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)
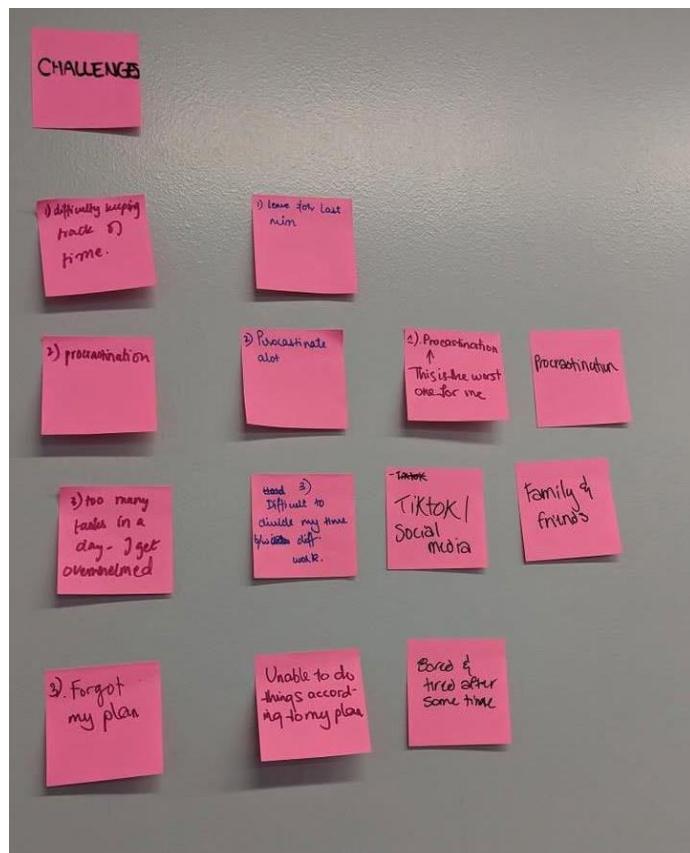
Goal: Identify user needs, preferences, and feature priorities
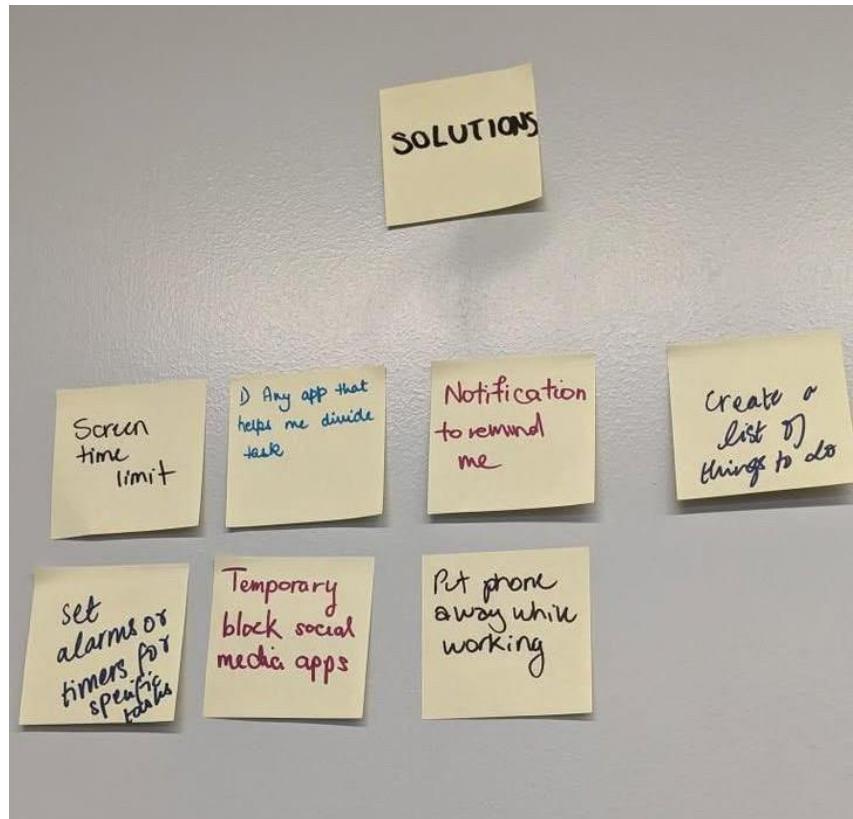
- Conducted moderated group discussion with targeted participants

- 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

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 improve 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?		

SOLUTIONS

- Screen time limit
- 1) Any app that helps me divide task
- Notification to remind me
- Create a list of things to do
- Set alarms or timers for specific tasks
- Temporary block social media apps
- Put phone away while working

$100 TEST

Instructions:

- You have $100 to spend on several features that could be part of a potential product or app. Each feature has a price.
- Allocate your $100 across the features you think are most valuable or impactful. You cannot exceed $100.
- For each feature, write down your reasoning in a few brief keywords 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	$10.00	Collaboration Option	$10.00
Habit Tracker	$10.00	Device Sharing	$5.00
To Do List	$20.00	Customise Interface	$20.00
Date And Time Pickers	$10.00	Habit Accomplishments	$5.00
Priority Labels	$5.00	Streak	
Repeat Options	$5.00		

Feature Name	Price	Reasoning
Add Task	10	Basic Feature
Todo list	20	To see how many tasks
Streak	5	Encouragement
Notifications	10	Reminder → Same
Weekly View	15	
Widget	5	Customization +
Tracker	10	+ Reminder Encouragement
Repeat	5	Easier to use
Date & Time	10	Pick a date
Add Event	10	
Total		**$100.00**

$100 TEST

Form 1

$100 TEST

Instructions
- You have $100 to spend on several features that could be part of a potential product or app. Each feature has a price.
- Allocate your $100 across the features you think are most valuable or impactful. You cannot exceed $100.
- For each feature, write down your reasoning in a few brief keywords 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 Option	$10.00
• Habit Tracker	$10.00	• Device Sharing	$5.00
• To-Do List	$20.00	• Customise Interface	$20.00
• Date And Time Pickers	$10.00	• Habit Accomplishments Streak	$5.00
• Priority Labels	$5.00		
• Repeat Options	$5.00		

| Feature Name	Price	Reasoning
Widget	$5	Its on my screen so helps me look at it
Add Event	$10	Its like a motivation to look forward to.
Weekly View	$15	Like to manage things weekly.
Notification	$10	It works like a reminder.
Analytics	$15	Visual things makes it easy to look at things.
Priority labels	$5	helps me know what to do first.
To Do List	$20	To know my task
Total		$100.00

Form 2

$100 TEST

Instructions
- You have $100 to spend on several features that could be part of a potential product or app. Each feature has a price.
- Allocate your $100 across the features you think are most valuable or impactful. You cannot exceed $100.
- For each feature, write down your reasoning in a few brief keywords 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 Option	$10.00
• Habit Tracker	$10.00	• Device Sharing	$5.00
• To Do List	$20.00 ✓	• Customise Interface	$20.00 ✓
• Date And Time Pickers	$10.00	• Habit Accomplishments Streak	$5.00
• Priority Labels	$5.00		
• Repeat Options	$5.00		

Feature Name	Price	Reasoning
Notification	$10.00	Help accountable
Analytics	$15.00	See progress in chart/visual form
Weekly view	$15.00	See the week what being done like monthly
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/know whats coming up
Customise interface	$20.00	can help on things cause its stress or make it
Widget	$5.00	can be on homescreen not own app
Priority labels	$5.00	Bring priority to it
Total		$100.00
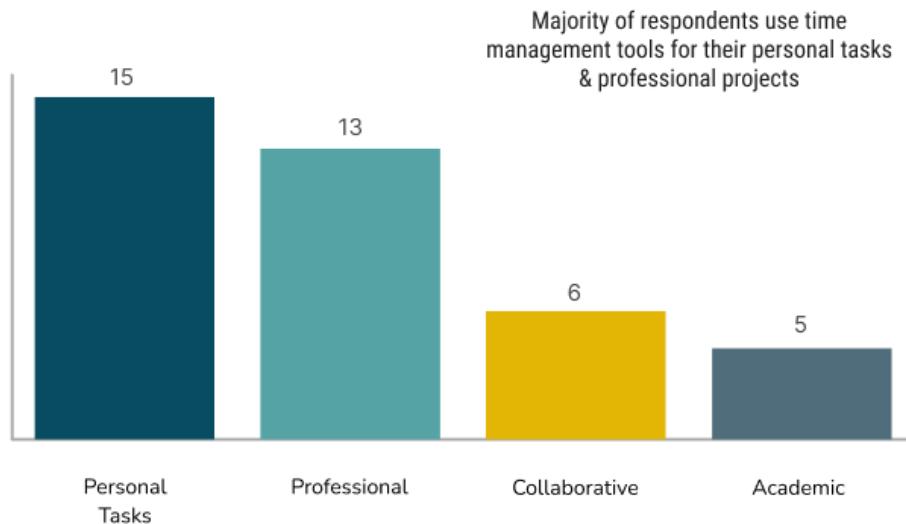
Phase 2: Online Survey (Validation)

Goal: Gather quantitative data from a larger sample to validate qualitative insights
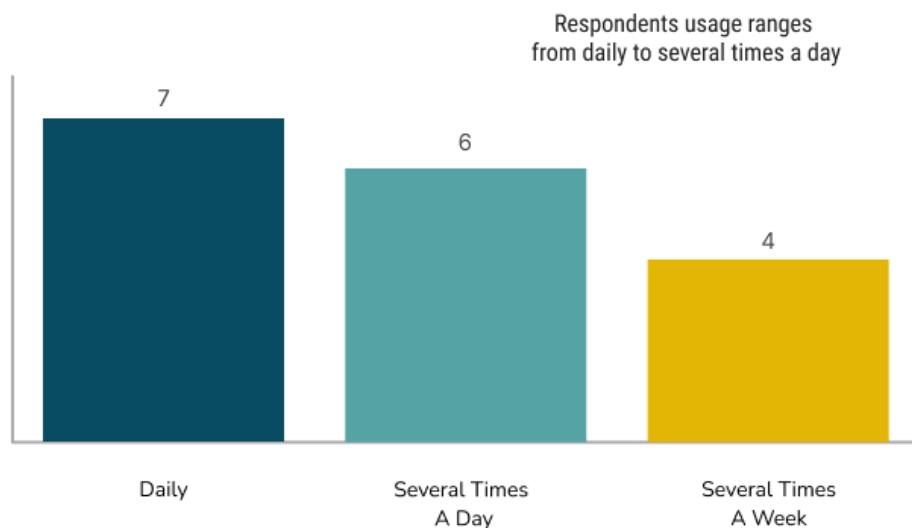
- Recruited 17 participants who self-identified as good at time management

- Designed 12-question survey via JotForm focusing on:

    o Tool usage frequency and types of tasks managed

    o Current challenges and desired improvements

    o Feature usage patterns and anti-procrastination strategies

- Incorporated screener to filter suitable candidates

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

Research Artifacts

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

Majority of respondents use time management tools for their personal tasks & professional projects

15 — Personal Tasks
13 — Professional
6 — Collaborative
5 — Academic
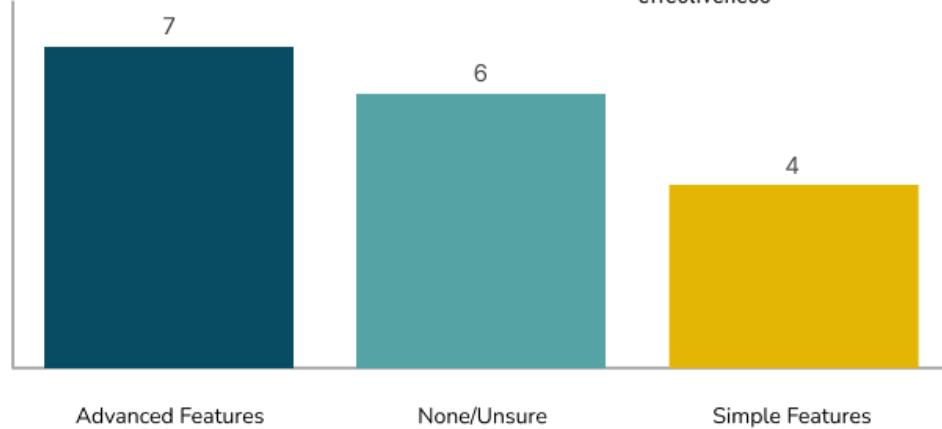
Q2: How often do you use time management tools?

Respondents usage ranges from daily to several times a day

7 — Daily
6 — Several Times A Day
4 — Several Times A Week
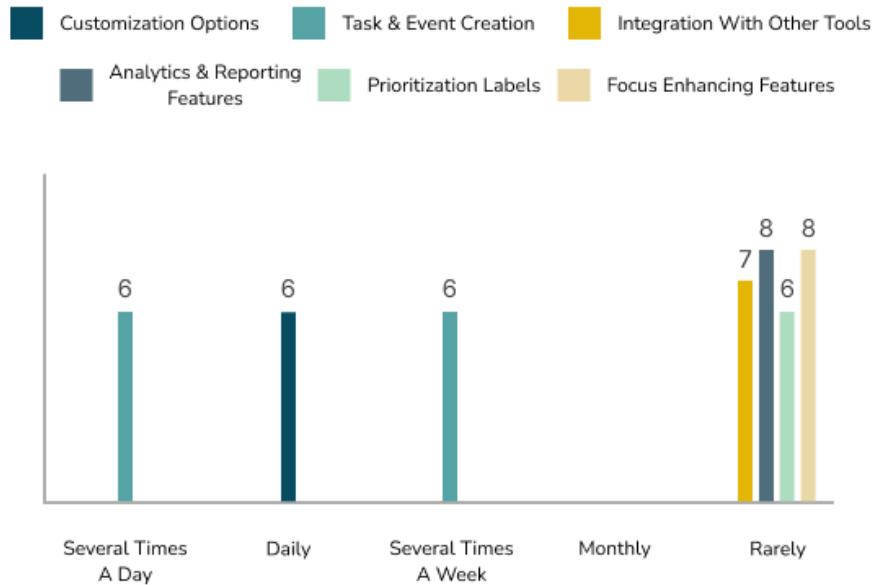
Q4: What feature or improvement would make a time management tool more effective for you?
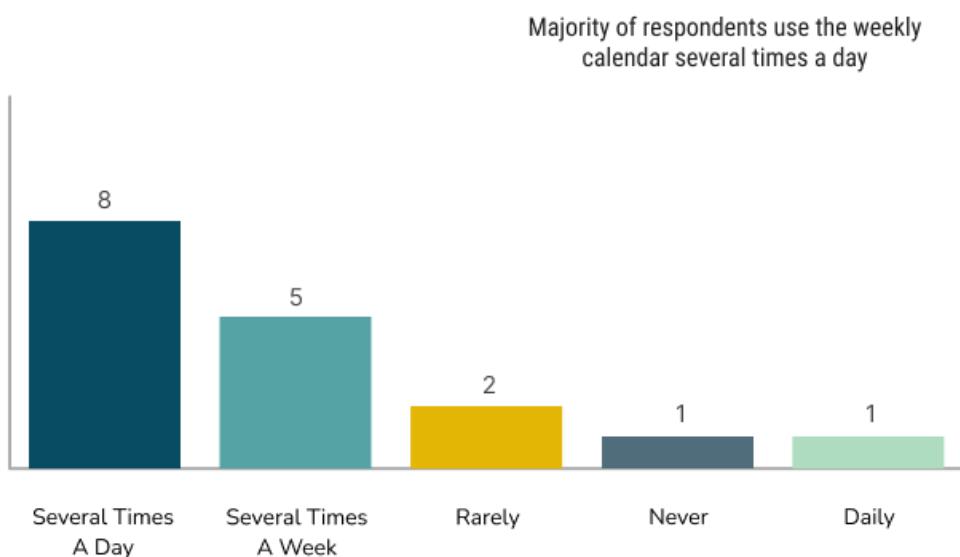
Majority of respondents state having advanced features would increase their effectiveness

Q5: How frequently do you use the following features?

Legend:
- Customization Options
- Task & Event Creation
- Integration With Other Tools
- Analytics & Reporting Features
- Prioritization Labels
- Focus Enhancing Features

	Several Times A Day	Daily	Several Times A Week	Monthly	Rarely
Task & Event Creation	6		6		
Customization Options		6			
Integration With Other Tools					7
Analytics & Reporting Features					8
Prioritization Labels					6
Focus Enhancing Features					8

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

Majority of respondents use the weekly calendar several times a day

Several Times A Day	Several Times A Week	Rarely	Never	Daily
8	5	2	1	1

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

Setting Deadlines	Task Breakdown	None	App Blocking	Other
9	9	6	1	1

Q8: How often do you customize or personalize features?

Majority of respondents rarely customize features

Rarely	Several Times A Week	Daily	Several Times A Day	Monthly
8	3	3	1	1

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 Enchancing 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 respondant beahviour	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)
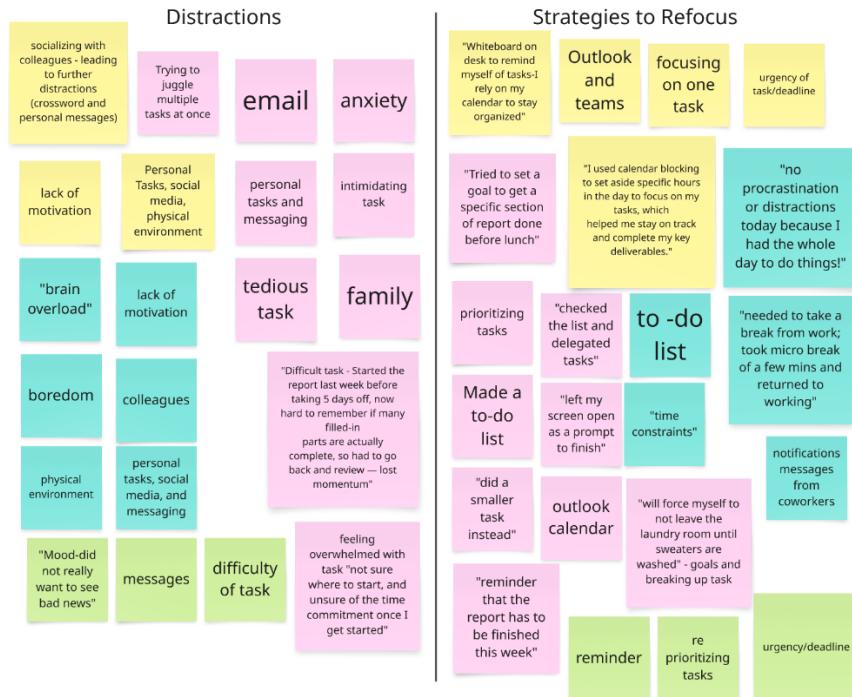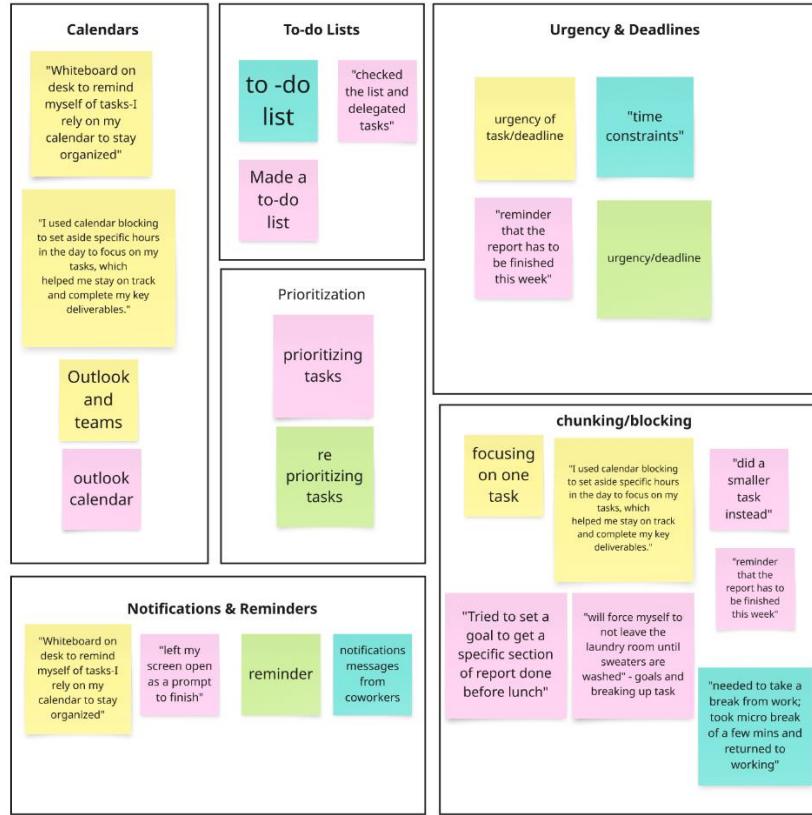
Phase 3: Diary Study (In-Context Observation)

Goal: Observe real-world behavior and tool interactions over time
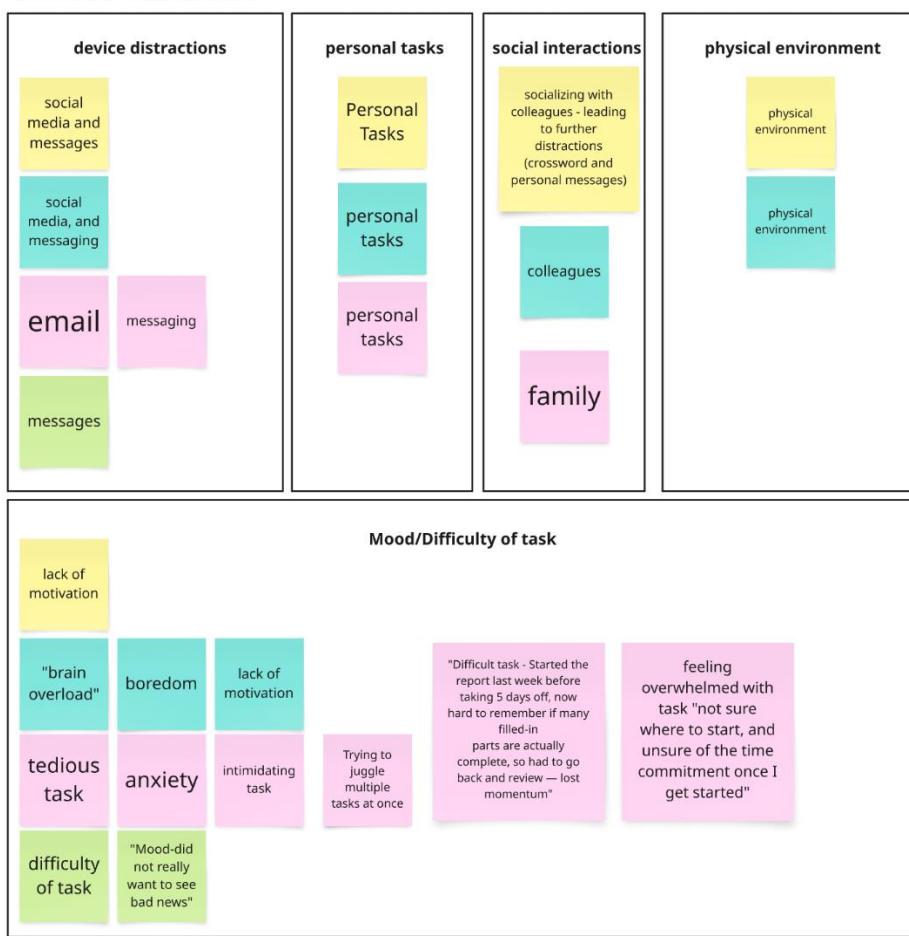
- Recruited 4 participants for 10-day digital diary study

- 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

Time management Tools & Strategies

Calendars

"Whiteboard on desk to remind myself of tasks-I rely on my calendar to stay organized"

"I used calendar blocking to set aside specific hours in the day to focus on my tasks, which helped me stay on track and complete my key deliverables."

Outlook and teams

outlook calendar

To-do Lists

to -do list

"checked the list and delegated tasks"

Made a to-do list

Prioritization

prioritizing tasks

re prioritizing tasks

Urgency & Deadlines

urgency of task/deadline

"time constraints"

"reminder that the report has to be finished this week"

urgency/deadline

chunking/blocking

focusing on one task

"I used calendar blocking to set aside specific hours in the day to focus on my tasks, which helped me stay on track and complete my key deliverables."

"did a smaller task instead"

"reminder that the report has to be finished this week"

"Tried to set a goal to get a specific section of report done before lunch"

"will force myself to not leave the laundry room until sweaters are washed" - goals and breaking up task

"needed to take a break from work; took micro break of a few mins and returned to working"

Notifications & Reminders

"Whiteboard on desk to remind myself of tasks-I rely on my calendar to stay organized"

"left my screen open as a prompt to finish"

reminder

notifications messages from coworkers

Distractions

socializing with colleagues - leading to further distractions (crossword and personal messages)

Trying to juggle multiple tasks at once

email

anxiety

lack of motivation

Personal Tasks, social media, physical environment

personal tasks and messaging

intimidating task

"brain overload"

lack of motivation

tedious task

family

boredom

colleagues

"Difficult task - Started the report last week before taking 5 days off, now hard to remember if many filled-in parts are actually complete, so had to go back and review — lost momentum"

physical environment

personal tasks, social media, and messaging

"Mood-did not really want to see bad news"

messages

difficulty of task

feeling overwhelmed with task "not sure where to start, and unsure of the time commitment once I get started"

Strategies to Refocus

"Whiteboard on desk to remind myself of tasks-I rely on my calendar to stay organized"

Outlook and teams

focusing on one task

urgency of task/deadline

"Tried to set a goal to get a specific section of report done before lunch"

"I used calendar blocking to set aside specific hours in the day to focus on my tasks, which helped me stay on track and complete my key deliverables."

"no procrastination or distractions today because I had the whole day to do things!"

prioritizing tasks

"checked the list and delegated tasks"

to -do list

"needed to take a break from work; took micro break of a few mins and returned to working"

Made a to-do list

"left my screen open as a prompt to finish"

"time constraints"

"did a smaller task instead"

outlook calendar

"will force myself to not leave the laundry room until sweaters are washed" - goals and breaking up task

notifications messages from coworkers

"reminder that the report has to be finished this week"

reminder

re prioritizing tasks

urgency/deadline

Common Distractions

device distractions	personal tasks	social interactions	physical environment
social media and messages	Personal Tasks	socializing with colleagues - leading to further distractions (crossword and personal messages)	physical environment
social media, and messaging	personal tasks	colleagues	physical environment
email messaging	personal tasks	family	
messages			

Mood/Difficulty of task

lack of motivation

"brain overload"   boredom   lack of motivation

tedious task   anxiety   intimidating task   Trying to juggle multiple tasks at once   "Difficult task - Started the report last week before taking 5 days off, now hard to remember if many filled-in parts are actually complete, so had to go back and review — lost momentum"   feeling overwhelmed with task "not sure where to start, and unsure of the time commitment once I get started"

difficulty of task   "Mood-did not really want to see bad news"

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**.

Daily Journey Insights

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?")
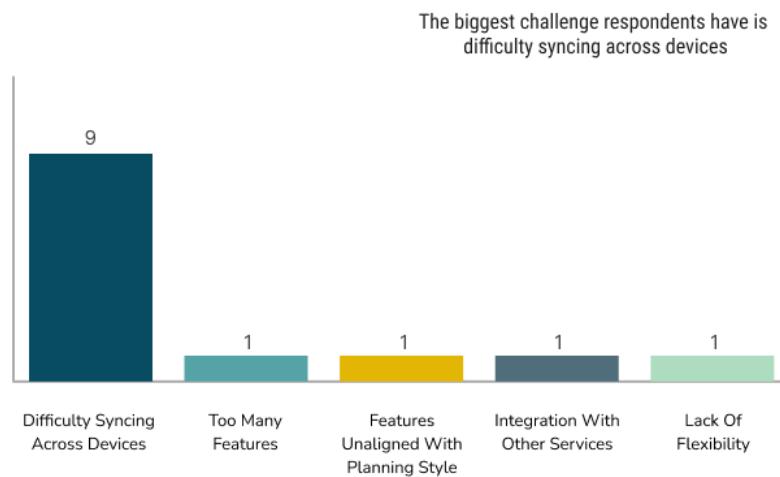
5. Gentle Nudges & Reminders

- 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?

The biggest challenge respondents have is
difficulty syncing across devices

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

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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

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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

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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

This case study demonstrates my ability to design and execute rigorous UX research, synthesize complex data into clear insights, and deliver recommendations that balance user needs with business objectives.