Review of report of Round 6 consumer testing results for HUD's new mortgage disclosure forms

Report by
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Introduction

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through HR Communications, Ltd. asked Redish & Associates, Inc. to provide an expert review of the report of Round 6 of the iterative development and testing of HUD's new mortgage disclosure forms.

The Kleimann Communication Group (KCG) of Washington, DC, conducted Round 6, as they had the earlier rounds of testing. Therefore, the document reviewed here is part of the series known as the Kleimann Reports.

Who reviewed the Round 6 report?

Dr. Janice (Ginny) Redish, President of Redish & Associates, Inc., Bethesda, Maryland, reviewed the Round 6 report. For more on Dr. Redish's qualifications, see the biography at the end of this report.

What does the Round 6 report cover?

In Round 6, the researchers conducted two tests.

In the first test, with 60 participants, they compared two versions of the Good Faith Estimate (GFE) – a revised GFE (revised on the basis of what was learned in earlier rounds of testing) and an alternative GFE (developed as an alternative internally at HUD).

In the second test, with 20 participants, they introduced and tested a Settlement Script, comparing situations in which the script was or was not used.

What questions were the focus of the review?

HUD asks these four questions for a review:

- Does the paper involve significant errors of fact, methodology, or analysis?

- Does the paper have significant omissions or irrelevant materials that could be deleted?

- Can any stylistic improvements be suggested that would enhance the paper's readability?

- Does the reviewer have other comments on the paper?

These questions frame the following review.

Does the paper involve significant errors of fact, methodology, or analysis?

No. Round 6, just like the earlier rounds of research in this project, was based on excellent methodologies. The KCG researchers carefully carried out and appropriately analyzed the data in each of the two tests that were part of Round 6.

KCG conducted usability tests, using these best practices:

- conducting the study in different geographic locations (including locations different from those used in earlier rounds of testing)

- recruiting for diversity among the participants.

- including 60 participants in the major test that was part of Round 6 and 20 in the smaller test

- carefully balancing and counter-balancing presentation of the different forms and different situations so that the test did not bias participants in any way towards or away from any particular version of the forms or script (versus no script)

Does the paper have significant omissions or irrelevant materials that could be deleted?

No. The reports are very well written and presented.

The reports begin with useful context-setting information so that the reader is brought into the ongoing project. The information needed to understand each study is carefully presented with tables, charts, and lists where appropriate. The pages are laid out so that information is easy to find.

A particularly helpful example of good information design is the Recap of HUD's Goals for Testing (pages 21 and 22). Using color and checkmarks / x's, KCG provides a visual summary of both the goals for the study and the findings, linked to each goal.

The appendices give all the necessary materials for someone to understand exactly what the documents in these two tests looked like.

Can any stylistic improvements be suggested that would enhance the paper's readability?

For the most part, the presentation is very clear.

I caught a few glitches that might confuse readers. I give those in the next section.

Does the reviewer have other comments on the paper?

I have two comments.

Important note: I stress that these comments are all minor. None affects the reliability of the methodology and analysis nor the validity of the findings in the Round 6 report.

Comment 1: Tables 4 and 8 have the same typo

The demographic tables for both Round 6 tests (pages 7 and 13) have $75,000 as both the end point of one category and the beginning point of the next category under household income. The categories should be

- $50,000 - $75,000

- $75,001 to $100,000.

The inconsistency has no real significance because it is highly unlikely that any participant was at the exact cusp between the two categories or that anyone had trouble putting themselves into the right category. Furthermore, KCG used the demographics only to see that they had achieved good diversity of income among the participants. They did not do any analysis with break-downs by income level.

The figure should be fixed in the final version of the report just to acknowledge that options like this one for income level should not have overlapping numbers. Each person should have one and only one option that is correct for that person.

Comment 2: Tables 5 and 9 may confuse readers

The tables on home-buying experience (Tables 5 and 9; pages 8 and 14 respectively) are confusing as they are presented in the report that I reviewed.

In both of these tables, there is an asterisk indicating that people could select more than one option, but the asterisk is only on the last section (different ways that those who plan to buy have acted).

There is no asterisk on the first two rows. However, the numbers in the first two rows don't add up -- clearly some people must have both bought or refinanced in the last two years and also plan to buy or refinance in the next year.

Also, there is a "no response" option reported for "Plan to buy or refinance in next year" but no similar "no response" option reported for "Bought or refinanced in past 2 years."

Here are the two tables as they are in the report that I reviewed:

Table 5: Home-buying Experience—Test 1

Home buying Experience	Number in Sample	Percent
Bought or refinanced in past 2 years	41	68
Plan to buy or refinance in next year	23	38
No response	1	1.7
Of those who plan to buy:*		
Have gone to open houses	21	35
Have contacted a real estate agent	14	23
Have pre-qualified for a mortgage loan	7	12
* Participants were allowed to select as many options as applied to their situation		
N	60	100

Table 9: Homebuying Experience of the Sample

Homebuying Experience	Number in Sample	Percent
Bought or refinanced in past 2 years	14	70
Plan to buy or refinance in next year	10	50
No response	10	50
Of those who plan to buy:*		
Have gone to open houses	9	45
Have contacted a real estate agent	4	20
Have pre-qualified for a mortgage loan	5	25
Participants were allowed to select as many options as applied to their situation		
N	20	100

The KCG researchers do not show us the complete demographic form they used to recruit participants. It is likely, however, that it had the options of "yes" and "no" for each of these questions:

- Have you bought or refinanced a home in the past 2 years?

- Do you plan to buy or refinance a home in the next year?

The table would be clearer if they reported all figures for each of these questions:

- Number answering "yes"

- Number answering "no"

- Number who did not respond (left the answer blank)

Both of my comments are easily fixable and do not in any way affect the data or results of the study. I understand that KCG has, in fact, fixed these problems (as well as the inconsistency in the headings of Tables 5 and 9) in a more final version of the report that they are submitting to HUD.

Janice (Ginny) Redish, Ph.D.

Dr. Janice (Ginny) Redish is President of Redish & Associates, Inc., a small, woman-owned consultancy in Bethesda, Maryland. For more than 30 years, Dr. Redish has been helping clients develop and evaluate documents that meet both the client's business goals and the needs of the people who use the document.

Dr. Redish is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Harvard University.

From 1977 to 1992, Dr. Redish worked full-time at the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in Washington, DC. From 1978 to 1981, she directed the $1.5 million, federally-funded Document Design Project, bringing plain language to government forms, regulations, and other documents. In 1979, she founded AIR's Document Design Center where she and her colleagues studied the problems that people have with public documents and helped government agencies and private clients develop model documents. She directed the Center through the 1980's, also serving as Institute Director and as a Vice President of AIR.

Research with users was part of the process that Dr. Redish introduced from the beginning of her work at AIR. That research included field studies to understand how people use documents and usability testing of draft documents. For her work in this area, Dr. Redish has been called the "mother of usability" and has been featured as one of the "pioneers of usability." See www.upassoc.org/upa_publications/upa_voice/volumes/2005/june/ginny_redish.html and http://www.adlininc.com/uxpioneers/ginny_redish.html.

Dr. Redish is co-author of *A Practical Guide to Usability Testing* (with Joseph Dumas, Intellect Ltd., first edition, 1993; revised edition, 1999). The book remains a classic in the field; it is still in print and continues to be used to train new professionals in the field.

Dr. Redish's other books include:

- *Guidelines for Document Designers* (with AIR colleagues, 1981)

- *User and Task Analysis for Interface Design* (with JoAnn Hackos, John Wiley & Sons, 1998)

- *Letting Go of the Words – Writing Web Content that Works* (Morgan Kaufmann / Elsevier, 2007)

In addition, Dr. Redish serves on the editorial board of four journals and has published numerous papers and book chapters on various aspects of usability, task analysis, accessibility, document design, plain language, and writing for the web.

Dr. Redish's government clients have included the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Transportation, the General Services Administration, as well as agencies within federal departments, including the Federal Aviation Administration, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Cancer Institute, other institutes within the National Institutes of Health, and more than a dozen agencies in Washington state. Her non-government work has been with AARP, American Airlines, Hermes Software (Slovenia), Hewlett-Packard, Hughes Network Systems, Marriott International, Nokia (Finland), SAP (Germany), and Xerox, among many others.

Her work in plain language and usability has brought Dr. Redish many awards. She is also a Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and a past member of the Board of Directors of the Center for Plain Language, the Society for Technical Communication, and the Usability Professionals' Association.

(For more details, go to www.redish.net.)