STUDENT SUCCESS COLLABORATIVE
ADVISOR RESEARCH STUDY & FINDINGS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

In order to better understand the advisor experience, EAB conducted a research study on approximately 15 advisors across 3 institutions. The goal was to understand the concept of academic success by asking "How does the target audience organize their thinking around their biggest issues when advising students?" In order to answer the larger question, our interviews with advisors focused on understanding the following smaller questions including:

How do students get assigned to advisors?

Which students are selected when the advisor's caseload becomes overwhelming?

How do advisors intervene with students when a student has gone "off-path" or is experiencing difficulties with their coursework?

TARGET AUDIENCE

The interviewees were spread across three types - the professional advisor, the faculty advisor and the student specialist. Within the two advisor types, we interviewed both general and major-specific advisors. The student specialist was typically a graduate student who would assist in triaging and managing caseload, but often did not directly advise students.

FINDINGS

After careful analysis of our transcripts and an extensive mental model, we were able to distill the findings into several areas that best represented the advisors' thoughts, feelings and beliefs towards our research topic. These main areas formed the basis for our initial product development strategy which is described in detail on the following pages.

Overview
What does a mental model do for you?

1

Usable

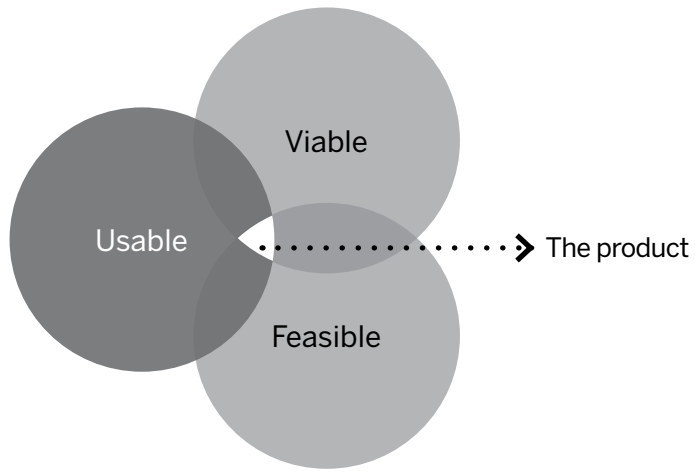It begins to tell you what **form** the end-users will find most **usable**.

However, this is not enough to design a product. There are other "lenses" needed to guide the course of a product.

2

Usable

It begins to tell you what **form** the end-users **desire**.

Viable

What is financially valuable and rewarding for ABCO?

Feasible

What is technically and organizationally feasible?

3

The intersection of these three areas helps to guide the product to a potentially more successful design.

Viable

Usable

Feasible

.............> The product

4
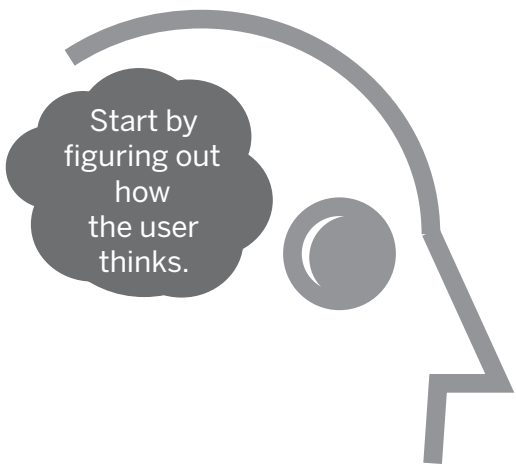
Usable

How do we start to figure out what is usable?

5

Start by figuring out how the user thinks.
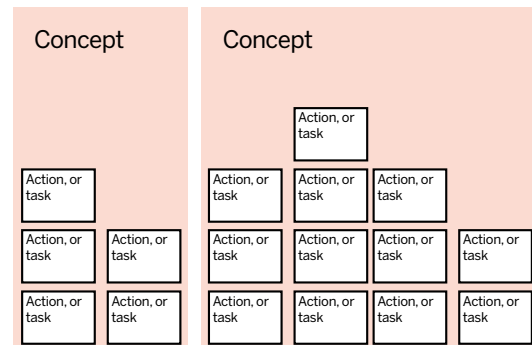
Background
How do we create a mental model?

1 **Mental space**

After interviewing a number of target users look for patterns among how they organize the tasks and actions. Group them into **mental spaces**.
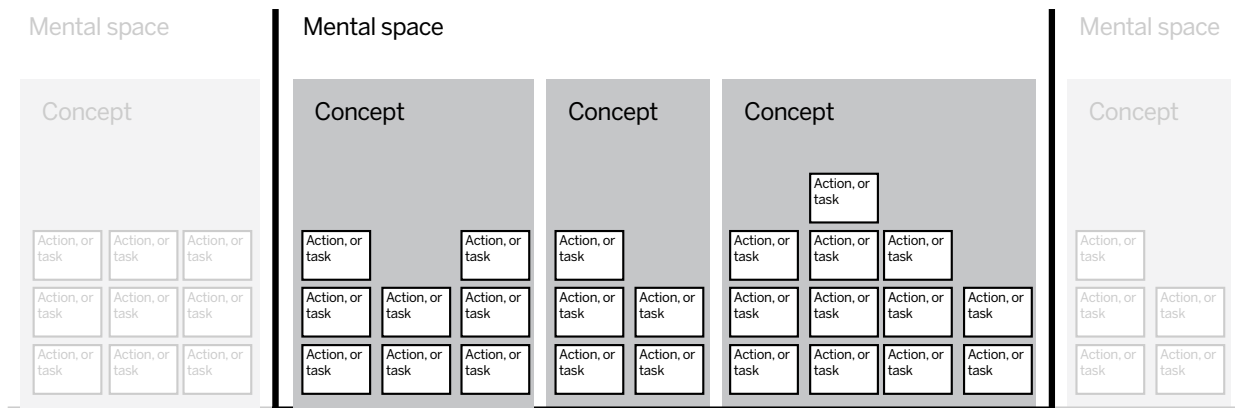
2 **Mental space**

Concept areas

Group the tasks within a mental space into related **conceptual areas**

Concept	Concept

Action, or task (multiple boxes arranged under each Concept area)

3 Mental space · Mental space · Mental space

Concept · Concept · Concept · Concept · Concept

Action, or task (multiple boxes under each concept)

Capture key insights and transform them into ideas for solutions.

Brainstorm ideas in the context of the users' mental spaces and conceptual areas.

This ensures the ideas fit the form of how the user thinks.

Idea · Idea · Idea
Idea · Idea
Idea · Idea
Idea
Idea

SSC
What did our advisor mental model tell us?
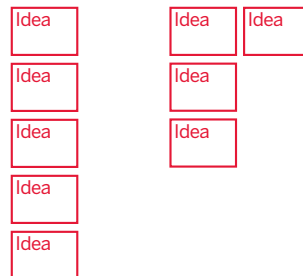
Mental Spaces

1 Assigning

Assigning is the initial process of pairing student and advisors. It may be done automatically or through manual selection and can be changed over the course of a student's career.

2 Initial Assessing

Initial assessing is the process of looking at a student tyically through their records as advisors have not yet met a student face-to-face and the student does not have a university record. This is only for entering students.

3 Initial guidance

This is the process of interacting and assisting students when they first enter the university. They may be incoming freshmen or transfers but it is setting the student up for their early course work.

4 Outreach

Outreach involves interacting with the students once they have started their coursework. They may be moving towards getting off path. They may not yet be off-path but they could be on their way towards it.

5 Observing

A student may be starting towards off-path or the advisor is interested in seeing if this student is prone to going off-path if they have problems.

6 On going guidance

These include ways and methods for providing real assistance such as helping the student learn to manage their time and ensuring the students can meet with their advisors when and if they have problems.

7 Intervening

This area addresses the mental aspects of a student who has gone off-path. How can an advisor "get inside the student's head" and help them realize they have a problem.

8 Planning corrective action

This is taking action to get the student back on path. This may include remedial coursework, counseling sessions and tutoring, or directly re-planning the student's course work.

9 Outcome

This is the final outcome for the student - either they succeed and graduate or get dismissed if they do not make it. It may also include withdrawing from the university altogether.

10 Other functions, administrative in nature

These are administrative tasks that are not directly related to student success markers but were shared by advisors as desirable actions/issues.
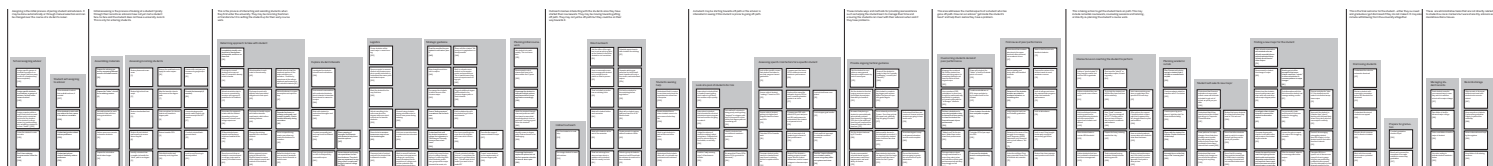
SSC

What were the insights and how did that shape the product?

Observing

Key insight:
"Help an advisor select which students to aid first/are in greatest need."

Initial guidance

Key insight:
"Keep the student's course selection broad in the early terms to allow for as many options as possible."

Intervening

Key insight:
"Make it real" for the student. Make them understand their performance when they are not doing well.

Relationship to SSC core product strategy v1

360 view of student

Surface most "save-able"

Take direct action
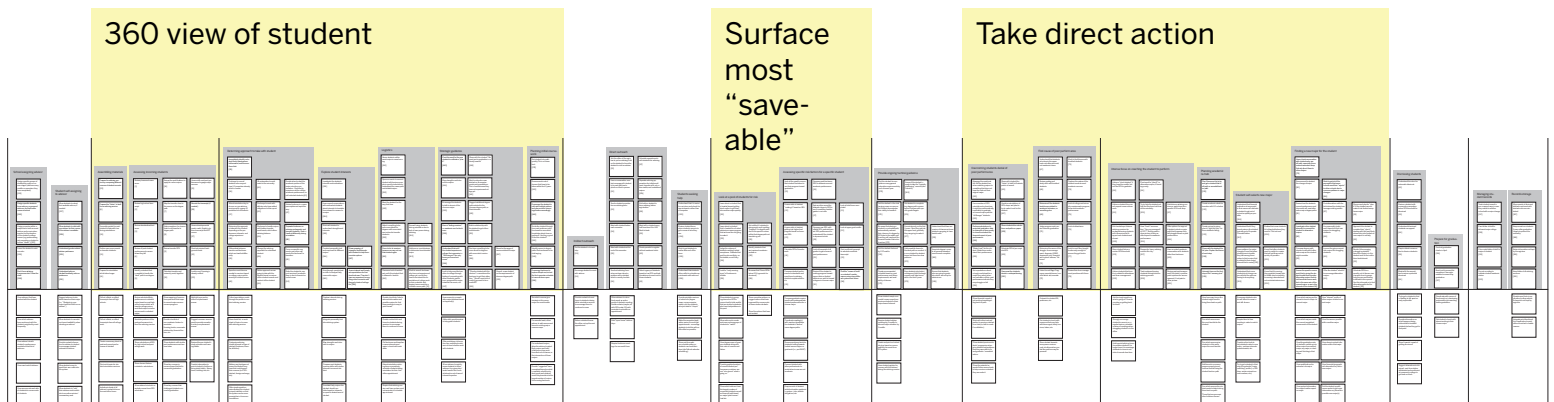
Next steps...

Adoptability

Explore ways to ensure existing and new members continue to embrace our product.

Extensibility

Look for unique ways to reuse functionality and tie areas of the application together.

Adaptability

Ensure the application can provide value to a greater number of users in a wider variety of roles.

Continue to explore the mental model for new development opportunities.