

Summary

The interviewee is a female student in her twenties living in a shared flat. From the interview it became clear that she suffers from mental load due to her flat mates not doing household tasks correctly or forgetting to do them. However, her biggest problem is that she can't even reach a few of her flat mates because they are never in the common areas and don't read their messages. She also mentions that it is difficult to plan get-togethers because everyone has their own schedule. Her relationship with her flatmates ranges from getting along well to avoiding each other. Having to avoid some people also seems to be a mental load for her. The mental load caused by her flatmates not completing tasks is accompanied by a constant annoyance at her flat mates.

The interviewees expressed multiple needs with the most prevalent being finding an effective way to communicate the tasks that have to be done in the flat. Besides that, she also wishes to not only keep track of how many tasks have been completed (quantity) but also keep track of how well tasks have been fulfilled (quality). Finally, she needs a way to improve the relationship with her flatmates and make it easier to find dates for get-togethers.

Interestingly, the people she gets along with better are also those who have similar expectations, regarding cleanliness and activities with flat mates, as herself. This induces a segregation of the flat into smaller groups which probably create a negative feedback, reducing the communication possibilities to certain flat members even more.

The main insights gained with this interview is that the cleaning schedule and planning in a household tracking app should be flexible since the freetime of the people in a flat may vary greatly over the year. Besides that, she also stressed that an app would only work if everybody in the flat uses the app, thus it is of great importance to make the app appealing to all the users in a household.

Finally, it was interesting to see that her flatmate, whom I also interviewed (my second interview), had a very different view of many aspects in living in the shared flat but especially with regards to the mental load. In his opinion, his flatmates don't cause him much mental load and he also seems to have a better relationship with the other members of the flat (he is also less annoyed at them). Moreover, the communication works very well in his opinion. Whilst the interviewee interviewed here had problems with mental load due to household tasks not being done, her flat mate, albeit also noticing the undone tasks, does not feel too troubled by this and instead quickly finishes the tasks himself.

Interview Questions and Answers

General Information

- **Are you working or studying?**
Studying
- **Living situation**
 - **How many people do you live with?**
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 - **How long have you been in this living situation?**
3 years
 - **What kind of relationships do you have with these people?**
Shared apartment (WG)
 - **How would you rate yourself on a scale from 1 (completely spontaneous) to 10 (everything planned out)?**
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Cohabitation/Communication

- **How would you describe your living situation?**
Smaller groups that get along well
- **Is your living situation what you expected? (What is different?)**
Yes
- **How would you describe the current communication in your living situation?**
Many new people in the shared apartment -> still quite good. Only the essentials are communicated (what needs to be cleaned, etc.); often communicated in person and not much over messaging apps.
- **Are expectations clearly communicated?**
Yes, but not all expectations are the same. I communicate mine clearly.
- **How do you handle differing opinions?**
Keep it friendly, no arguments. Mostly possible to resolve without conflict. If needed, sanctions or dividing up areas (bathroom) are implemented.
- **How would you describe your relationships with your roommates?**
It depends from person to person. From good acquaintances to avoiding each other. But I am not close friends with any of them.
- **How do you handle conflicts?**
Depending on how stressful the time is (e.g., during exams), more or less tense. Now, it's more relaxed (beginning of the semester).
- **Do you have unresolved conflicts?**
No.
- **How do you approach finding solutions?**
We speak with each other
- **How do you handle forgotten tasks?**
Verbal and written communication, otherwise, if it gets too bad, we call for a general meeting.

Do you have any wishes for your communication?

More presence in communal spaces for regular communication, problem: some people are hard to reach.

Why do you want to reach them?

For example to say that the cleaning plan has been changed or what needs to be bought (coordinate for furniture purchase).

How do you handle shared spaces and tasks in your living situation?

Division of labor with a written plan

Household Work/Tasks

- **How is the household work divided?**

We use a cleaning plan (everyone agrees) with areas. Tasks are alternated between flat mates.

- **Are there people who focus more on the cleaning plan?**

Yes, about 2 people.

- **If something breaks, who takes care of it?**

Some will never take care of it, but a few people who care about it will fix it. Initiative is rarely taken, and when it is, it's usually the same 2 or 3 people.

- **How does that feel?**

It's annoying, everything falls on my shoulders. But someone has to do it...

- **Is the division of labor fair? Does everyone see it that way?**

On paper, it's fairly divided, but in reality, it isn't.

- **How often do you notice things in the household that still need to be done?**

Often. I would say I'm the person who notices it the most.

- **How do you handle it?**

I am annoyed and speak to person who did not do something. But with some people I know that it will not help talking to them, then I don't even bother. Then you just live in a constant state of annoyance... You just deal with it.

- **How is it handled if something is not done to your satisfaction?**

Talk to the person.

Personally (e.g., estimates, product opinions, etc.)

- **Are there things that burden you in the household/living situation?**

People you have to avoid in the household (because of previous discordances) and people who don't do any better when you point it out to them.

- **Can you think of other reasons for mental loads?**

Just the cleaning situation and that maybe we could do things together more often, or that more activity could take place in the kitchen.

- **Can you estimate how big your share of the household planning is?**

Above average.

- **Can you estimate how big your roommates' share is?**

3 others are also above average, 2 don't do anything at all, and the rest are average.

- **If it's smaller/larger than your share, why do you think that is?**
Character, different backgrounds, standards, habits regarding cleanliness/order.

Product

- **Have you ever tried to track your work in household planning?**
No, but I got some feedback with the cleaning plan (where crosses are, where not).
- **Why did you never track it?**
Haven't found a good app – it only works if everyone uses it. People who aren't reachable now wouldn't be reachable through the app either. It would have to be customized for each shared apartment.
- **What features would such an app have to have?**
Notifications to remind of tasks (when, for example, the user has something else on their mind).
- **Do you have ideas on how to show problems in task division?**
Measure not just quantity but also quality of task fulfillment, since quality often lacking
- **Are there things that are often underestimated in task division?**
Everyone has their own calendar (phases with many other activities and phases with few other activities) -> a flexible plan would be advantageous.