Running with Friends: Contextual Inquiry Review

Erica Putsche, Heidi So, Luke Chang, Linsen Wu

Contextual Inquiry Participants

Participant #1: Jennifer is Heidi's next-door neighbor who runs 2-3 times a week. Heidi followed Jennifer on her usual "neighborhood route". After getting hydrated/stretching in Jennifer's home, they first walked to their neighborhood park. Jen ran around the park once to warm-up, around the neighborhood next to theirs, and once more around their park to cool-down. Then they walked back home while wrapping up questions.

Jennifer is an active runner who has developed a routine of running on her own because of the challenges she faced finding close friends to run with her. She reasoned that she did not feel motivated to explore other routines or record personal statistics because she runs alone.

Participant #2: Erica met 3 women, who prefer to remain anonymous, at Marymoor Park that regularly jog together when they find the time. Erica met them after they had already started jogging, but they were in no hurry, so they were very cooperative when Erica asked them kindly to let her observe them from the beginning.

The women demonstrated that they value the social experience of running by making an effort to meet on days when everyone was available and feeling more motivated to run when friends are able to accompany them in person.

Participant #3: We observed one of Linsen's neighbors in his apartment named Preston. Preston is a Junior at the University of Washington, trying to study business. He goes to the gym regularly to workout and swim, but never goes running. We talked in his apartment, where we asked him questions about why he does not run and what it might take to get him to start running. We also talked about if he were to run, how he would go about doing it.

The inquiry with Preston revealed how he would be more willing to start running if he had friends to encourage and accompany him. Rather than sharing personal statistics to foster more social or competitive interactions, just having a running friend seems to be sufficient.

Participant #4: Eddie and Austin are two friends who go running semi-regularly on the Burke-Gilman trail near Gasworks Park. They are both students at the University of Washington. Eddie goes to the gym regularly and is fairly health-conscious. Austin does not exercise outside of running once a week or so. While they were taking a break in Gasworks Park, I approached them to ask them about their run.

Despite their varying levels of running experience, Eddie and Austin have established a running routine because of their close friendship and common interest in health.
Each of the members in our group did one contextual inquiry. Originally we were going to decide on the best three, but all of them revealed useful and unique perspectives to consider while designing the core design of the application.

Contextual Inquiry Themes

Theme #1: Social Motivation

One theme we have found is that people are much more willing to run when they are with friends. People who don't run regularly are more likely to run if a friend asks them, and many current runners tend to run with the same group. After finding a group to run with, people do not generally branch out to find new friends to run with. Running with the same person keeps routines consistent, it is easier to coordinate the same schedules, and it is more likely that they run at the same level. With this and safety concerns in mind, it is unlikely that people will be willing to run with complete strangers.

Theme #2: Casual Runners

Another theme we have found is that the participants are casual runners. They do not use any apps to track improvement. They also do not plan their routes in advance since they routinely run the same routes. Because they are more casual runners, they expressed their desire to share their experience with others not only for the enjoyment, but also for the motivation that comes with running with friends.

Theme #3: Health/Consistent Goals

We were curious if people set goals for themselves and how they kept track of them. But the people in our inquiries were all casual runners and did not explicitly record any goals to keep track of and measure. They stated that they wanted to ensure that they run consistently to stay active.

Theme #4: Scheduling

One common challenge was finding a time that a friend/group could meet to run together. Even if there is a friend that is willing to run together, inefficient scheduling can make it difficult to meet. When people face this constant challenge, they can grow unmotivated or unsatisfied with their routine of running alone.

These common themes suggest there is a need for an easy way to find friends that are willing and available to run. To support these runners in staying active and motivated, there will be a focus on designing features that cultivate greater social interaction and motivation among friends. This will take the form of tasks to organize running events, schedule regular runs with an established partner/group, and share information/statistics with others.

Task Analysis Questions

1. Who is going to use the design?
   This design will be used by casual runners who want to integrate social interaction into their running routines so they can be motivated and encouraged to run more and consistently. These runners can have various levels of running experience and various preferences for how often they run and the environment in which they like to run. They will also have a smartphone that can support this application.

2. What tasks do they now perform?
   They seek running companions among friends they are comfortable with (even if they are at different levels of running experience). They usually call or use online messaging to reach out to their friends. Most of the participants run a designated route (neighborhood, trail, gym) that they are familiar with. They also have set routines such as the number of times they try to run a week or a specific day that a group of people come together to run.

3. What tasks are desired?
   - An easy way to find friends that are willing and available to run
   - For friends that are unable to run together in person due to scheduling conflicts, the ability to share an individual's running experience (through personal statistics, pictures, etc.) will help develop the social experience one has with their friends.
   - A way to schedule (one-time, reoccurring etc.) future runs/send reminders with a friend/group

4. How are the tasks learned?
   Being familiar with mobile user interfaces/conventions/idioms may help when navigating this application. Also, familiarity with social media websites such as Facebook is useful since it exposes customers to the concept of inviting friends and sharing information which are shared by this application.
   Even without this knowledge/skillset, there will be a tutorial designed to fill in this gap for a customer that is using the application for the first time. The tutorial will walk the user step-by-step through how to schedule runs, add routes, and invite friends to a run. During the first scheduled run, if the user wants to record statistics to share post-run, there will be another set of tooltips that demonstrate how to record statistics and how to share their results with others after completing their run.

5. Where are the tasks performed?
   Organizing a run with friends is done before the scheduled run date/time. Since this is a mobile application, a customer can setup a run anywhere and at any time. To start recording statistics on a run, the user will be at the start of the running location.

6. What is the relationship between the person and data?
   Personal/Individual data: A user's profile has background information such as where they live, what running level/category they are, who their friends are,

statistics from past runs etc. (The information on a profile can be adjusted by privacy settings)

Event/Shared data: For a running event, its participants will have access to the run's date, time, location, and route. This information is available to those who have been invited to participate. (Like with profiles, the event can be adjusted to be open to the public or to only invited members)

7. What other tools does the person have?
To find running companions, they used their phones to personally call and ask and also used texting/online messaging to get in touch with friends. For those who found a consistent group/partner to run with, participants continued to communicate (verbally or online) in order to set up regular times to meet and run.

8. How do people communicate with each other?
Customers communicate with friends they would feel comfortable running with and invite them to run together. For those who find running companions, they discuss where and when to meet. This is done using a phone, messaging online, etc.

9. How often are the tasks performed?
For the participants that have a consistent running partner/group, they do not have to invite a friend very often because they have already established a routine with a companion. These participants will instead continue to communicate with their designated group to organize future meetings.
Participants that do not have regular running companions will perform the task of reaching out to friends more often. This will continue until they find a friend/group that they enjoy experiencing the run with. Sharing personal statistics will occur as often as the runners want to use it. For example, if there is a group of friends that enjoys sharing the running experience but cannot find a time for all to run together, they may use the tracking features more often so that they can individually record their results/experience and share it with the group.

10. What are the time constraints on the tasks?
Customers will want the ability to find friends and organize runs first. Having this support ready for customers will allow them to start integrating more in-person social interaction into their running routines. This can help foster a greater motivation and excitement to run. The ability to track personal statistics would be the next feature to support, for runners who are primarily interacting with others by sharing statistics.

11. What happens when things go wrong?
If the task of finding friends is inefficient, customers may be unable to find the motivation to run without friends. They may either stop running or develop a running routine that they are unsatisfied with.