

Time Management App: UX Research Case Study

Role: UX Researcher

Timeline: January 2025 - April 2025 (3 months)

Methods: Focus Groups, Online Survey, Diary Study

Team: Group research with individual contributions

The Challenge

Design a time management app that aligns with user expectations and actual usage patterns. The project needed to understand what **features** users truly need versus what they think they **need**, and how these tools fit into their daily routines.

Research Question

Which time management tools, features, and strategies do individuals who are good at managing their time use?

Hypothesis

Users are more likely to use a time management app with features customizable to their preferences.

My Approach

I designed and executed a **three-phase mixed-methods research study** to understand user behavior from multiple angles:

Phase 1: Focus Group (Exploratory)

Goal: Identify **user needs**, preferences, and feature priorities

- Conducted & moderated group discussion with targeted participants
- Explored user feelings, motivations, and pain points
- Created discussion guide with activities to uncover behavioral patterns

Role: Collaborated on research plan, screener, and KWHL analysis

Research Artifacts

KWHL Matrix

K	W	H	L
What do I know?	What do I want to know?	How will I learn what I want to know?	What do I hope to learn?
Many people struggle with time management	What are the most effective strategies or tools for time management?	Conducting a focus group	The behaviours and habits that influence time management
Deadlines help people stay accountable	How do people organize their day or track deadlines?	Survey to collect data	Preferred tools and features for time management across different people
Time management improves productivity	What features do users expect in a time management tool?	Perform diary study	The main challenges people face in managing their time and solutions they use
People often use tools like calendar, reminder, apps to manage time	What challenges do people face with managing their time?		Insights into how people can improve their time management
People have multiple responsibilities to balance	Which tools or apps do people prefer, and why?		

Focus Group Discussion Guide & Script

Overview

Session Details

Moderator: Evelyn Martinez

Assistant Moderator: Dana Alkoheji

Note Taker(s): Caylin Yeung and Amina Ali

Date/Time: Thursday, January 30th, 2025 at 2:25 PM

Location: In-person

Purpose of the Session

- Gain insights into users behaviour & motivations, regarding time management
- Identify user needs & preferences
- Prioritize features based on user insights

Session Flow

Introduction & Warm-Up (4 Mins)

Sticky Note Activity (11 Mins)

\$100 Test Activity (13 Mins)

- Individual Task (10 Mins)
- Group Discussion (5 Mins)

Wrap-Up (2 Mins)

Discussion Guide

Introduction & Warm-Up (5 Mins)

Welcome! Let me introduce myself and my peers, my name is Evelyn, this is Dana, Amina and Caylin. Today we will be conducting a focus group to gather insight on your thoughts and opinions on time management. You have been chosen to participate in this focus group based on your prior experience with time management products.

The goal of today's session is to understand which features or ideas you think are the most valuable by doing a series of activities, which I will explain shortly.

Before we begin I'd like to cover some ground rules and ethics. All of you have signed waivers giving consent for your participation, as a reminder your participation is voluntary and there are no incentives for this study. There are no right or wrong answers so feel free to share your opinions openly while being respectful of others. If something isn't clear, don't hesitate to ask. All focus groups will be audio & video-recorded. As for some ground rules please be respectful, don't interrupt while others are talking, and no hateful speech. If these rules are not followed, you will be asked to respectfully leave.

Warm-Up Activity

In front of you, there is a piece of paper and some markers. I'd like you to draw what type of clock you would be and your name. I'll give you 2 minutes. This activity is designed to help everyone feel more comfortable and get into a creative mindset before we dive into today's discussion.

(Let everyone go around and share their work)

Sticky Notes: Challenges & Solutions Activity (11 Mins)

Purpose: Quickly identify key challenges students face with time management and brainstorm practical solutions.

Outcome: Gather concise input that highlights pain points and actionable ideas.

Script

→ **Part 1: Identifying Challenges (5 Minutes)**

1. **Introduction:**

Let's start by quickly identifying the biggest challenges you face as students when it comes to managing your time and completing tasks.

2. **Task Instructions:**

a) Take a sticky note and write down one challenge per note. Feel free to write as many as you can within the next 2 minutes.

b) **After completing:** Please stick your notes on the Challenges section of the board. As you stick them up, try to group similar challenges together.

→ **Part 2: Brainstorming Solutions (5 Minutes)**

1. **Transition to Solutions:**

Now that we've identified the challenges, let's think about solutions. How can these problems be addressed? What tools, methods, or features could help you overcome these challenges?

2. **Task Instructions:**

a) Write down one solution per note. Try to think of creative or practical ideas, even if they seem simple.

b) **After completing:** Please stick your notes on the solutions section of the board. As you stick them up, try to group similar solutions together.

→ **Part 3: Final Question (1 Min)**

When choosing a time management tool, do you prefer advanced features or simplicity?

- **Listen for:** The specific tools being used and why
 - **Probe:** what makes these tools so valuable to you?
-

\$100 Test Activity (13 Mins)

Purpose: Identify and prioritize the features that participants find most valuable or impactful in a product or app. By assigning prices to features, we can learn about user preferences and what they consider essential.

Outcome: The activity will help us understand which features resonate most with participants and why. This information will help guide us with making sure the final design aligns with user needs and expectations.

Script

Introduction and Explanation of Activity (1 Min)

Now that we've discussed some of your thoughts on time management, let's move on to the activity portion of today's session. This is how the activity works, let's imagine you have been given \$100 to spend on several features from the menu provided, that could be part of a potential product or app.

Each feature has a price, your task is to decide which features you want to "buy". Since you can't exceed \$100, you'll need to prioritize the features you think are most valuable or impactful.

You will work individually to allocate your \$100 across the features. Write down your choices and include a few brief keywords to explain your reasoning, just enough to capture why you made each decision. Don't spend too much time writing, the focus is on your thought process. If you have any questions along the way please let us know.

→ Part 1: Individual (7 Mins)

Now let's start our activity!...

→ Part 2: Group Debrief/ Discussion (5 Mins)

Upon Completing the sheet: Thank you for completing the activity. Let's go around and discuss what features you have chosen...

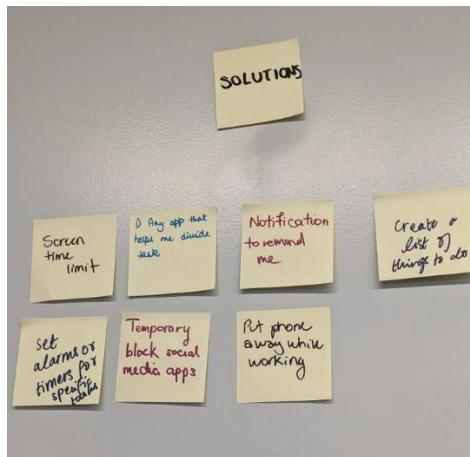
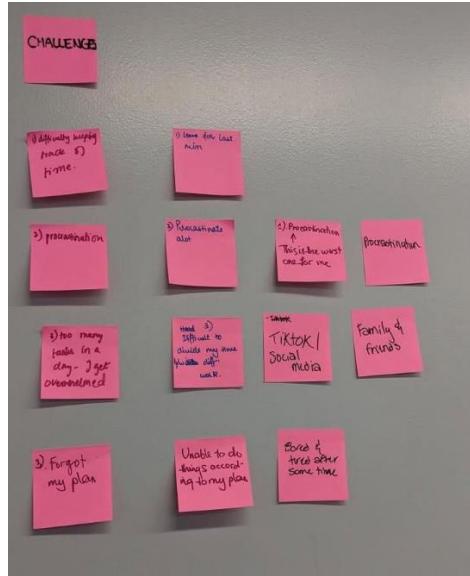
Listen for: Why they prioritized certain features over others. Which features they found least valuable and why, agreements/disagreements

Probe for: Why did you choose...? How does this feature make time management easier for you?

Wrap-Up (3 Mins)

Thank you all for your participation! Your insights will play a big role moving forward. We hope you had fun and enjoyed this experience as much as we did. If you have any additional thoughts after the session, feel free to share them.

Focus Group Activities Results



\$100 TEST

Instructions:
You have \$100 to spend on several features that could be part of a product you build or add. Each feature has a price.
Allocate your \$100 across the features that you think are most valuable or important. You cannot exceed \$100.
The result: write down your reasoning in a few sentences or paragraphs. Focus on your thoughts process rather than long explanations.

Feature	Price	Feature	Price
Add Task	\$10	Widget	\$2.00
TodoList	\$20	Notifications	\$10.00
Streak	5	Project Tracking	\$20.00
Notifications	10	Analytics	\$15.00
Weekly View	15	Customization	\$10.00
Widget	5	Option	
Tracker	10	Drop Sharing	\$5.00
Repeat	5	Customize Interface	\$20.00
Date & Time	10	Reddit	
Add Event	10	Accomplishments	\$5.00
Total		Streak	
			\$100.00

\$100 TEST

Instructions:

- You have \$100 to spend on several features that could be part of a potential product or not. Each feature has a price.
- Allocate your \$100 across the features you think are most valuable or important. You cannot exceed \$100.
- For each feature, write down your reasoning in a few brief sentences or phrases. Focus on your thought process rather than long explanations.

Feature Menu

Feature	Price	Feature	Price
- Add Task	\$10.00	- Widget	\$5.00
- Add Event	\$10.00	- Notifications	\$10.00
- Monthly View	\$15.00	- Project Tracking	\$20.00
- Daily View	\$15.00	- Analytics	\$15.00
- Weekly View	\$15.00	- Collaboration	\$10.00
- Habit Tracker	\$10.00	Option	
- To-Do List	\$20.00	- Device Sharing	\$5.00
- Date And Time	\$10.00	- Customise	\$20.00
Pickers		Interface	
- Priority Labels	\$5.00	Habit	
- Repeat Options	\$5.00	Accomplishments	\$5.00
		Streak	

Feature Name	Price	Reasoning
Widget	\$5	It's on my screen so helps me work as well.
Add Event	\$10	It's like a reminder to look forward to.
Weekly View	\$15	Like to review things weekly.
Notification	\$10	It would take a reminder.
Analytics	\$15	Visual insight makes it easy to look at things.
Priority Labels	\$5	Helps me know what to do first.
To Do List	\$20	To remove my tasks
Total	\$100.00	

\$100 TEST

Instructions:

- You have \$100 to spend on several features that could be part of a potential product or not. Each feature has a price.
- Allocate your \$100 across the features you think are most valuable or important. You cannot exceed \$100.
- For each feature, write down your reasoning in a few brief sentences or phrases. Focus on your thought process rather than long explanations.

Feature Menu

Feature	Price	Feature	Price
- Add Task	\$10.00	- Widget	\$5.00 ✓
- Add Event	\$10.00 ✓	- Notifications	\$10.00 ✓
- Monthly View	\$15.00	- Project Tracking	\$20.00
- Daily View	\$15.00	- Analytics	\$15.00 ✓
- Weekly View	\$15.00 ✓	- Collaboration	\$10.00
- Habit Tracker	\$10.00	Option	
- To Do List	\$20.00 ✓	- Device Sharing	\$5.00
- Date And Time	\$10.00	- Customise	\$20.00 ✓
Pickers		Interface	
- Priority Labels	\$5.00	Habit	
- Repeat Options	\$5.00	Accomplishments	\$5.00
		Streak	

Feature Name	Price	Reasoning
Notification	\$10.00	Helps accountable
Analytics	\$15.00	See progress in chart form
Weekly view	\$15.00	See the week without being overwhelmed
To do list	\$20.00	Can see what needs to be done
Add task	\$10.00	So you can see what you need to do
Add event	\$10.00	Can plan / review what's coming up
Customise interface	\$20.00	Can help me things' easier
Widget	\$5.00	Can be on homepage
Priority labels	\$5.00	Bring priority to it
Total	\$100.00	

\$100 TEST

Instructions:

- You have \$100 to spend on several features that could be part of a potential product or not. Each feature has a price.
- Allocate your \$100 across the features you think are most valuable or important. You cannot exceed \$100.
- For each feature, write down your reasoning in a few brief sentences or phrases. Focus on your thought process rather than long explanations.

Feature Menu

Feature	Price	Feature	Price
- Add Task	\$10.00	- Widget	\$5.00
- Add Event	\$10.00	- Notifications	\$10.00
- Monthly View	\$15.00	- Project Tracking	\$20.00
- Daily View	\$15.00	- Analytics	\$15.00
- Weekly View	\$15.00	- Collaboration	\$10.00
- Habit Tracker	\$10.00	Option	
- To Do List	\$20.00	- Device Sharing	\$5.00
- Date And Time	\$10.00	- Customise	\$20.00
Pickers		Interface	
- Priority Labels	\$5.00	Habit	
- Repeat Options	\$5.00	Accomplishments	\$6.00
		Streak	

Feature Name	Price	Reasoning
Monthly view	\$15.00	Want to look at everything.
Priority labels	\$5	prioritizing tasks are helpful reminders!!!
Notifications	10\$	remind me
Accomplishments	\$5	keep me going
collaboration	10\$	more motivation!
Habit tracker	10\$	keep track of my bad habits
Daily view	15\$	daily look to prepare me for the day
Add task	10\$	basic feature
Total	\$100.00	

Phase 2: Online Survey (Validation)

Goal: Gather quantitative data from a larger sample to validate qualitative insights

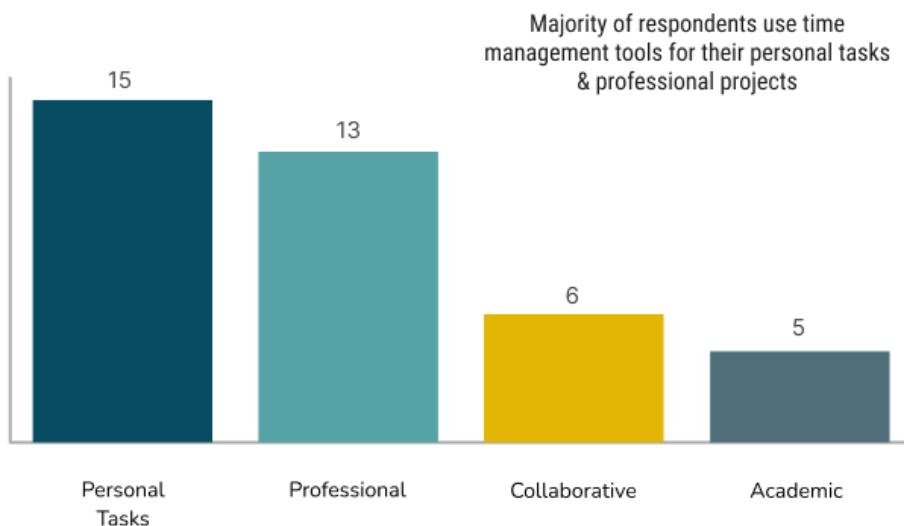
- Recruited 17 participants who self-identified as good at time management
- Designed 12-question survey via JotForm focusing on:
 - Tool usage frequency and types of tasks managed
 - Current challenges and desired improvements
 - Feature usage patterns and anti-procrastination strategies
- Incorporated screener to filter suitable candidates

Role: Solo researcher - designed study, recruited participants, analyzed data

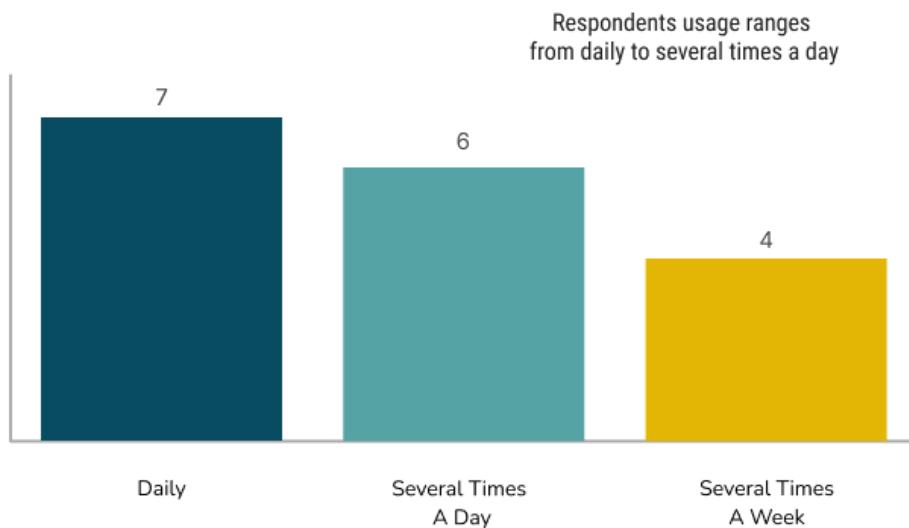
Research Artifacts

Survey Questions & Data

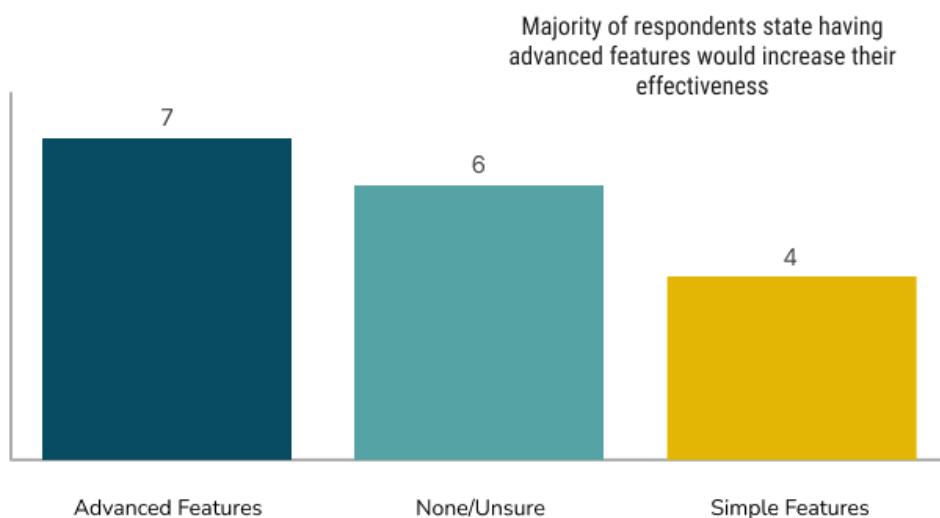
Q1: What type of tasks do you most often manage with these tools?



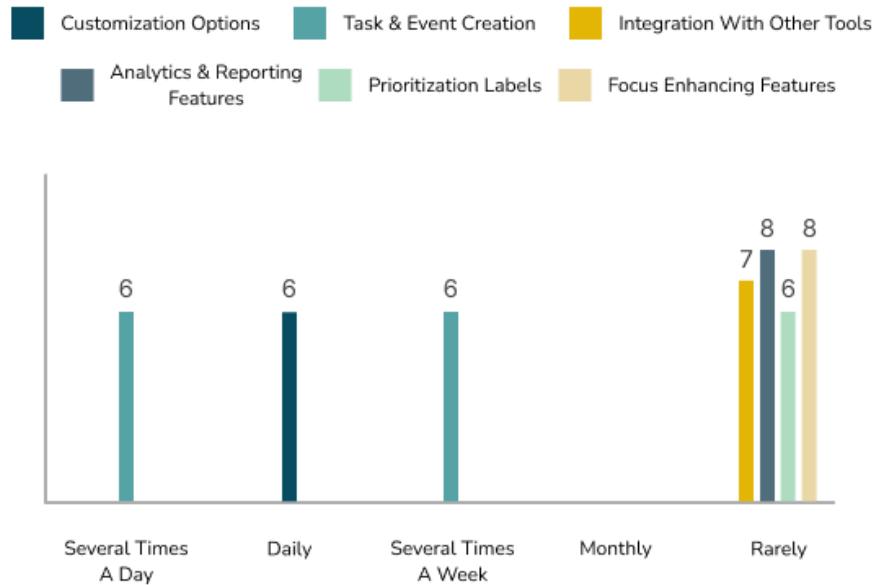
Q2: How often do you use time management tools?



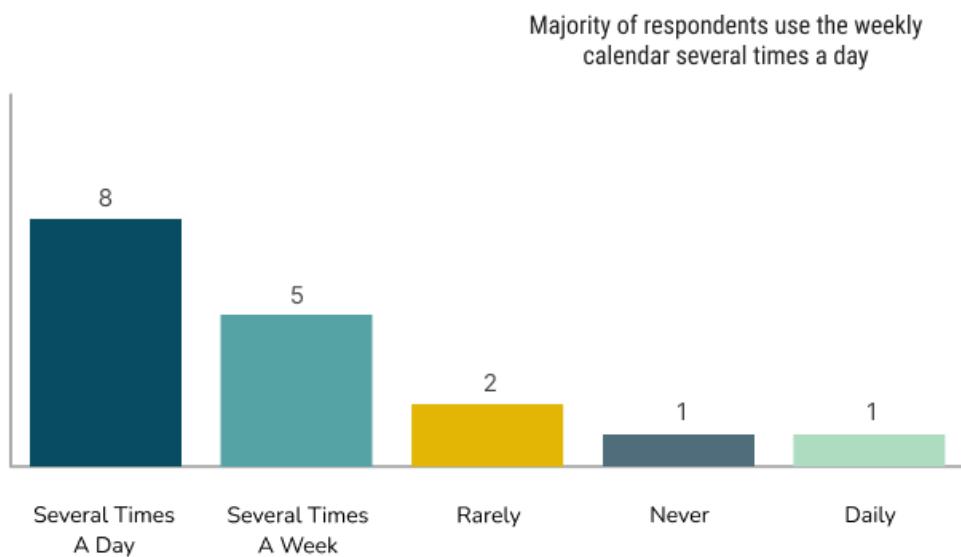
Q4: What feature or improvement would make a time management tool more effective for you?



Q5: How frequently do you use the following features?

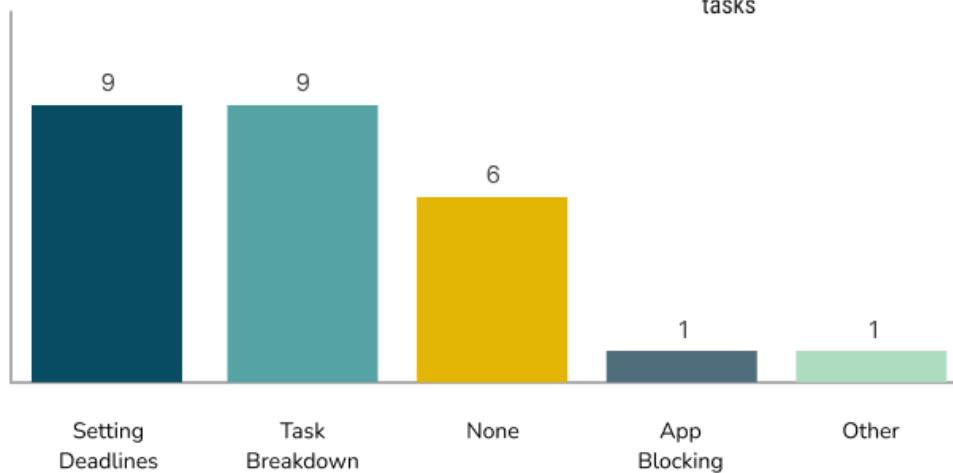


Q6: How frequently do you use the tool's weekly calendar?



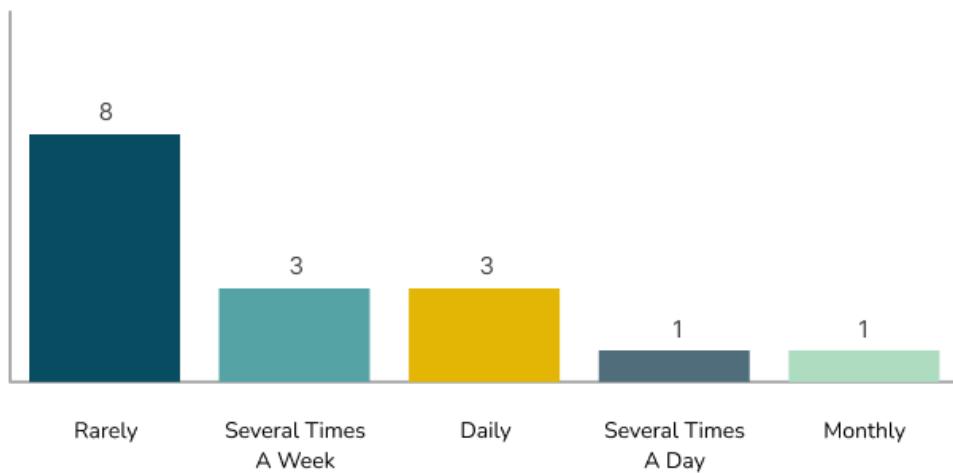
Q7: What strategy do you use within time management tools to avoid procrastination?

The strategies respondents use the most are setting deadlines and breaking down tasks



Q8: How often do you customize or personalize features?

Majority of respondents rarely customize features



Survey Question Table

Objective	Construct	Question	Options
8) Understanding patterns of use	Frequency of use	How frequently you use the following features?	Question Table - Customization options - Task/event creation - Integration with other tools - Analytic/ reporting features - Prioritization - Focus Enhancing Features - Other (Please Specify): - Several times a day - Daily - Several times a week - Monthly - Rarely - Never
9) Understanding patterns of use	Frequency of use	How frequently do you use the tool's weekly calendar view to plan upcoming tasks or events?	- Several times a day - Daily - Several times a week - Monthly - Rarely - Never
10) Understanding respondent behaviour	Habits	What strategies/features do you use within time management tools to avoid procrastination?	- Setting deadlines - Breaking tasks into smaller steps - Using focus enhancing features - Blocking distracting apps/websites - Other (Please specify).
11) Understanding patterns of use	Frequency of use	How often do you customize or personalize features in your time management tool?	- Several times a day - Daily - Several times a week - Monthly - Rarely - Never
12) Gather satisfaction	Expertise	What feature or improvement would make a time management tool more effective for you?	(open text)

Phase 3: Diary Study (In-Context Observation)

Goal: Observe real-world behavior and tool interactions over time

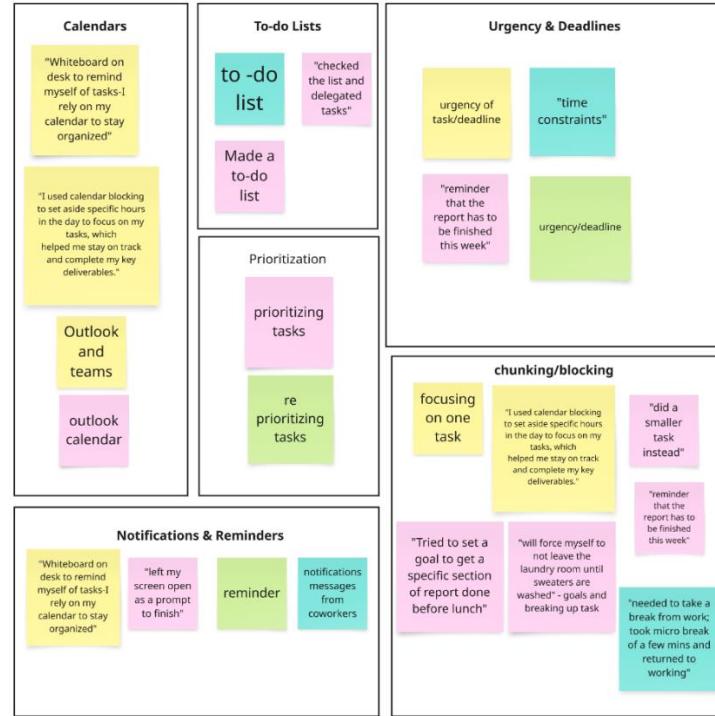
- Recruited 4 participants for 10-day digital diary study
- Designed three versions of daily questionnaires:
 - Day 1: Baseline assessment of current tools and habits
 - Days 2-9: Daily productivity tracking and strategy documentation
 - Day 10: Reflective assessment and self-discovery
- Participants journaled about distractions in real-time

Role: Solo researcher - created research plan, question tables, conducted study, analyzed findings

Research Artifacts

Affinity Maps

Time management Tools & Strategies

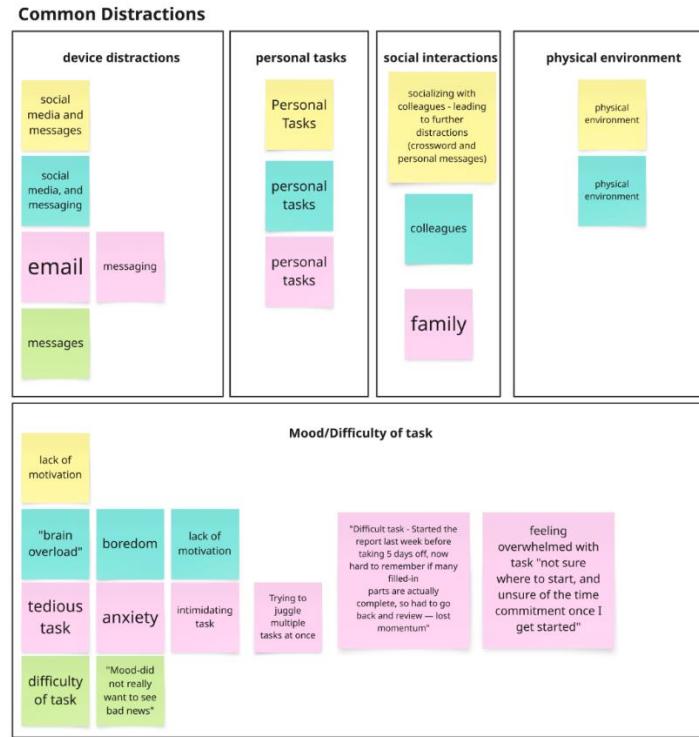


Distractions



Strategies to Refocus





Key Findings

1. Frequency Drives Engagement

Users who successfully manage their time use tools multiple times daily, not just once per day. This constant touchpoint keeps them organized and on track.

"I use a whiteboard on my desk to remind myself of tasks. Otherwise, I rely on my calendar to stay organized." - Participant

2. Mood Significantly Impacts Productivity

Low mood or motivation dramatically increased procrastination, particularly for complex tasks. Users need motivators and task breakdown strategies to maintain momentum.

3. Interruptions Derail Focus

Common distractions included:

- Social interactions: Colleagues, family, friends
- Digital interruptions: Emails, notifications, social media
- Task switching: Personal errands interrupting work tasks

Users struggled to refocus after interruptions, indicating a need for focus protection features.

4. The Customization Paradox

While users rarely customized features in existing tools, they expressed strong desire for flexibility. The insight: users want smart defaults with easy customization options, not blank slates requiring setup.

5. Breaking Tasks is Key to Completion

The most effective anti-procrastination strategies were:

- Setting specific deadlines
- Breaking tasks into smaller, manageable steps
- Time-boxing work into focused chunks

6. Weekly Calendar is Essential

Majority of productive users accessed their weekly calendar view several times daily, making it the most critical feature for planning and awareness.

User Persona



User Persona
Alex Lee
32 M

Goals

Reduce the amount of time wasted on distractions
Avoid procrastinating on non-urgent tasks
Complete all tasks set for the week

Needs

Assistance in managing his work & personal life without using multiple time management tools
Assistance in keeping motivated when tasks are non-urgent

Tools & Strategies

Calendar Blocking
Using his whiteboard to write reminders & tasks to complete
Prioritizing tasks by urgency
Taking small breaks

Type of Distractions

Digital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Texts & Messages Emails Mobile Games Social Media 	Environmental <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socializing with colleagues
---	--

Pain Points

Task Switching
Frequently interrupted by coworkers questions

Low Motivation
Procrastinates on repetitive and non-urgent work tasks

Multiple Tools
Using multiple time management tools for his work & personal life is overwhelming

User Journey Insights

USER JOURNEY MAP: Time Management App					
		Scenario		Expectations	
PHASE	MORNING	MID-MORNING	AFTERNOON	LATE AFTERNOON	EVENING
TASKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking emails • Reviewing calendar • Planning day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on assigned tasks • Attending meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing work • Attending more meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finishing up his last work task for the day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running personal errands • Participating in leisure activities
MINDSET	He is prepared after reviewing his calendar and seeing all his tasks and meetings planned for the day.	He is engaged but does get distracted.	His motivation and focus is waning, he allows himself to check his phone and shifts to personal tasks around the house.	Regaining his focus to finish the last work task for the day. But he is extremely tired and ready to clock out.	He is relaxed but feels guilty if there are unfinished work tasks.
EMOTIONS	 Productive & Motivated	 Productive But Getting Bored	 Losing Focus	 Regaining Focus	  Happy or Guilty
PAIN POINTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations with his colleagues & family keep interrupting his flow • Temptation to check his phone after hearing notifications <p>"I use a whiteboard on my desk to remind myself of tasks. Otherwise, I rely on my calendar to stay organized."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone notifications and emails kept interrupting his focus • Wants to procrastinate on the complex task he is working on <p>"Since I was working from home, I also felt the urge to clean my home which pulled away from my work tasks."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeps shifting to personal tasks instead of work • Distracted by social media and messages • Questions from colleagues keep interrupting flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tired from working • Low motivation because the work day is ending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spends a lot of time on his phone, checking messages, and spending time on social media
OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task & event reminders • Smart calendar • Scheduled work mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Mode • To-do Lists <p>"Silencing my phone has helped me focus on tasks that take a lot of concentration."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization & Deadlines • Time Blocking or Chunking • Break Prompts <p>"Setting small goals within a short timeline (completing a section of a report in the next 30 minutes.)"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle Nudges 	

Morning (Start of Day)

- **Mindset:** Productive and motivated
- **Pain Points:** Reviewing full calendar feels overwhelming; interruptions from colleagues and family
- **Opportunity:** Smart calendar widget for at-a-glance planning

Mid-Morning

- **Mindset:** Engaged but susceptible to distraction
- **Pain Points:** Procrastinates on complex tasks; digital notifications break concentration
- **Opportunity:** Focus mode and task breakdown features

Afternoon

- **Mindset:** Low motivation, easily distracted
- **Pain Points:** Shifting to personal tasks; social media temptation
- **Opportunity:** Prioritization labels and time blocking

Late Afternoon

- **Mindset:** Racing against deadlines or losing steam
- **Pain Points:** Tired, difficulty maintaining focus
- **Opportunity:** Gentle nudges for unfinished tasks

Evening

- **Mindset:** Relaxed but potentially guilty about incomplete work
- **Reflection:** Reviews day and plans ahead

Design Recommendations

Based on research findings, I recommend prioritizing these features:

1. Smart Calendar with Quick Access

- Weekly view as default (most-used feature)

- Widget for at-a-glance planning
- Drag-and-drop rescheduling
- Fixed upcoming reminder banner in app

2. Intelligent Task Management

- To-do lists with subtasks/checklists for breaking down complex work
- Prioritization labels based on deadline, task complexity, and time required
- Automatic task reorganization by urgency and priority

3. Focus Protection Features

- Do Not Disturb mode when creating tasks or via toggle
- Silence notifications during focused work
- Visual indicator when in focus mode

4. Time Blocking & Chunking

- Built-in Pomodoro timer
- Guided break prompts to prevent burnout
- Time-box task suggestions ("What can you complete in 10 minutes?")

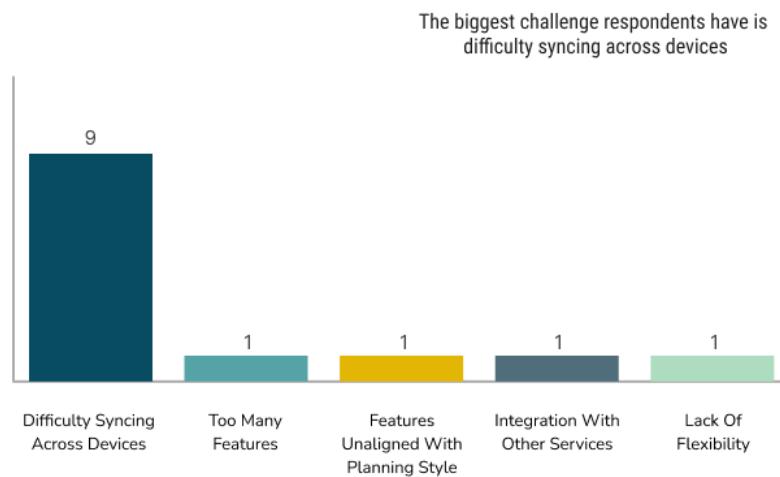
5. Gentle Nudges & Reminders

- Push notifications for unfinished tasks
- End-of-day incomplete item review
- Motivational prompts during low-energy periods

6. Cross-Device Syncing

Survey respondents identified syncing across devices as their biggest challenge with current tools—making this a critical feature for adoption.

Q3: What is the current biggest challenge you face when using time management tools?



7. Task Replication

Allow users to duplicate recurring tasks easily, reducing setup friction.

Research Impact

Validated Hypothesis

Yes, with a caveat. Users want customization, but they need smart defaults first. The ideal app learns from user behavior and offers suggestions while allowing flexibility.

Design Principles Uncovered

1. Reduce cognitive load - Smart defaults over blank slates
2. Protect focus time - Active interruption management
3. Breaks - Make complex tasks feel manageable
4. Maintain visibility - Calendar view as central hub
5. Adapt to mood - Recognize when users need extra support

Business Value

- Clear feature prioritization based on actual usage patterns, not assumptions
 - Reduced development risk by validating demand before development
 - Competitive differentiation through focus mode and smart prioritization
 - Higher retention potential by addressing the #1 pain point (device syncing)
-

Methodology Highlights

What Worked Well

- Mixed methods approach provided both breadth (survey) and depth (diary study)
- Recruiting productive users as participants gave insights into successful patterns rather than just pain points
- Real-time journaling in diary study captured authentic moments of distraction
- Three-phase progression allowed each study to inform the next

Challenges & Solutions

- Challenge: Low survey response rate (17 vs. goal of 25)
 - Solution: Recruited previous survey respondents for diary study, ensuring highly engaged participants
- Challenge: Participants forgetting diary entries
 - Solution: Daily check-ins and gentle reminders, maintained consistency
- Challenge: Balancing feature requests with observed behavior
 - Solution: Journey mapping revealed gaps between stated preferences and actual usage patterns

What I'd Do Differently

- Extend diary study to 14 days to capture full work weeks
 - Include participants who struggle with time management for comparison
 - Add observational component to see actual tool usage vs. self-reported
-

Skills Demonstrated

- **Research Design:** Created comprehensive study plans across three methodologies
 - **Mixed Methods:** Combined qualitative and quantitative approaches for holistic insights
 - **Participant Management:** Recruited, screened, and maintained engagement across 10-day study
 - **Data Analysis:** Synthesized findings from 17 survey responses and 40 diary entries
 - **Synthesis:** Created user personas and journey maps from raw data
 - **Stakeholder Communication:** Delivered actionable recommendations tied to business goals
 - **Ethics:** Ensured participant privacy, consent, and data security throughout
-

Next Steps

1. **Usability Testing:** Create low-fidelity prototypes of recommended features for validation
 2. **Competitive Analysis:** Audit existing time management apps to identify implementation gaps
 3. **A/B Testing Framework:** Design experiments to test smart prioritization accuracy
 4. **Expanded Diary Study:** Include users who struggle with time management to understand barriers
-

Deliverables

- Research plans and screeners for all three studies
- Survey question table and data analysis
- Diary study question tables and journaling prompts

- Affinity diagrams and thematic analysis
 - User persona and journey map
 - Final research report with actionable recommendations
 - Stakeholder presentation materials
-