████████ REDESIGN – RESEARCH SUMMARY

ABSTRACT

Research was conducted by Diana Criser during the summer of 2016 to gain an appreciation for the current experience and needs of the end users of the ████████ platform. The purpose of this research was to recognize the main pain points of the current portal that should be avoided with a redesign, and to identify the main gaps in the current portal that should be closed with a redesign. Thirty-two participants from both the home office and Advisor's offices contributed to this research effort.

BACKGROUND

- The current ████████ framework was implemented in 2001 within a narrow landscape of browser and system configurations.
- It was built to serve an immediate need with a smaller offering of applications (proprietary and third party) and features, which served well for some time.
- The adoption of non-Microsoft browsers and the deployment cycle of newer versions of Microsoft browsers (including the release of Microsoft Edge) have increased and, as overlapping life-cycles of popular operating systems widen, the increasing number of common configurations is causing the workstation to become heavily dependent on IT professional support and development in order to operate across the user base.
- In many cases, now popular configurations cannot be supported, meaning users are restricted to a narrow configuration, which is further compounded as newer computers only provide the most up-to-date configurations.
- Browser settings required for ████████ to function as designed have also been reported to interfere with settings required for other applications utilized regularly by an Advisor's office.
- As the workstation expands to include a broader offering of applications and features, previous methodologies used to create and/or drive the framework may not be sustainable over time.
- Newer versions of these browsers now require stricter observance of protocols that were previously flexible by interpretation, which presents downstream challenges for handling changes and updates to the applications supported within the framework.
- The current ████████ framework does not scale well to accommodate the varied screen sizes of today's mobile devices.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Goal

To gain an appreciation for the perspective of the Home Office, Advisors, and Office Assistants by identifying the emotions and descriptions related to both the current ████████ workstation and a hypothetical new ideal ████████ workstation, in order to define the problem statement that a site redesign intends to solve.

Research Questions
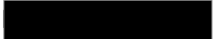
1.   What are the specific user concerns with our current portal/workstation?
2.   What specific changes or added features will lend themselves more towards the "Ideal" portal?
3.   What are the justifications for each change/new feature?
4.   What order should changes/new features be introduced, in order to improve the user experience with the portal over time while not disrupting the user's ability to conduct business through the site?
5.   (Future) What are the new icons and features to be usability tested?
6.   (Future) What are the technical constraints to any of the changes or potential features identified?

Sample

23 Home Office employees were interviewed, selected from Advisor-facing departments from across the company (Executives, ████████, ████████, Compliance, Practice Management, and Transition). These interviews were conducted from 5/16/2016 through 6/29/2016.

In addition, 9 Advisors and Assistants (5 and 4, respectively) that have offices in Nebraska within 2 hours driving distance from Omaha were interviewed. This portion of the research was conducted from 8/15/2016 through 8/3/2016.

All meetings were held in person, and were each scheduled for one hour. Some took less than the hour, and some ran over by a short amount of time.

Research Components

Research was conducted with two different activities.

The first activity focused on Contextual Inquiry/Interviews that consisted of listing out and expanding upon words in the following four categories:

1.   *Emotive* words relating to how you feel about the *current* ████████ platform
2.   *Emotive* words relating to how you would expect to feel about an *ideal* ████████ platform
3.   *Descriptive* words characterizing the *current* ████████ platform
4.   *Descriptive* words characterizing what you would expect in an *ideal* ████████ platform

The second activity surrounded a Card Sorting exercise focused on the Information Architecture of the applications available in ████████. Participants were asked to use their own mental model in order to categorize these applications:

- Laminated cards were provided to the participant with one ████████ application and its short description on each card. 35 cards were presented.
- Non-labeled "Bucket" cards were provided for the participant to group similar cards together within a bucket.
- Blank laminated cards were also provided for users to either split the functions of an application between buckets, or to place one application within multiple buckets.

- Each bucket was labeled individually by the participant.

HOME OFFICE EMPLOYEE RESPONSES

Figure 1 Home Office Emotive Responses

Emotive Responses – Current

The top 5 emotive responses regarding the current version of ████████ that were provided by the home office are summarized as:

- Confused – 18 responses
- Frustrated – 11 responses
- Overwhelmed – 7 responses
- Unsure – 6 responses
- Bored – 5 responses

Emotive Responses – Ideal

The top 4 emotive responses regarding expected feelings towards an ideal version of ████████ that were provided by the home office are summarized as:

- Confident – 13 responses
- Happy – 7 responses
- Excited – 6 responses
- Pleased – 6 responses

Figure 2 Home Office Descriptive Responses

Descriptive Responses – Current

The top 4 descriptive responses regarding the current version of ████████ that were provided by the home office are summarized as:

- Boring – 3 responses
- Organized – 3 responses
- Outdated – 3 responses
- Unorganized – 3 responses

Descriptive Responses – Ideal

The top 4 descriptive responses regarding their vision of an ideal version of ████████ that were provided by the home office are summarized as:

- Customizable – 12 responses
- Intuitive – 11 responses
- Consolidated – 7 responses
- Interactive – 6 responses

Descriptive Analysis

All descriptive responses regarding an ideal version of ████████ can be broken down into four categories – Table Stakes (those things required to make a usable tool), Look and Feel (cosmetic and flow), Functional (things that it does), and Non-Functional (those underlying things that must be present in order to support a positive user experience). The terms provided by the home office regarding an ideal description of ████████ have been broken down into these four categories in Figure 3; a number following the term in parentheses indicates the number of responses employing this same term.

Descriptive Analysis – Table Stakes

- ✓ Intuitive (11)
- ✓ Simple/Easy 10)
- ✓ Organized (5)
- ✓ User-Friendly (5)
- ✓ Consistent (4)
- ✓ Findable (4)
- ✓ Focused (4)
- ✓ Logical (3)
- ✓ Relevant (2)
- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Learnable
- ✓ Purposeful

Descriptive Analysis – Look and Feel

- ✓ Creative (5)
- ✓ Modern/New (3)
- ✓ Sleek/Slick/Smooth (3)
- ✓ Appealing
- ✓ Fresh
- ✓ Fun
- ✓ Inviting
- ✓ Cool
- ✓ Precise
- ✓ Professional
- ✓ Balanced
- ✓ Clean Cut
- ✓ Vibrant
- ✓ Warm
- ✓ Welcoming

Descriptive Analysis – Functionality

- ✓ Customizable (16)
- ✓ Informative/Helpful (13)
- ✓ Consolidated (7)
- ✓ Interactive (6)
- ✓ One-Stop Shop (4)
- ✓ Interoperable/Integrated (3)
- ✓ Streamlined (2)
- ✓ Apparent/Prominent (Cues)
- ✓ Current
- ✓ Exportable
- ✓ Emulatable (Work-As)
- ✓ Big Picture

Descriptive Analysis – Non-Functional

- ✓ Speedy/Fast/Quick (6)
- ✓ Accessible (2)
- ✓ Efficient (2)
- ✓ Tech/Browser Agnostic
- ✓ Embedded/Contained
- ✓ Holds State
- ✓ Scalable
- ✓ Standardized
- ✓ Accessible
- ✓ Dynamic
- ✓ Fewer Tech Issues
- ✓ On Demand
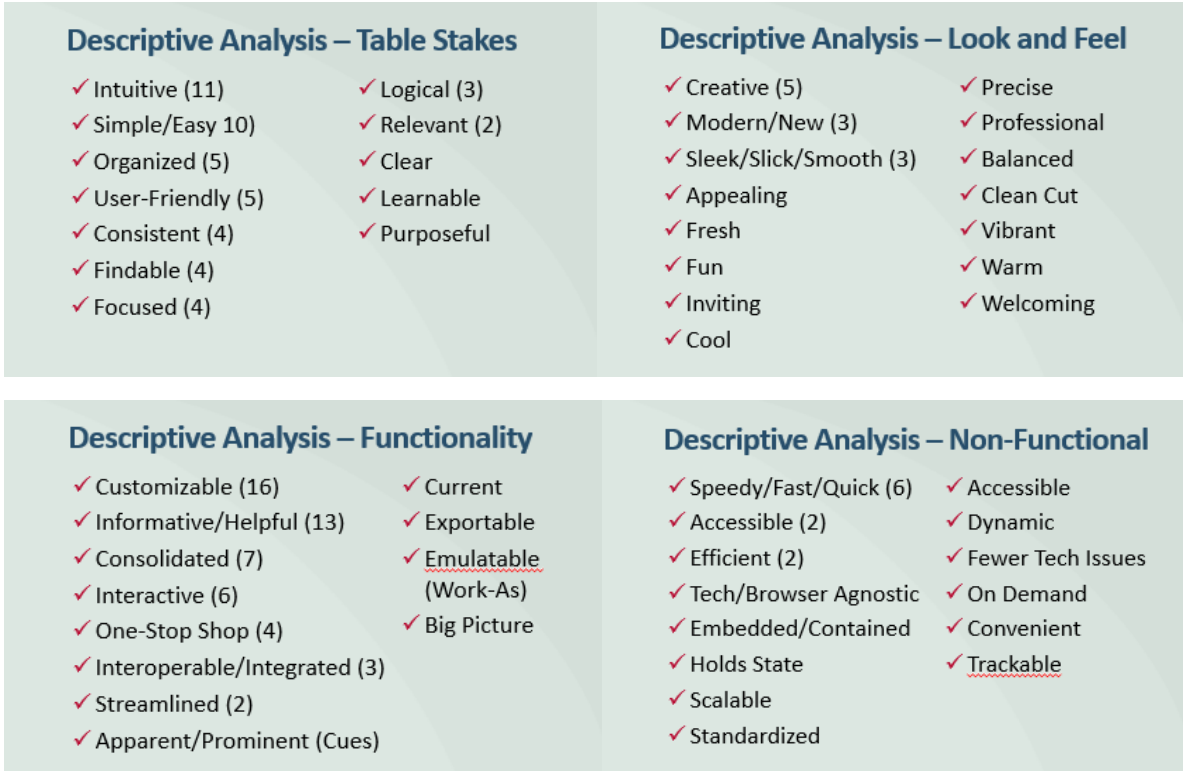- ✓ Convenient
- ✓ Trackable

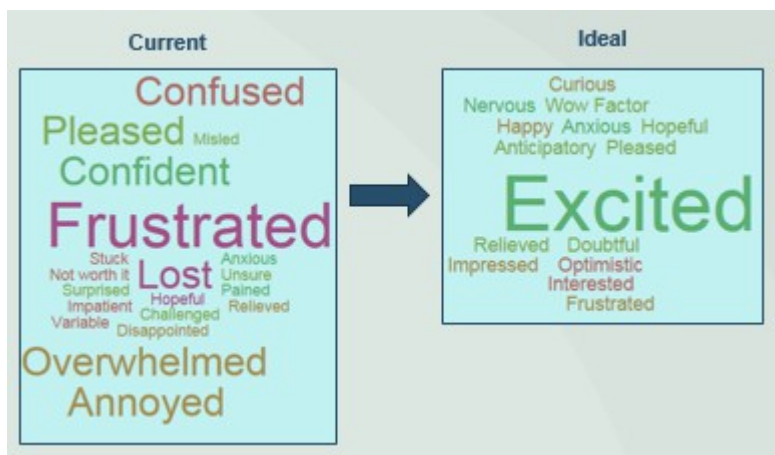*Figure 3 Home Office Descriptive Categories*

ADVISOR/ASSISTANT RESPONSES

Figure 4 Advisor/Assistant Emotive Responses

Emotive Responses – Current

The top 7 emotive responses regarding the current version of ██████ that were provided by the Advisors and Assistants are summarized as:

- Frustrated – 3 responses

- Annoyed – 2 responses
- Confident – 2 responses
- Confused – 2 responses
- Lost – 2 responses
- Overwhelmed – 2 responses
- Pleased – 2 responses

Emotive Responses – Ideal

Interestingly, while many different words were provided by the Advisors and Assistants regarding their vision of an ideal version of ████████, only one was repeated by more than one participant:

- Excited – 3 responses

Figure 5 Advisor/Assistant Descriptive Responses

Descriptive Responses – Current

The top 2 descriptive responses regarding the current version of ████████ that were provided by Advisors and Assistants are summarized as:

- Clunky – 4 responses
- Slow – 3 responses

Descriptive Responses – Ideal

The top 5 descriptive responses regarding their vision of an ideal version of ████████ that were provided by Advisors and Assistants are summarized as:

- Easy – 6 responses
- Consolidated – 4 responses
- Customizable – 4 responses

- Efficient – 3 responses
- Fantastic – 2 responses

Descriptive Analysis

All descriptive responses regarding an ideal version of ██████ can be broken down into four categories – Table Stakes (those things required to make a usable tool), Look and Feel (cosmetic and flow), Functional (things that it does), and Non-Functional (those underlying things that must be present in order to support a positive user experience). The terms provided by Advisors and Assistants regarding an ideal description of ██████ have been broken down into these four categories in Figure 6; a number following the term in parentheses indicates the number of responses employing this same term.
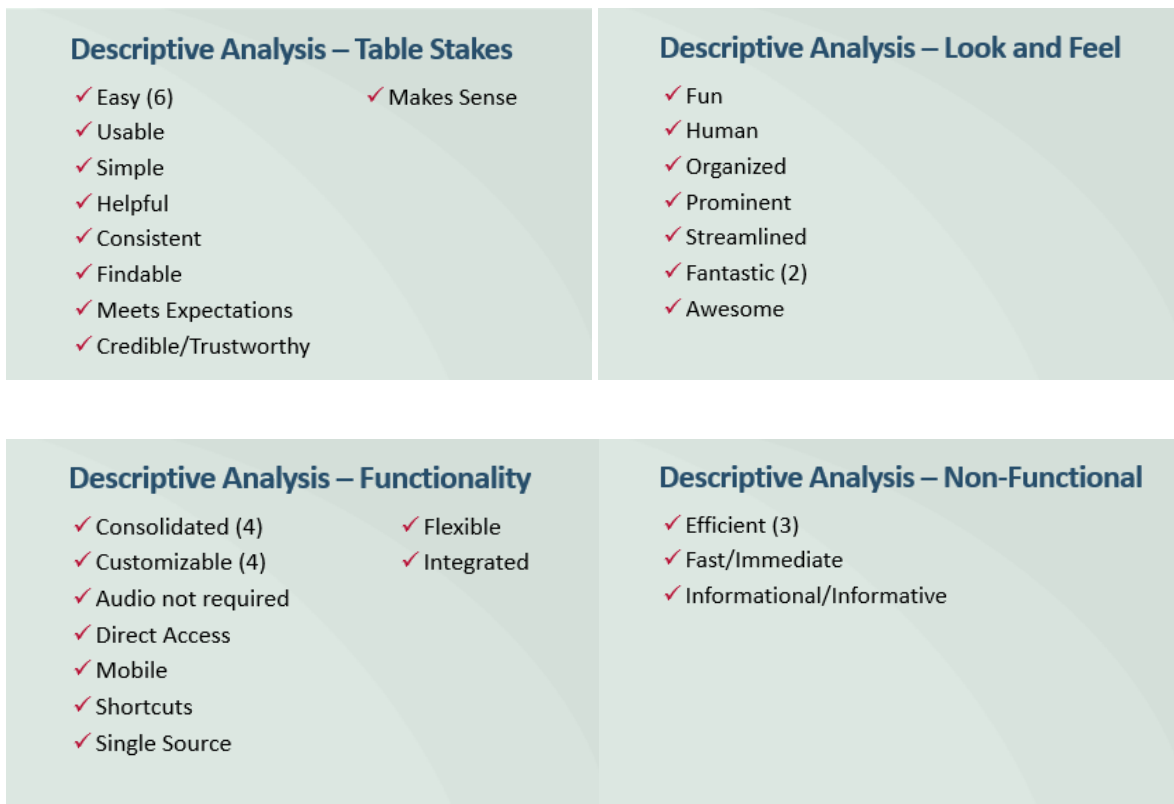
Descriptive Analysis – Table Stakes

- ✓ Easy (6)
- ✓ Usable
- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Helpful
- ✓ Consistent
- ✓ Findable
- ✓ Meets Expectations
- ✓ Credible/Trustworthy
- ✓ Makes Sense

Descriptive Analysis – Look and Feel

- ✓ Fun
- ✓ Human
- ✓ Organized
- ✓ Prominent
- ✓ Streamlined
- ✓ Fantastic (2)
- ✓ Awesome

Descriptive Analysis – Functionality

- ✓ Consolidated (4)
- ✓ Customizable (4)
- ✓ Audio not required
- ✓ Direct Access
- ✓ Mobile
- ✓ Shortcuts
- ✓ Single Source
- ✓ Flexible
- ✓ Integrated

Descriptive Analysis – Non-Functional

- ✓ Efficient (3)
- ✓ Fast/Immediate
- ✓ Informational/Informative

Figure 6 Advisor/Assistant Descriptive Categories

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

OVERALL

CURRENT: Home office staff used more negative than positive words on the EMOTION side, while Advisors/Assistants used more negative than positive words on the DESCRIPTION side.

ANALYSIS:

- Home Office staff members interviewed were more comfortable with expressing negativity through subjective feelings than were Advisors or Assistants.
- Advisors and Assistants interviewed were more comfortable with expressing negativity when they could tie their responses back to something tangible and specific.
- This disparity could be caused by relationship bias – the majority of the home office participants were already familiar with the researcher, while the researcher was a stranger to all of the Advisor/Assistant participants prior to initial email contact with them.

IDEAL: Both home office staff and Advisors/Assistants overall were heavily positive on both the EMOTION and DESCRIPTION sides.

ANALYSIS:

- Both the home office participants and the Advisor/Assistant participants most likely felt that the effort being expended by the researcher, and the support of the executive leadership team in regards to the research, were both positive signs that this initiative was important, that the results would be found meaningful, and would be applied towards a redesigned █████ portal that will clearly be focused on meeting the needs of the end user.

Demographic Comparisons

	Home Office		Advisors/Assistants	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
AGE:				
20's	3	13%	0	0%
30's	10	43%	2	22%
40's	7	30%	4	44%
50's	3	13%	3	33%
TENURE:				
Less than 5 years	8	35%	3	33%
5-10 years	9	39%	3	33%
10-15 years	1	4%	2	22%
15+	5	22%	1	11%

Figure 7 Age and Tenure Comparisons

The details revealed by Figure 7 indicate that Home Office participants were younger overall than the Advisors and Assistants interviewed, and tenure was fairly even across both groups.
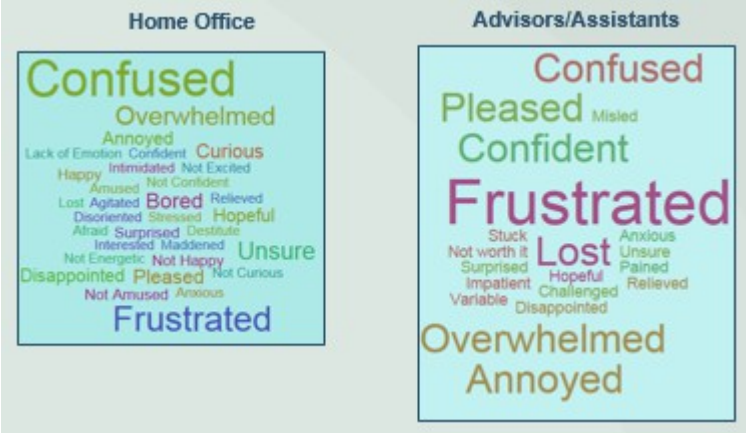
Figure 8 Emotive Responses - Current - Comparison

Emotive Responses – Current

Both the Home Office employees and the Advisors/Assistants place high focus on the intricacies of the current version of ████████ and the difficulties that causes ("Confused", "Frustrated" and "Overwhelmed" were terms common to both groups).

Home Office employees continued this theme through the word "Unsure" ("What do I do?" "Where do I go?"), and Advisors/Assistants expressed a feeling of being "Lost" in the interface.

While Home Office employees and Advisors/Assistants both expressed irritation with the current version of ████████ ("Annoyed"), a higher frequency of this particular response from Advisors/Assistants placed a higher weight on this indication of slight anger towards the system from this group.

On the other hand, Assistants often demonstrated pride in their own abilities to overcome the challenges of the system with time and training ("Confident"), and both Advisors and Assistants expressed satisfaction ("Pleased") with the functionality currently available within the portal.

Figure 9 Emotive Responses - Ideal - Comparison

Emotive Responses – Ideal

While the Home Office employees interviewed expressed more trust in the ability of a redesigned ████████ framework to meet their expectations and needs ("Confident"), both employees and Advisors/Assistants indicated feelings of being "Hopeful" and "Optimistic" about the end result.

It is interesting to note that while all of the responses from Home Office employees were positive in nature, Advisors and Assistants articulated feelings on both the positive ("Excited") and negative ("Doubtful", "Nervous") sides of the spectrum, with positive responses outweighing the negative by three to one.

Figure 10 Descriptive Responses - Current - Comparison

Descriptive Responses – Current

Home office employees are most concerned with the way the current version of ████████ looks ("Boring", "Outdated") and the way that it is structured ("Organized" or "Unorganized" based on the perspective of the respondent).

Conversely, Advisors and Assistants are most concerned with the way the current version of ████████ functions for them over the Internet ("Slow", "Clunky").

Figure 11 Descriptive Responses - Ideal - Comparison

Descriptive Responses – Ideal

Both Home Office employees and Advisors/Assistants want to be able to make the new version of ██████ their own ("Customized") – to meet their own unique needs – and to be able to find the information they need in one central location ("Consolidated").

Both groups expect the new version of ████████ to be simple to use and to incorporate into their own workflow ("Intuitive", "Easy").

The Home Office described the "how" of the new version of ██████████ ("Interactive"), and their elaborated descriptions very closely match the "what" ("Efficient") as voiced by the Advisors/Assistants.

Elaboration by the home office regarding the term "Interactive" focused on the feeling of accomplishment obtained when progress could be identified through the system. A common example provided was the current functionality of the Status tabs – these systems visually inform the user of the state of each work item within the process, and if the next action required is the responsibility of the Home Office or of the Advisor's office. These same examples represent "Efficiency" to an Advisor's office, allowing an Advisor or Assistant to focus only on the portions of the process that are important to them at the present time.

OVERALL/COMBINED RESPONSES

The responses of both the Home Office participants and the Advisor/Assistant participants have been rolled up to common themes for this portion of the analysis. The following expands upon the particular terms that were combined under each theme.

Card Sorting – Findings

While some common threads were seen across participants, the clear result was that each person organized the application labels in their own unique manner, in a way that made sense within their own mental model.

Some participants organized the application cards by the type of information contained or functions that they themselves utilized within the tool, some based their sorting preferences by frequency of their use of the tool, and most made use of an "I Don't Know" pre-labeled bucket to identify those tools that they do not utilize at all and did not prefer to categorize any further.

This exercise also provided blank application cards so that users could choose to either "split" the functions of a current application into different buckets, or to place the same application under different buckets. It also allowed for sub-buckets under main buckets, and for applications to be relabeled if desired. Limitations to the participant's own creativity were attempted to be mitigated with this exercise as much as possible. However, very few participants took advantage of this flexibility in their own sorting results. This behavior may either represent that:

1. The user's own mental model has already been constrained by the current system structure
OR
2. The ability to customize application access at this level of detail is not a desired function at this time.

These findings support the need for a customizable application menu within █████████, where a user can organize the applications they use under headings of their choice, and hide the applications they have permissions to but do not utilize in their role. After completing this exercise, many of the participants themselves recognized this value and expressed interest in having the ability to customize the order and groups of their own █████████ applications within the portal itself.

This activity also sparked comments from Home Office users that while the ability to customize menus per user would be helpful to the field and for their own use under their own direct logins, locating applications to launch through Work-As may be difficult for them if only the customized version of the menu was available through this function that emulates the user's own version of █████████.

Specific outcomes of this activity were so varied with each participant that a summary of the card sorting results could not reasonably be combined into one view of the overall results across all participants, or even across user types.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
Contentment (10)	Disinterest (9)	Disorientation (34)
Eagerness (9)		Discontentment (23)
Certainty (3)		Alarm (14)

Figure 12 Emotive Responses - Current - Combined

Emotive Responses – Current

POSITIVE:

- Contentment: Includes the terms Pleased, Happy, Relieved
- Eagerness: Includes the terms Curious, Interested, Hopeful
- Certainty: Includes the term Confident

ANALYSIS: Overall positivity has come with time – there is more information and functionality available in the current version of █████████ than most participants originally thought when they were introduced to the system initially. They have gained experience with the system over their tenure, and they know that even if they are unsure of where to find particular information or a specific function, it is most likely available. One Advisor specifically mentioned that he only had access to █████████ with his previous broker/dealer, with no system to see into home office functions or data at all.

NEUTRAL:

- Disinterest: Includes the terms Bored, Lack of Emotion, Not Worth It, Not Energetic, Not Curious

ANALYSIS: Some participants were only able to describe their emotions regarding the current █████████ portal in terms of what it is *not* – these were considered neutral responses for the purpose of this analysis. Those participants that indicated "boredom" with the current site

specifically made reference to look and feel or to the length of time that █████████ has existed in its current form.

NEGATIVE:

- Disorientation: Includes the terms Lost, Stuck, Misled, Confused, Unsure, Not Confident, Challenged
- Discontentment: Includes the terms Frustrated, Overwhelmed
- Alarm: Includes the terms Agitated, Stressed, Anxious, Intimidated, Not Amused, Annoyed, Pained, Maddened

ANALYSIS: Negativity centered on difficulties experienced with the current system and came in varying degrees – from the basic feelings of being lost and confused to more aggressive emotions such as anxiety and pain. "Disorientation", "Discontentment" and "Alarm" are listed above in order of extremity (lowest to highest), as well as from the most to the least reported emotions in this category, indicating that more respondents were more subdued in their terminology.

Specific details provided with these responses centered around system issues (automatic logout, application loading issues), navigation concerns (sub-tabs "hidden" under main tabs) and a disparity between functions (multiple places to check statuses several times a day). Some respondents indicated that these feelings were more prevalent when they were new with the system, and that this discomfort has subsided over time.

The more extreme responses were often related to what was perceived to be forced navigation, referred to by some respondents as the assumption of where the user intended to go. The examples presented to the researcher were the pop-up windows that open automatically when a main tab is selected (█████████████ from the █████████ tab and the █████ from the █████████ tab). While this assumption is false – it is a technical limitation which causes this unintended redirection rather than an assumption of user intention – it was still the perception expressed by some of the participants. It may also be interesting to note that since the █████ window opens in a separate new window when the █████████ tab is selected, several participants, most often Advisors or Assistants, consequently referred to the █████ *as* the █████████, rather than being just one component of the █████████ (█████████████ currently resides under this same main tab).

Positive	Neutral	Negative
Contentment (24)		Apprehension (4)
Certainty (15)		
Eagerness (10)		
Empowerment (8)		
Curiosity (7)		
Tranquility (7)		

Figure 13 Emotive Responses - Ideal - Combined

Emotive Responses – Ideal

POSITIVE:

- Contentment: Includes the terms Pleased, Happy, Satisfied, Surprised, Relieved
- Certainty: Includes the terms Confident, Sure, Not Confused
- Eagerness: Includes the terms Hopeful, Optimistic, Interested, Energized, Motivated
- Empowerment: Includes the terms Self-Sufficient, Autonomous, Empowered, Accomplished, Involved, Successful, Sense of Progress
- Curiosity: Includes the terms Curious, Anticipatory, Intrigued
- Tranquility: Includes the terms Calm, At Ease, Comfortable, Invited, Not Annoyed, Peaceful

ANALYSIS: Responses were overwhelmingly positive in regards to the participants' expected feelings towards a redesigned ███████ portal. Home Office employees and Advisors/Assistants both reflected a confidence in our ability to take their needs into consideration with the next release, which could be due in part to the interest displayed by the researcher through this contextual inquiry process.

NEGATIVE:

- Apprehension: Includes the terms Anxious, Nervous, Doubtful, Frustrated

ANALYSIS: All negativity was expressed by the field only, in reaction to the thought of modifying one of the main systems that they rely on daily to run their business. Additional probing into these particular responses revealed concern over change in general – "Will I be able to find what I'm looking for?" and "Change is hard" were a few quotes in this regard. Technical difficulties with the initial release of ██████████████ (specifically Closed accounts displaying on the █████ tab) was one recent example that led to this doubt, and advanced communication relating to expected changes and ongoing communication on known issues were solutions proposed by one assistant that could ease these worries.

The importance of these particular research findings is that these emotions reveal the expectations of our end users – it is the positive feelings that a redesign must strive to instill in our target audience, while also rendering the expected negativity groundless. This is the main goal that this redesign project must strive to meet, and demonstration of these positive emotions by our end users after the release of the redesigned portal will be a clear indication of our success with an ███████ redesign.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
Utilitarian (7)		Ordinary (26)
Uncomplicated (7)		Haphazard (20)
Unified (5)		Difficult (12)
		Inefficient (9)
		Congested (9)
		Anachronous (6)

Figure 14 Descriptive Responses - Current - Combined

Descriptive Responses – Current

OVERALL OBSERVATION: While the majority of respondents referenced both positive and negative characteristics of the current portal, they weighed much heavier on the negative aspects, and very few participants provided only negative responses.

POSITIVE:

- Utilitarian: Includes the terms Functional, Task-Oriented, Useful, Purposeful, Competent
- Uncomplicated: Includes the terms User-Friendly, Easy, Simple, Simplistic, Seems Easy, Accessible
- Unified: Includes the terms Integrated, Streamlined, Aggregated, Seamless

ANALYSIS: One Advisor reported that the current version of ▮▮▮▮ "does what I need it to do", and another indicated that it "provides access to the tools I need." Several positive responses referenced enhancements that had been made over the years, and a comfort level that comes from using the same systems over a period of time.

NEGATIVE:

- Ordinary: Includes the terms Institutional, Industrial, Utilitarian, Not Fun
- Haphazard: Includes the terms Disorganized, Unorganized, Spread Out, Puzzle, Scattered, Not Consolidated, Chaotic, Top-Driven, Ambiguous, Unclear, Lots of Clicking, Crap Shoot, Hidden, Lack of Findability, Lack of Prominence, Not Findable
- Difficult: Includes the terms Struggle, Not Intuitive, Not User-Friendly, Not Helpful, Clunky, Not Accessible
- Inefficient: Includes the terms Time-Consuming, Time-Wasting, Slow, Unnecessary Actions, Not All Fast
- Congested: Includes the terms Small, Tiny, Information-Heavy, Overloaded, Crowded, Cluttered, Busy, Too Much Information
- Anachronous: Includes the terms Outdated, Old Fashioned, Old, Dated, Not New, Antiquated

ANALYSIS: While the majority of responses received across the board were negative, participants from the Advisor's offices provided a higher percentage of negative terms than those of the Home

Office employees interviewed. Negativity mainly focused around look and feel, organization, and technical concerns:

- Look and Feel concerns specifically focused on the outdated tab structure, the current color scheme (as compared to the recently-updated ███████████, and the top-heavy use of real estate.
- Organizational problems commonly referenced the multiple clicks and the time and effort required to locate and access the proper application under the main tab structure. Unclear labels and icons were also mentioned as hindrances in this area, as well as the lack of help present where it is needed most (at the point of struggle). Having to scroll to the right to reveal "hidden" tabs when the list exceeds the horizontal real estate of the portal itself was also reported as a challenge, and Advisors/Assistants reported annoyance by on-screen space being taken up by tabs that they never use (further research uncovered that many of the Advisors with this complaint were listed in the back office system as being dual-clearing, but each one mentioned that they have since changed to utilizing only one Clearing Firm). References to the time expended due to the current organization of the portal were often compounded by technical speed-related issues.
- Technical issues regarding timeouts and slow load times were most often reported by Advisors/Assistants, and also by Home Office employees in the ██████████████ (those that spend the most time each day within the portal).

Positive	Neutral	Negative
Uncomplicated (43)		
Tailorable (22)		
Centralized (14)		
Expedient (12)		
Explanatory (9)		
Original (8)		
Obvious (8)		
Exclusivity (8)		
Approachable (7)		
Real-Time (7)		
Connected (6)		

Figure 15 Descriptive Responses - Ideal - Combined

Descriptive Responses – Ideal

OVERALL OBSERVATION: As would be expected, all participants responded positively with descriptions of how "their" ideal portal would work, how it would function, and what additional features it would employ.

POSITIVE:

- Uncomplicated: Includes the terms User-Friendly, User-Focused, Usable, Intuitive, Easy, Logical, Learnable, Simple, Stupid-Simple, Straight-Forward, Clean-Cut, Clear, Makes Sense
- Tailorable: Includes the terms Customizable, Configurable, Personalized, Flexible
- Centralized: Includes the terms Consolidated, Big Picture, Focused

- Expedient: Includes the terms Fast, Quick, Speedy, Efficient
- Explanatory: Includes the terms Informational, Informative
- Original: Includes the terms Creative, Fun, Fresh
- Obvious: Includes the terms Findable, Apparent, Prominent
- Exclusivity: Includes the terms One Path, One Stop Shop, Not Redundant, Single Source, Streamlined
- Approachable: Includes the terms Warm, Welcoming, Vibrant, inviting, Looks Cool, Human, Appealing, Professional
- Real-Time: Includes the terms Interactive, Dynamic
- Connected: Includes the terms Integrated, Interoperable, Balanced, Sharable Services

ANALYSIS: The following expands the descriptive categories expressed by the interview participants into specific recommendations for the redesign of the █████████ portal:

Look and Feel:

- "Original", "Approachable": An updated look and feel that coordinates with the recently-updated █████████ is recommended.
- "Obvious": The ability to view the entire sub-menu with a hover over a main menu category, accessing a sub-menu item with a single click, was noted as a benefit to the navigation of the new █████████ by a few of the respondents. The redesigned █████████ portal should follow this same methodology of prominence in menu structure by:
  1. Placing links to items that need to be accessed readily and often directly on the screen and labeling them appropriately for findability.
  2. Linking to a full tools/utilities list of all other applications from this same location.

However, it would be recommended to NOT employ the slide-out left menu (accessed through the "hamburger" menu icon) within the new █████████ portal that the █████████ currently utilizes. This method of design is a mobile-first approach that allows one single design for the █████████ to also function on a small screen, but a usability study conducted earlier this year by Nielsen Norman Group and international remote-usability-testing firm WhatUsersDo found that desktop designs that are optimized for mobile result in the desktop user experience suffering significantly. Rather, their recommendation would be to optimize the design for each platform (Referenced Article can be found at the following link: https://www.nngroup.com/articles/mobile-first-not-mobile-only/). Since the █████████ portal as a whole is intended for use on a desktop, a multiplatform design strategy should be employed if the new portal is expected to be optimized for mobile use in the future.

Functionality:

- "Centralized", "Obvious", "Real-Time": Combine all Status and Alert functionality – those items currently awaiting action by the user as well as recent activity – from any system to be viewable as a high-level summary within one location. This function should be accessible from a link directly on the main portal, as it needs to be accessed readily and often. Each item on this summary needs to provide the ability to directly access additional detail and available actions from the summary – automatic redirecting to the appropriate record in the appropriate system

would meet this need (the user should not have to manually navigate to a different system in order to obtain additional detail or to perform a required action).

- "Tailorable": Allow the user to fully control the data they see – this includes sorting/filtering, and the ability to remove items that they are no longer following from a list of activity. Saving custom settings and providing control to the user regarding whether an application opens in its own window or as an embedded application within the portal will also improve the user experience, allowing each user to work within ███████ in the way that best fits their workflow and screen setup.
- "Tailorable": Provide the ability for a user to control which applications they see in a customized list, self-organized to meet their own unique needs, while also maintaining access to the full, non-customized list of applications the user has permissions to. The Card Sorting activity revealed the different ways that each participant views these applications within the framework of their own position/workflow/duties, and reinforces the need for this customizable menu functionality. Maintaining access to a full non-customized list serves two purposes:
  1. Applications that a user may have hidden from their own customized view are still accessible and can be added to their customized list at any time.
  2. A home office user (via an emulated work-as type functionality) will still be able to access any application the user they are "working as" has access to in the same order and location as they are used to finding the application (without having to search through the user's own customized application view).

  The Card Sorting activity revealed the varied ways that each participant views these applications within the framework of their own mental model informed by their own position/workflow/duties, and reinforces the need for this customizable menu functionality.

- "Connected": As we move forward in redesigning the actual applications available within ███████, the focus should be to strive for integration between data stores (including ██████, ██████, ██████, ████████████████, and the Clearing Firm) and to provide access to relevant details and actions directly from the location of the related information.
- "Exclusivity": Redundancies should be eliminated, or accessing the same application or process from multiple locations should maintain prior state and perform in the same manner from every location. A current example where this does not occur is the Check/Certs blotter, which is currently located under both the ████████ tab and the ███████ tab, but beginning entry in one of these locations does not carry over to the second location (they are completely disparate instances of the same tool).
- "Expediency", "Explanatory", "Tailorable": Providing default settings or entries within an application will assist in the learnability of the application. A current example is the ████████ – some users expressed confusion with this tool at first because it requires setup before it can be useful. Providing the appropriate defaults will speed up the learning curve and the use of the tool or utility, and allowing values or settings to be modified – or even customized and saved – will also increase the usefulness and shorten the time required to complete tasks within the system. Eliminating horizontal scrolling within the portal or for any application contained within it will also increase the speed of learnability and utilization.

Non-Functional:

- "Expedient": System stability and performance should be a focus of these redesign efforts. The system should never kick a user out before a reasonable timeout period, screens should not

require a refresh due to a loading issue, searches should be optimized to always return results in a reasonable amount of time, and a specific browser and custom settings should not be required. With ██████ being a web-based application, and Internet speeds and quality variance around the country (especially in more rural areas or on shared networks such as within a financial institution), the system itself must be as solid as it can be to not further aggravate these infrastructure challenges faced by Advisors and Assistants.

Table Stakes:

- "Uncomplicated": Logical labels should be employed in a consistent manner across ███████ – including application names, data entry fields, and informational display sections. These labels should fit the mental model of the Advisors and Assistants, using the terminology that they use and that their clients use. Consistency in format, functionality, layout, and data entry processes between applications should also be a main focus of application redesigns and for new applications that will be included within ███████ going forward. Data entry/upload and search tools need to also work hand in hand – an Advisor's office needs to trust that anything they submit into ██████ can easily be located – for tracking, full review, or retrieval purposes – at a later time, and that all related detail is available without additional intervention or searching in multiple locations.
- "Explanatory": The proper level of help should be available for each application and process, employed first by simplification of the interface as validated by usability testing with actual representative end users, and second with on-demand help files, quick cards, and videos that are accessible just-in-time from within the appropriate location of the application itself. This help can also be provided at the application menu level by providing a brief description and a small screen shot accessible from the menu itself for each application, so that the user can verify that they have correctly identified the application they are looking for before actually launching the application itself and expending load time on what may possibly be the wrong application.

WRAP-UP

Further Research Opportunities

1. Younger interviewees, specifically on the Advisor/Assistant side.
2. Focus more specifically on functions that ███████ does not incorporate but would be beneficial to an Advisor's office.

Conclusion

- A redesign of the ███████ portal is well overdue.
- The majority of users interviewed are positive about future changes.
- Many different methods/designs could be employed to meet user needs.
- Usability testing of potential concepts will ensure the correct solution is implemented.