Quality Assurance Portal Analysts' UI UX Feedback

"If we don't rise up to the level of our goals, we fall down to the level of our systems."
QA Analyst quoting James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*

Introduction and Process

The following review of the QA Portal was conducted from 03/06 – 03/23/2023. The analysts were asked to present their workflow for a typical day of processing audits. A representative selection of LRAs and SRAs in individual interviews were encouraged to frankly discuss the application's strengths and weaknesses.

It is important to note that the remarks cited in quotation marks and attributed to an anonymous analyst identification numbers are NOT direct quotes. There are two reasons for this. Often, I am paraphrasing in my notes to capture the analysts' observations and remarks as succinctly as possible. The other reason for the identification and paraphrasing system is to focus on the input of the user and not the identity.

Another aspect of UX UI investigation is that invariably an application, particularly a government application, is designed with changing policies guiding content and functionality. This is the case with the QA Portal. In this document, many policies are discussed by the analysts. These conversations came up from my interview questions. Of those analysts frustrated with a particular system policy, many of them suggested solutions from a practical experience.

A characteristic of government applications is that features are usually added or adjusted in an incremental fashion over time with the different policy agendas. Typically, these improvements are done individually on an O&M basis without a full UI UX evaluation. QA Portal is a classic example of this. Throughout the course of its use, various elements have been adjusted or added by individual requests of management or suggestions by the users. But as initiatives and policies change, obsolete items have not been removed or reengineered. At best, as in the case of this application's home page, the item just sits in the UI taking up space and serving no purpose. Or worse, new innovations in the workflow are being hampered by existing formats or older requirements that should be evaluated as to their viability.

For example, in the Audit Detail Page form the analysts indicated that the Scoring component had change from points being automatically assigned (when categories in the Six Steps were checked), to the current format of manually checking the scores in the Scoring region. Related to this, the Rubric and Scoring have been aligned with corresponding headers and sections, but the original Six Steps of the form do not correspond directly with the Rubric and Scoring. All the analysts have cited this as hampering their efforts to align the Rubric Scores with their write-ups in the Six Steps.

In UX UI development it is important to look for actual patterns in behavior and overall usage. By inventorying the users' remarks we can see patterns of usage both good and bad.

The selection of the user input entries in this report is organized by the overall application, pages, sub tabs, links, and related resources to the portal. Each topic will contain either ISSUES, NOTES, or a combination of the two. ISSUES are supported by the analysts' discussion points and are comprised of challenges that the users encounter either from technology or workflow policies. NOTES are more for my reference to track the user roles as well as the application's functions and resources.

Those items with little or no ISSUES or NOTES are no longer in use by the analysts or had no functional challenges and currently serve their purpose to the workflow.

The last section, Innovations is the collection of solutions and suggestions derived from the analysts' interviews.

Summary of Interview Findings

The QA Portal is a vital application for vetting standards of compliance by the Operations analysts (RAs) reporting in the Application system. The deliverable end products are the audits of the RAs' reports produced by the LRAs. In turn, the LRAs quality of work is monitored by the SRAs through internal evaluations.

The current reviewing system has evolved over the years from team leads overseeing QA on the Ops floor to the centralized team of LRAs managing QA through the portal. The application has had numerous adjustments in the UI to accommodate changes in policies and sources of data.

The workflow of the LRAs consists of evaluating individual reports that are randomly provide to their dashboards on the Audit Page through [a service]. The LRA can organize the reports by filtering columns such as priority (High, Low), type of report (NR, RP, RF etc.) and audit date. Clicking on an individual report brings up the Audit Detail Page that is the central resource for documenting the LRAs' audits.

In the interviews, the LRAs and SRAs cited the most issues with the Audit Detail Page forms and policies. Of the 26 pages of user feedback, 15 pages are dedicated to detailing the technical and procedural challenges hampering the review process of the Audit Detail Page.

The three main issues of the Audit Detail Page forms that were consistently featured in the interviews:

- The Six Steps of evaluation
- The process of documentation through the analysts' write-ups in the Notes
- The Audit Scoring the using the Rubric

The Audit Detail Page is really the core of this application. Not only does it produce the final product—the audit report back to the RAs—but it also generates the data for compiling the productivity reports of the LRAs as well as tracking the types and amounts of errors found in the audits. It is apparent from the interviews with the analysts, various scoring and other features have been added to the UI on an as-need basis negatively impacting the original function and focus of the page which is to communicate the reportable issues back to the RAs.

The Six Steps qualify the errors and irregularities that the audit documents. The Rubric provides guidance on Scoring the impact of the cited errors. It is in the Notes that LRA inventories and defines in detail the types of errors through citing the documentation in the SOP. As the form is set up now, the LRAs cannot write directly into their Notes. The current form inputs do not support a straightforward method to write and read the entirety of the Notes. The form inputs are not designed for the amounts of documentation that the LRAs provide, and obscure entered text. The full Note, the product that is sent back to the RA, is visible only by a tab that takes the analyst away from the input form and the text is read-only. LRAs are constantly clicking back and forth from the input form and the read-only tab to edit their audits.

The Notes feature is the central resource that should be supported by the Six Steps and the Rubric Scoring. The original design using the Six Steps to frame the workflow is cumbersome and error-inducing.

There are other components in the Audit Detail form that are also hampering production:

- The link to [MANAGING APPLICATION] does not provide the complete data in IE.
- The Case File Number component is confusing and overly complicated.

- RA Rubric Notes and LRA Rubric Notes input fields obscure data and LRAs are missing messages from SRAs that are not readily apparent.
- The entry tagging system of user and time/date stamp in the LRA notes is not functioning correctly.
- The Rubric is only available as a PDF and not programmed into the workflow to facilitate scoring.
- The Response Tab's interface used by the SRAs to communicate disputed issues with OPS is cumbersome.
- There is no Status feature or standard work History for the LRAs to track their submitted completed audits.

The SOP Search Page also became a target of discussion. The recently developed search feature was generally appreciated. But the analysts had some issues with it. Among them were sections of SOP text—which could impact interpretation of regions containing search terms—are not appearing in the results. Quite a few LRAs rely on searching PDFs of the SOP because the browser search of a PDF shows the entire document as well as allows them to tab amongst highlighted results.

Overall, the QA Portal is showing its age in UI and UX design. There are other pages, features, and resources with issues that are captured in the interviews. This is to be expected when dealing with legacy applications built with older technologies.

That being noted, fortunately the LRAs and SRAs are very invested in the application. Many came to the interviews with notes for improvement. The section on Innovation provides six pages of suggestions from the analysts who have hands-on daily experience with the portal.

Some of the suggestions include:

- Revising the default order of drops to high priority, first and then date second.
- A secondary filter in the Audit grid to organize by subcategories.
- Add SRA or Lead Column to main Audit grid.
- A tally of daily completed audits on the Audit grid.
- LRA highlighting ability in Brava for redaction and edit errors.
- A policy and tracking method so the LRA would be assigned the sister Namechecks together.
- Rubric assigns Score.
- A programmed lag time – possibly 30 minutes – from [THIS APPLICATION] before it posts to the [Public App] to allow inadvertently closed audits to be retrieved and amended.
- Contributors are auto populated from [MANAGING APPLICATION] Case History.
- Link directly to the SOP and Handbook change request form from within the QA portal.

Quality Assurance Portal Analysts' UI UX Feedback [Draft for Review]

Application

a. **ISSUES:**

   i. **508 Compliance**

      1. While a comprehensive review for 508 issues was not a part of the evaluation requirements, a cursory overview of the app presents some basic accessibility red flags. For example, headers are not present on the pages; text fields obscure data input; and components like “Case File Referenced in Steps 1-2” are not tab operable. With the effort to update and incorporate QA Portal into [MANAGING APPLICATION] the new UI should be developed to resolve any 508 existing issues.

   ii. **Application: White Screen of Doom: System errors out while in use**

      1. 14 analysts cited this issue.
      2. A78007- “I can't tell you how many times I had to clear my cache; I've had to restart my computer.” Uses SOP Search in a Chrome browser where SOP app is more stable.
      3. A14802- “And I don't know what the issue is. It does that quite frequently, even with the [THIS APPLICATION] databases it will just error out. Then I'll have to try to basically sign out and log back in to even get into the Audit Screen.”
      4. A62205- “It happens every day with me. At least two- or three-times day.”
      5. A05306- “Having to refresh the QA Portal multiple times a day can be frustrating.”
      6. A42812- “It’s been months since I've been able to go from audit to audit to audit, like I was clicking with you today. The system is sluggish, or it gives the error of that blank screen. And you must either go in the push the button to clear cache or you must refresh. And we have too much work for that to be happening.”

   iii. **Application: Browser Issue**

      1. A14504- “You can't close the case in [THIS APPLICATION] unless you're in Internet Explorer.”

b. **NOTES**

   i. **Standard App Usage is complemented by multiple screens of [MANAGING APPLICATION], [Related Application] and SOP as well as some printed resources on the analysts’ desks.**

1. A42812- "I have a [MANAGING APPLICATION], [Related Application], and the SOP open up on the other screen and then you just tag back and forth, whatever we need to be looking at."
2. All analysts use QA Portal in some combination of dual screens to [MANAGING APPLICATION].
3. Some analysts keep Word documents of reusable and searchable archives of common audit discrepancies, their related SOP documentation and tags to readily copy and paste into write-ups.
4. Some analysts refer to a printed version of the Rubric.

ii. **Number of Expected audits per day:**

1. A14802- "24-30 a day"
2. A69401- "They're looking to close 20 to 30 a day of this general bucket depending on the workload of what's actually in these specific cases."
3. A66511- "The goal is to do a minimum of 2.5 an hour."
4. A40703- "I think three an hour. I don't know if they've actually written it down, but that's kind of a median that's expected of us."
5. A14504- "It used to be thirty a day, but then they changed it to twenty-five a day or 2.5 an hour."
6. A62205- "Wow, I forgot that number, it seems like it was in the 30s or 40s or something like that. I probably knock 50 or so audits a day."
7. A42509- "It's like two and a half to three an hour."
8. A70210- "Two or three an hour–which was depending on how many hours you work–eight or ten hours, between twenty-four and thirty cases a day."

17. Home [Page]

a. **ISSUES**

i. **Homepage: is unnecessary**

1. Without exception, all the analysts consider their Audit queue as their homepage.
2. At the time of the review the Home page was empty.

18. SOP Search [Page]

a. **ISSUES**

i. A42812- "I know that search capabilities are a little different, kind of more like a Google search, I think it is kind of like where you can come up and say, I'll search 'background' and 'discontinue.' But it cuts out part of the SOP that does not include those words. The way our SOP is written out, if you miss one little Section it changes the content and could possibly change the context of everything. That is why I like to see the whole thing at one time. That's why I just do a keyword search but has just personal preference."

ii. A66511- "I don't like the auto search feature in SOP search because it kind of skips sections. I prefer to use the Chrome browser search of the entire SOP document. Because it shows the whole document. The SOP Search doesn't provide all sections in succession."
iii. A40703- "I much prefer the PDF. I feel like the searches on are more reliable. SOP search can be buggy. I will use it for a standard specific term like redactions. But for more complex searches I rely on opening the full SOP pdf and searching."
iv. A14504- "I am old school, so I prefer the PDF. I do use the SOP every day, but I prefer the PDF because I have worked with it long enough to be familiar with most of the sections. And I feel that the auto-search version doesn't show the complete sections around the search terms."
v. A93214- "An issue with the SOP is that when you search sometimes you don't see the section above or below. We see this a lot with the RAs if they do not know the sections are there and they are not familiar with the SOP then they will miss important related sections. Because sometimes the unseen sections can contradict or truly explain what they should be doing. We do see this quite a bit."
vi. A62205- "I never use it. I do not like how I cannot see all the related sections. I save the latest version of the SOP as a PDF and search in the browser. I tried using the SOP search in the beginning. But while it highlights the search results it doesn't allow me to hit the "Next" button and jump to the next section where the search term is found like the browser search of the PDF does."
vii. A05306- "You have to learn what terms to use to search and to be careful about adding a space or not because that will impact your search. For example, if you search on USCIS with a space after the term you will get so many more results than without the space."
viii. A89208- "I never use the Full SOP button."
ix. A42509- "I prefer to open the full PDF in my browser and search. It highlights the searched term and does not hide the sections. I keep the SOP PDF open in a browser window next to [MANAGING APPLICATION] all day."
x. A70210- "And I keep two tabs open. One with SOP will be open all the time, so I do not have to worry about clicking out of the audit back and forth. I use it every other case."
xi. A42812- "It's supposed to be set up as a living document. I do not understand why we are not following through with making the changes once they are approved immediately. Instead of holding and waiting to approve the whole document."

xii. A14802- "I do sometimes like the option of the PDF, especially if we're having connection issues. Sometimes I can get a PDF better than the SOP search, sometimes it just comes up with an error, won't load."

xiii. A6941- "I don't care for it I just prefer a PDF version. They have put a lot of work in the SOP. It is much better than what it used to be. But typically, what I do, I select the Full SOP. And then I just do a keyword search, like looking for 'background.'"

19. Elimination Tool [Page]

a. **NOTES**

i. A78007- "If they didn't go after a file and it's of concern to me, the first place I do is go to the Elimination Tool to make sure it wasn't on here. Because if it were, it would make sense why they did not go after the file. I definitely do use that, yes."

ii. A40703- "I use this once every two or three weeks. If I get a feeling that I am not sure we should be reporting this information. Then I'll go to the Elimination Tool and see if it's listed."

iii. A62205- "When I'm looking in the analyst's notes, and it shows that a case id was found in the Elimination Tool, and I will go and copy and paste it in there to verify."

iv. A05306- "I don't use this because we aren't supposed to rework the case. If the case says they are on the NR list, I take their word for it."

v. A89208- "Unless an analyst notes that it's on there, I don't use it. I don't think people use this as often as we used to."

20. Audit [Page]

a. **ISSUES**

i. **Audit: Final Date is essentially not being used in main audit grid**

1. 13 analysts cited this issue.
2. A89208- "Setting priorities if I note in the Final Date that it's 5 days or more, I'll give it a priority above the other low priority. But otherwise, I use it very rarely."
3. A42812- "I don't know what Final Date is. I am assuming as the date that it closed out and came to us. I don't use it."

ii. **Audit: Action Column main audit grid**

1. None of the analysts mentioned it in their workflow.
2. When asked about frequency of use: A66511- "I don't, honestly, in all the years I've use the app I am not even sure what this would do."

iii. **Audit: Action Column main audit grid ride side buttons: 'Get Next A&R, My Cases, History, Next etc."**
   1. None of the analysts mentioned these buttons in their workflow.
   2. When asked about it:
      a. A66511- "No, no, I don't use them."
      b. A42509- "Yeah, I don't touch those at all because they do the data dump two or three times throughout the day."

iv. **Audit: LRA Name column not being used in main audit grid**
   1. None of the LRAs mentioned these buttons in their workflow.
   2. 1 analyst cited this as being unnecessary for their use to see their name repeated

v. **Audit: Control over background screen color**
   1. A05306- "I find using the app with the white background for 8 hours a day is straining my eyes. If we could create a better background color like in [MANAGING APPLICATION] that would be so much better. I do like the ability to set color schemes with the dropdown Steps etc."
   2. A89208- "More color schemes to adjust the screens. And you know your eyes are getting burned out, and you're looking at the same colors over and over and over here."
   3. Several analysts cited this.

vi. **Audit Page SRA: Remove "Name Search" and "Overlisting" buttons**
   1. No longer used

vii. **After user filters names and then completes a case the names are jumbled by incoming audits.**
   1. A60813- "If I sort by name and then clear one out the order is shuffled. It would be nice to leave the list the way I had ordered it—by name or by date. You can sort by date and the dates will hold but the cases will be in a different order when you clear a case. If you sort your queue one way, it should stay that way. You could add a button that says "Refresh" that would bring in the new cases and will not reorder the current list until you are ready. You would work your cases down with your filtered list and then repopulate your queue with the new cases that you could filter in place."

21. **Audit Detail [Page]**
    a. **ISSUES**
        i. **Audit Detail Page: [MANAGING APPLICATION] Link Fail**
            1. A14802- "What I found is it's slower. I always just have the search box [MANAGING APPLICATION] open already to where I can search the CIDN and it's just quicker for me."
            2. A66511- "This link pulls it up into in an Explorer, because right now, [THIS APPLICATION] only operates in Internet Explorer. [MANAGING APPLICATION] doesn't function well in Internet Explorer, so like when you're trying to review like a large document, like a background investigation it doesn't always load properly, or the redactions will not load properly."
            3. A40703- "You don't get any of the employer, you don't get any of the candidate list. We do not get anything. All we get as those first two lines of information. I can't work anything from Internet Explorer, starting off with, I can only close a request in IE."
            4. A62205- "The developers said not to run it in IE and to run it in Chrome."
            5. 14 analysts cited this issue.
        ii. **Audit Detail Page: Audit Progress Bar at top of page**
            1. Progress bar of percentage of completion in upper right-hand side unnecessary.
            2. A93214- "It's not really helpful."
            3. Interviewer had to point out the component for any discussion of it with the analysts.
        iii. **Audit Detail Page: Audit Progress Indicators at top of page**
            1. Left Green Arrow Icon: Has been started
            2. Right Green Arrow Icon: Has been Completed.
            3. If the Right arrow is replaced by Red Not Complete the LRA has submitted it and forgot to complete the audit.
            4. Analysts like the workflow indicators but felt the icons could be clearer in expressing the three states of progress.
        iv. **Audit Detail Page: Excel Export button**
            1. A93214- "Probably used more at the SRA on the floor level to get a spreadsheet view of an audit in case they don't get an email."
            2. The sample we looked at showed the write-up by the analyst but the Excel spreadsheet didn't document the scoring. It showed 100% percent when the actual scoring was 80%--a possible bug.