying information most relevant to them assuming no previous knowledge.
   b. The perspective should also be possible to customize by the user. An individual’s own perspective should include functions such as bookmarks and history.
   c. Staff should be able to customize their own system with information helpful for them.
4. The first time user logs on to the system, a pop-up window should be displayed to inquire the user if he/she wants to have a start tour of the system to illustrate how things work.
5.1.3 Reduced complexity

The language should be simplified and terminologies should be unified so as to reduce complexity and to create legibility. The information should be less technical to avoid confuses and ambiguous.

Since the information has to be written in high preciseness, the author suggests building another system in addition to the present one as more simplified complement.

1. In addition to the original text, there should also be:
   a. Examples explaining common situations when the rule or regulation applies and how.
   b. A simplified version of the rule or regulations briefly explaining its content.
   c. Additional languages, preferably French and Spanish.

2. The rules and regulations should be fetched from a central data source meaning if it is updated at this source, also the data on the homepage is updated accordingly.
   a. There should be a RSS function allowing users to subscribe for updates. This could for example be used by HR staff members to be informed of updates so that they can correct example, translations etc to an updated versions well.

3. The system should provide a search function to allow users retrieve information quickly.

5.1.4 Hierarchies and Highlights

The system should have important information put up front, relevant information to certain users placed behind in their perspective. In general are sections that need to be put up front are: Recruitment process; Salary with sub-sections: salary deduction, rental subsidy, dependency allowances; Travel with sub-sections: transportation cost, visa.

1. There should be a process overview function:
   a. A database containing the users’ current processes and the current state in each process.
   b. Each process, step and task should be labeled.
   c. It should be clearly displayed for the user where he/she is in the process and for what reason. This could for example be implemented as a process flow chart where the current step is highlighted.
   d. A percentage indicator will give the user an idea how far he/she has progressed in the ongoing process.
   e. The possibility to receive reminders via for example e-mail when a deadline is coming up is suitable as well.

2. Deadlines for each task, step and process need to be highlighted

3. There should be multiple roles among the users allowing for some hierarchy:
   a. Administrators – Full access rights to everything except private data that only
the user have access to. The role includes administrating the system in all various forms.

b. **HR Staff Members** – Employed at the BES section of UNDP and handles all rules and regulation information.

c. **Staff** – the common user, employed at UNDP allowing full access to all information and limited editing possibilities.

   i. There should be a built in incentive model for these users to respond and contribute with their knowledge and experience in the system.

d. **Anonymous** – An anonymous user could be anyone and hence there are limited read access and no editing access for this user.

### 5.1.5 Relevancy and consistency

Reduce irrelevant links and keep information more structured.

1. There must be a standardized format of each page
2. Each reference to another page should be a link to that page (internal or external). No additional links are required.

### 5.1.6 Guidance

There should be instructions available that aid users to finish a task. State how certain items are calculated such as total benefit and entitlement, lump sum of the salary and so forth. Provide mechanism where staff can check how an individual entitlement was calculated.

1. In each step of a process, there should be help available easily explaining and helping to solve the most common issues the user might have.
2. Provide more detailed explanation on small items such as salary deduction, post adjustment and retro adjustment etc.
3. Explain how specific questions can be solved in specific ways
4. In order to improve transparency and understanding, it should be possible to:
5. See a breakdown of costs, such as salaries.
6. Provide examples on issues such as how deduction happens under different circumstances, why things were adjusted as such.
7. When a user has finished a task, there should be a definite confirmation of this. One solution to this is to have a pop-up window indicating that the user has finished and also to receive a confirmation in other forms, such as via e-mail.

### 5.1.7 Dynamic content

The system should be flexible and allow information displayed to vary with time. For example: In summer time, information regarding education grand should be put up front since this topic
becomes popular in summer and so on.

1. There should on the welcoming perspective be available staff choices of for example seasonal character in order to prioritize certain information.

5.2 Technological overview

In this section, a brief comparison of different technical solutions are presented and briefly evaluated.

In the process shown in Figure 5.2, based on what has been described in previous sections, there are mainly three paths to get your question answered. From the survey we could see that this process satisfies less than 50% of the respondents since they did not find the answer to their question. [15]

When a question arises, the user makes a choice of how to get it answered between asking someone in their proximity, contact the HR department or by looking at the online material. Another survey result showed that people are willing to spend some time looking for information; two thirds were even willing to spend half an hour or more displaying the importance to get it answered. [15] One might assume that the main source of information initially would be printed or online documentation in many cases. Each of these paths has its own weaknesses as described below:

• The “Ask HR” box indicates the process of when a user contacts the HR function directly by e-mail or phone in order to get the question answered. This is a time consuming process that is the least efficient one since it requires time and resources from the HR department. At the same time this is a reliable source of information as HR has the competence to interpret in case there is vagueness in the complex material.

• The process “look in documentation” indicates when the user actively seeks information in the regulations in order to find the answer. The current system does not provide a basic search mechanism so looking at a printed copy or online is equally time consuming despite that this should be the most efficient way to share knowledge since there is no transaction cost and the data can easily be multiplied.

• When the user “asks a coworker” he/she asks a fellow worker in the near geographical proximity about the answer to the question: This might be the most efficient method in the current process but is lacking the reliability the other paths have. It is also an inefficient way of knowledge sharing as it is only done between two individuals at one time.

In the optimal case, one would like to combine the benefits of the different paths while minimizing their negative impact on the process. In order to solve this problem we need to look outside of the current process - at alternative implementations.

This process is not only a Q&A service but also provides a learning structure for the employees. In addition to this is the process interactive since the user needs to provide input. There are several,
more successful, concepts available in this market for dealing with interactive processes. I will here compare some available technologies. Virtual worlds, wikis, augmented reality technologies and others have provided new structures of how to do this more efficiently.

However, not all of them are applicable in this case. While an advanced, high-tech solution is inspiring to think about it is also far away from the mindset of the users. For example, not a single respondent would like to see UNDP use modern social media tools such as Facebook or Twitter [15] and the most popular ones where online resources, call center support and online chatting. This is not far away from the paths used today and may also indicate a somewhat conservative mindset of some users.

Virtual worlds are in a shared space and the advanced graphical user interface provides a baseline for immediate, persistent and interactive communication. They usually require a registration of an “avatar” and are actually suitable for learning environments despite that it is hard to really assess. [16] There are severe technical barriers to create a working environment for information and learning and the main aim is to simulate an environment which is not so important in the process we look at here. There is also a lack of open standards [16] and the usage pattern is quite complex and hence not representing the interest of the users in the case of UNDP. Using Virtual worlds would also include more steps in the process, such as moving around and locating the virtual place where the information can be found. It is therefore not a suitable technology to use here.

Augmented reality on the other hand is trying to “add information and meaning to real objects or places”. [17] It is therefore, in opposition to virtual worlds, not a simulated reality but is instead aiming at adding contextual data to the real objects a user views. [17] It is very suitable for location based services and smart phones are making this technique growing exponentially. The benefit is hence the possibility of adding context to a real world situation which is interesting in this case as many questions that arise are depending on the situation the user is in. The drawback is the technological barrier since it is complex to set up and implement. Despite that the availability of mobile handsets enabling this technology is unknown; it is still not suitable as the network services can be assumed to be poor at many locations where UNDP is active.

Wikis are documents that are created and shared collaboratively. Wikipedia is of course the main example and their importance on the Internet today is in itself a proof of concept that this is a working educational structure. Is it suitable in this case? The main issue with wikis is the lack of reliability and since the rules and regulations are fixed this is not an option but have showed the interesting prospects of collaborative learning environments.

As we have seen does the above mentioned technologies all have drawbacks making them not suitable to be used in this case. However, there are several Q&A services using a mix of forums, wikis and FAQ:s. This is for example Yahoo Answers, Answers.com and Ask.com that have become popular and is optimizing the Q&A process. The basic function is to answer and receive questions from other users. This is very easily compared to a forum but what these services add is a hierarchy and authority in order to filter out relevant and good questions and also to provide an
incentive for answering questions.

There is usually also a “discovery” function in order to discover new parts. This can be thought of as a learning mechanism based on different aspects, such as popular answers being displayed first.

Figure 5.3 A screenshot from Yahoo Answers

In order to provide a hierarchy of the answers other users can vote them up or down. This also works as the incentive model for user participation.

In figure 5.3 is given a screenshot of Yahoo answers and its intuitive Graphical User Interface (GUI). I will argue that this service is the most feasible, efficient solution for the needs of UNDP regarding the Q&A aspects of the requirements of UNDP. The model needs to be modified however in many ways as will be done in a later section.

Table 5.1 A comparison of different technologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Virtual Worlds</th>
<th>Augmented Reality Tech.</th>
<th>Wikis.</th>
<th>Q&amp;A Services</th>
<th>Current System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location based</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports user-generated content</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level of authority</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Complexity</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In UNDP’s case, a service allowing questions and official answers to be public would increase transparency since the same answer would then be provided to everyone.

We have already discussed several drawbacks of the current system. The reason for not just enhancing this is because there are some technical barriers for improving it as necessary. It is not collaborative and the users are not only looking for a better representation of the information but also for their questions to be answered specifically. Hence, just improving the current system will not help solving the root cause of the problems and the gap between different departments.
6 Prototype

In this section a proposal of a system fulfilling many of the requirements mentioned previously is presented. The name under which this enhanced version is presented is BES Answers.

6.1 Issues and considerations

The prototype the author proposes is a CSCW system that enables the UN staff to cooperate in their work. It is also a CSCL system in the sense that it aids UN staff to share, discuss, refine and propagate the cognition of HR rules for collaborative learning. Internet as a medium is excellent for sharing ideas, not just for accessing information, and should be used in that way.

The author’s idea is to have a Q&A system merged with user’s own profile/perspective. The current online version of HR rules and regulations provide all benefits and entitlements, forms and links. This is therefore where all the crucial information is kept today.

By using smarter solutions, it will be possible to free time to more prioritized tasks than spending it on answering repetitive questions. BES Answers will hopefully improve efficiency and avoid flaws such as inconsistent answers to questions. The way staff is looking for help is a way for them to learn over time. They do not need to ask about the questions they asked in the past, because they simply learned it. This is for example indicated by the fact that newer staff has more questions than the ones that have worked for a longer period.

The system proposed also facilitates the users to build consensus around a question. By allowing users to vote for the “best answer” it will be possible to quickly identify the correct and most pedagogical answer seen from the users’ perspective.

By making the system more interactive it also becomes a reason to be more active in the learning process. By implementing incentive models for learning and teaching fellow staff members the efficiency of the process will improve additionally.

These kinds of network effects should be used to a greater extent than today. The conclusion from one group/community can be used to solve other individuals’ in their understanding process. “Such knowledge, created by the community, can be used in future situations to help a member overcome a breakdown in understanding.” [10 p. 103] The experience from the previous can be used to help the late-comers.

BES Answers also allows staff to build up their learning of HR rules gradually instead of pushing all information to them at one time.

This system provides functionality for inquiring, browsing and retrieving information from the Internet. Users can bring forward their own opinion as well as significant experiences to share
ideas with others. It also provides links to similar questions and original rule files in order to keep legitimacy. One strength of this is that before a question was raised by one person and answered by another, now the question is raised only ones and then might be answered by multiple and then facilitating a discussion for the correct answer.

The drawback of this interactive solution that allows for discussion of answers that in theory are rather straight-forward is that it implies a lack of authority. Rules and regulations have a legal dimension and hence it is important to decide which the correct answer really is and that this is clear to all involved actors.

In order to solve this there is a mechanism to promote authority within the system. By introducing a rating system, it allows users to negotiate and decide for what is the best to display for others. When the asker chose his best answer, the question is still open for discussion as there is a link to comment. This allows for negotiation between users which, as discussed in the theoretical framework, are an important foundation of learning. However, in order to make up for the legal dimension a reply from someone in the role of “HR Staff member” always wins in the sense that it is displayed as the correct answer.

6.2 Prototype and Interface Design

When the author was designing the interface of the prototype, theories regarding HCI and usability were used as a framework and also best practices from available websites on the internet today were taken into consideration.

Specifically, the prototype interface strives for consistency in the way that the layouts, color, structure and typography follow a certain pattern in all parts. It also caters to universal usability in the sense that it supports all types of users’ need. It has orientations for new users and also different perspectives are displayed for different user groups. The system provides feedbacks for actions and indications to yield closure for a sequence of actions. By providing users with pre-stored information and process overviews, the system reduces users’ memory load and saves them from perform tasks repetitively.

6.2.1 Homepage

Shown in the figure below is the suggested start page of the system proposed. There are ten sections on the page that now will be described in more detail.
Figure 6.1 The "Home" page of BES Answers

(1) Search

Users type in key words of the information they want to search for. There are three choices: browse, ask and answer. The search section will appear on every perspective/pages.

Browse - When they press browse, the system returns a list of questions that have been solved with the keywords users typed in. Each solved question is showed with a title, a brief view of the best answer, a time when it was solved, a name who contributed the best answer and the
category the question belongs to. The questions are listed by a calculation of how many thumb ups other users gave this best answer. The one with the most thumb ups is listed first. Users can also choose to have it list along time. They can click on the question to view details.

Ask - When users press ask, the system will take them to a question raise page and ask them to fill in more information and to choose category the question belongs to. Users can choose to stay anonymous when ask the question. They can also insert pictures to the question.

Answer - When users press answer, the system returns a list of questions that are open for answering with the keywords they typed in.

(2) Recommendation

The system displays a selection of popular or seasonal topics.

(3) Billboard

The billboard section displays recent news from BES team to staff.

(4) Question Categorization

In this section, HR rules and regulations are categorized into groups. Under each group, there are smaller groups. The category is listed with the most frequently asked parts. For example, the first group on the list is Salary with the subsection as salary deduction, rental subsidy, and dependency allowances and so on. The second group on the list is Travel with sub-category as transportation cost, visa etc.

(5) Question waiting to be solved

The first time users log in to the system, the system displays a group of five to ten question selected randomly. Users can set up their focus area then. They can choose to have up to 5 key words and 5 categories they are interested in. The system records these and then will display recent results from those questions to them. Users can click on those to view and also click on more to view more question under the categorization. Users can edit their focus and re-set the information whenever they want.

(6) Question in polls

When users feel that they cannot choose a best answer, they can have the question in poll condition (there must be more than two answers). Any user can vote for the answer he/she thinks is good.

(7) Account
Users can log on to the system in the account section to view their personal information. In section, number of new messages is also displayed to inform users if they have received any message from the system or other users.

(8) Virtual HR

There is a virtual HR called Miyo¹. Users can input questions they want to ask, and Miyo can answer some basic questions. For example: how to find the right information, whom to contact and so forth.

(9) Site information

This section provides site map, contact us as well as RSS feeds if users would like to follow some information posted on Facebook or Twitter.

(10) Chatting

Users can chat with others they added in the system. They can also choose to turn off the chat function and to appear offline. This section will appear on every perspective/pages.

The first time users log on to the system, a pop-up window will show from the chatting bar to offer an orientation of the system. Users can then follow the orientation steps to get familiar with the system. They can also choose to skip it or set it to ask later.

6.2.2 Profile

Shown in the figure below is the suggested profile page of the system proposed. There are 6 sections on the page that now will be described in more detail.

¹ Miyo is the nickname of the author of this thesis.
Figure 6.2 The "Profile" page of BES Answers

(1) Account

Users can do account settings such as changing passwords, emails, preference settings and focus settings in this section.

(2) Brief Condition
Users see how many answers they have asked and have answered, how many thumb ups they get and their focuses in this section.

Thumb up is a mechanism that allows user to promote closed questions with a best answer. Any user can give a thumb up to a best answer if the user thinks this answer helps to solve the question. Also in the browse perspective users use to search for closed questions, questions retrieved from the database will be presented in the order of how many thumb ups they get.

(3) My Questions

Users can see the titles of questions they raised. The system displays 5 questions and users can click on more to view all ask history. On each item, users can see how many answers they get, the time they raised the question and the current status of the question.

(4) My Answers

Users can see the titles of questions they answered. The system displays 5 questions and users can click on more to view all ask history. On each item, users can see how many answers are there of the question, the time the question is raised, the status of the question, if his/her answer is chosen as the best answer and how many thumb up they get.

(5) My Tasks

Users can see the tasks they need to fulfill currently and the tasks they have fulfilled in the past. The tasks are shown in a progress bar to indicate which steps they are in now and how much is there left to do. When they finished one step, that step will be colored in the progress bar and the grey ones are there to indicate users need to take actions on it to activate it.

Click on each step, a detailed instruction will be displayed. If there are files need to be fulfilled, the files are displayed with links. Users can thus click on the link to open the files. The system displays information users have filled in before so they can either have it like that or edit it if there are any changes. The system allows users to save it as a draft or send it immediately. The system will provide feedback with pop-ups so as to indicate if users have filled in the wrong information and to confirm when they have sent it successfully.

(6) Browse History

Users can see the titles of questions they browsed. The system displays 5 questions and users can click on more to view all ask history.

6.2.3 Question

When users raise a question, the following tasks need to be performed:
- Fill in Title
- Fill in Description
- Choose a category
- Choose if they would like to stay anonymous

The question is then open and other users can contribute with their answers.

A question can have four statuses:

- Open: When the question is raised by a user and is waiting for others to answer.
- Resolved: When the question is closed with a best answer. The best answer is chosen from the answers contributed by other users by the user who raised the question. When a question is open for long, for example more than 20 days, administrators can also choose a best answer for the question.
- Closed: When the question is closed with no satisfying answer.
- Poll: When the answers of the question are open for users to vote.

Admin can edit on the closed questions and give recommendations. The “Question” page therefore has four perspectives according to different question statuses.

Shown in the figure below is a closed question page of the system proposed. Users can see under with category the question belongs to. There are links to the corresponding parts of HR rules and regulations on the right side.
6.3 Scenarios

To illustrate how BES Answers works five scenarios are presented below.

6.3.1 New user log on to the system

Lisa is recently employed by UNDP and has just received the welcome package from the BES team. She is told to log on to the BES Answers and browse for help if she has any questions. Lisa thus opens the webpage. She clicks on different links and viewed answers. She comes back to the homepage and logs into the system with account and password she received with the welcome package, the system detects that Lisa is a first time user; a pop-up window from the chatting bar asks Lisa if she wants to have a tour of how to use the system. There is a click box and it says "do not show next time" next to it.

6.3.2 Browsing tasks

From the tour Lisa gets to know that she can check what tasks she has to fulfill. So she clicks on
“My Task” and goes to her profile page. The system shows that she has a task called “recruitment process” and is 20% completed. The first step in the progress bar is colored orange and the left three steps are grayish. Lisa clicks on step B and the system showed under the progress bar that specific actions need to be taken under this step. She needs to fill in five forms. Each form is underlined to suggest that it is a link. Lisa clicks on the first link, a form pops up. Lisa fills in certain fields there and clicks on save and then opens the second form. The same field such as name and address is already filled with information Lisa provides for the first form. Lisa fills in the form and clicks on send. A pop-up window showed to indicate that Lisa has successfully sent in the form. There is also a tickle in front of the second form’s link.

6.3.3 Browsing questions

Lisa clicks on rental subsidy link in the category section on the homepage. She then sees titles of all the questions under the field. The system also shows quick links to admin/HR related to this field and their names are underlined to indicated more information about this staff will be displayed if clicks on the link. Besides admin/HR, the system also shows users who answered the most questions under this category and an RSS button in the bottom of the page which says “Book feeds of questions under this categorization”.

Lisa then wants to search for education grand, she types in education grand in the search field and click browse. A list of questions that have been solved with the keywords Lisa typed in is showed. Each solved question is showed with a title, a part view of the best answer, a time when it was solved, a name who contributed the best answer and the categorization the question belongs to.

6.3.4 Raising questions

Lisa wants to raise a question on education grand. She types in education grand in the search field and click ask. A text box is displayed for Lisa to enter in more details of the question.

A number of related questions are shown under the text box. The system asks if those questions have solved Lisa’s problem. Lisa filled in her questions and chooses categories. She also tickles the anonymous box since she does not want other to know that she raises this question. She submits the question and waits for people to answer.

Every time when someone answers the question, Lisa gets a message showing on the accounts bar. Lisa also gets a mail in her mail box by default. In the mail, there is a link to if Lisa wants to change the settings of receiving emails notifications from the system. Lisa then wants to add some additional information to her question, so she clicks on add information on the question page and edit it. A few days later, Lisa has received 5 answers from different users. Lisa can thus choose to have any one of them as the best answer, to launch a poll or to close the question as no satisfying answer. Lisa is satisfied with one of the answers so she clicks on best answer button on that answer and the question is thus closed.
A few days later, Lisa logs on to the system and sees this topic in her asking history. She sees that 3 people have given a thumb up to the best answer and also someone leaves comments on the best answer.

### 6.3.5 Answering questions

Lisa has now been using the system for more than a year. She gets to know some colleagues by using this system. She is quite familiar with some parts of the rules now and is happy to help others. She has set education grand as her focus area and the systems displays questions under this category that need to be answered. Lisa clicks on one of the question and write what she thinks is a good explanation for the question. She keeps track of if her answer is selected as the best in her answer history.
7 Discussion

In this last part, a brief discussion concerning the work will be introduced together with some general conclusions and thoughts.

UNDP is an interesting example from the perspective of people, activities, context and technology. It consists of staff all over the world with a wide variety of backgrounds. They work in a very special context as they are active in locations with the intention to help others. To set up a system that facilitates quick and accurate responses to their concerns regarding the rules and regulations that also are a part of the context is an important, difficult and challenging task. Much work remains. First of all there is a need to perform an evaluation of the proposed system and then to implement it so that it comes to the benefit of these important people.

The evaluation was out of scope for this thesis and the author hereby proposes general guidelines to follow. The wide range of users needs to be considered. Not only HR staff but also people all over the organization needs to be involved in an evaluation since it has been noticed that they have different perceptions of how the system should work. This is also one barrier for the evaluation to be performed properly. Make sure that the whole range of users from the newly employed to the very experienced are engaged in the process. The evaluation can be performed on the requirements, the current interface design and the choice of method for communicating with the staff in order to also capture the context to an extent.

Since the author has shown that understanding the HR rules and regulations can be viewed as a learning process it is important to evaluate this aspect – is the BES Answers a better solution that provides a more efficient learning tool which is its purpose?

7.1 Conclusions

UNDP with its very crucial role as an actor for a better tomorrow needs to have efficient processes in its organization. This thesis has been able to conclude that the learning process of understanding the rules and regulations that apply to an employee is far from optimal.

Specifically, it has been showed that the employees feel that:

• There is a gap between the HR staff and regular staff.
• Despite a long employment time, staff is still unsure of the rules and regulations that apply to them.
• The process is inefficient and does not utilize technology today in the way it should do.
• There is no need to consider advanced technological solutions as there is no interest from the employees to adapt to them.
• A large proportion of the employees are willing to spend much time looking for information.
Unfortunately, the response rate from the questionnaire was a little bit low but overall does these opinions seem to be general including the interviews performed in Copenhagen.

In order to solve some of the experienced issues, a new system has been proposed in this thesis called BES Answers that proposes new aspects. This includes the design of different user perspectives according to how long the user has worked for UNDP. The user studies showed that this was a fruitful way of distinguishing the users. The reason for this is that understanding these rules and regulations can be seen as a learning curve.

BES Answers provide both synchronous and asynchronous distributed communication which was what the user studies showed was expected from the system. This will hopefully additionally add the possibility to improve the efficiency.

In the end, this work has also tried to make the information more appealing to approach. By introducing incentives for being interactive and both to ask and answer questions it will hopefully become more fun to learn than previously.

It has also been considered how we can use the group intelligence in order to achieve efficiency. This should be viewed in contrast of delivering knowledge in the form of one to one as in today’s system.

### 7.2 Suggestions for Further Research

The scope of this thesis was large – how can we improve the efficiency of mediating and learning with the help of IT? This thesis did not give a complete solution but rather some ways to originate collaboration. The topic is extensive and difficult to give simple answers to but on the other hand leaves many doors open for extended research.

More research can definitely be done on how to allow consensus forms of negotiation in situations such as this. How can you allow anyone to answer when there in reality is a clear answer and it is important that it is the correct one? Can negotiation among users be one path forward? How can we optimize groups of people and their responses?

More concretely regarding this work, there could always be more research into distributed, global organizations like UNDP since it is very interesting. The questionnaire in this work had a low response rate and to do a deeper investigation of how the staff at UNDP learns is hence necessary for an extended study.

To implement and evaluate the system developed also carries some challenges with it. Regarding scalability, how to attract the users and also how to solve the technical aspect of providing access in all locations where UNDP is active would be interesting to see.
References


Appendix
### 1. How long have you been working for UNDP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2. How long have you been working within the UN common system?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Are you familiar with HR Benefits and Entitlements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Familiar</th>
<th>Quite Familiar</th>
<th>Only some parts</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.6% (16)</td>
<td>32.4% (24)</td>
<td>37.8% (28)</td>
<td>5.4% (4)</td>
<td>2.7% (2)</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| answered question | 74 |
| skipped question | 1 |
4. What kind of questions have you had regarding HR Benefits and Entitlements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>answered question</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skipped question</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Are there any parts of HR Benefits and Entitlements you seldom or never refer to?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Yes, what are those

| answered question | 55 |
| skipped question  | 20 |

6. Do you find any parts on HR Benefits and Entitlements of more importance to the other ones?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Yes, what are those

| answered question | 53 |
| skipped question  | 22 |
7. How long time are you willing to spend on looking for HR related information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple of minutes</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half an hour</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hour</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple of hours</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 59
skipped question 16

8. In general, when you look for the HR related information you need, can you find all the relevant information to your question?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If No, why not? 29
answered question 60
skipped question 15
9. How would you like to approach the HR related information? (multiple choices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call center support</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online resources</strong></td>
<td><strong>79.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed version</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media such as Twitter/Facebook</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Chatting</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent robot</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 59
skipped question 16

10. If your mother tongue is not English, would you like to have HR related information available in that language?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I would like to have that.</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No, I don’t need it.</strong></td>
<td><strong>76.4%</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Yes, what is your mother tongue?

 answered question 55
skipped question 20
11. What do you think of the current forms of HR Benefits and Entitlements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Answered Question</th>
<th>Skipped Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Can you give some suggestions on improving them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Answered Question</th>
<th>Skipped Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>