

DHCS: FINAL PROJECT REPORT

Understanding and Designing for People - Track 1

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INTRODUCTION

Given the coronavirus outbreak, these times for physical distancing have given rise to a greater dependence on the need for social connectivity. With social isolation linked to poor mental and physical health and a recent study showing 66.9% individuals reporting higher stress levels due to COVID-19, it is increasingly important to focus on mental health and learn of ways to cope with this stress and anxiety [1][2]. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has mentioned how individuals can do so by making some time out to unwind, connecting with others, meditating, eating healthy and exercising regularly[3].

With this in mind, I wanted to develop a prototype for an application which allows its users to focus on their mental health by allowing them to partake in activities they enjoy or are simply interested in learning, all on one platform for better ease of scheduling.

OBSERVATION PHASE

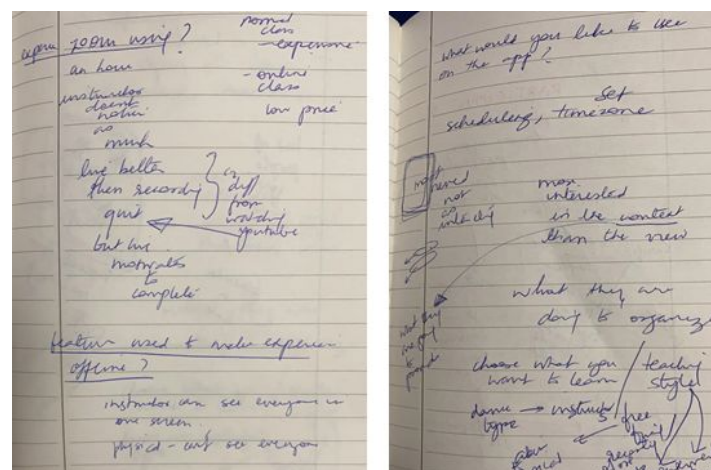
Contextual Inquiry as a method of observation was one I was keen to use because of its reliance on using the Master-Apprentice approach. It was best suited to my application given its ability to allow me to listen to users as they talk through their process of using applications similar to what I am trying to build thereby providing a lot of information regarding user needs albeit the few number of users being interviewed.

I used contextual inquiry to observe how five users (all of them female, ages between 23 and 30) have used online platforms in the past, to engage in activities that help them unwind. All five of them used Zoom to participate in live sessions - three for zumba and two for spin class. And since I was familiar with Zoom, I did not ask the users to get on a video call and share their screen while they talked me through their process of participating in such workout or fitness sessions. In addition to this, I asked users if they would like to use Zoom or any other similar platform for some other interests they have during lockdown, what

features of the platform proved to be beneficial in delivering an experience akin to in-person workshops and their thoughts about having to search for workshops for some of their other interests amongst others.

Some of these questions led to four out of five users mentioning that this abrupt shift to physical distancing hasn't allowed them to maintain a good balance between studying and staying active while at home. They were able to focus on at most one of their interests (that they previously engaged in via Zoom) but not all. When asked for the reason behind this, they stated that searching for online workshops for all of their other interests wasn't convenient as it involved them having to go the extra mile in terms of searching and scheduling these sessions while following their daily routines. Keeping this in mind and with the realization that Zoom as a platform was intuitive and easy to use for everyone, I planned to focus on making searching for online workshops and scheduling easy for users of the mobile application.

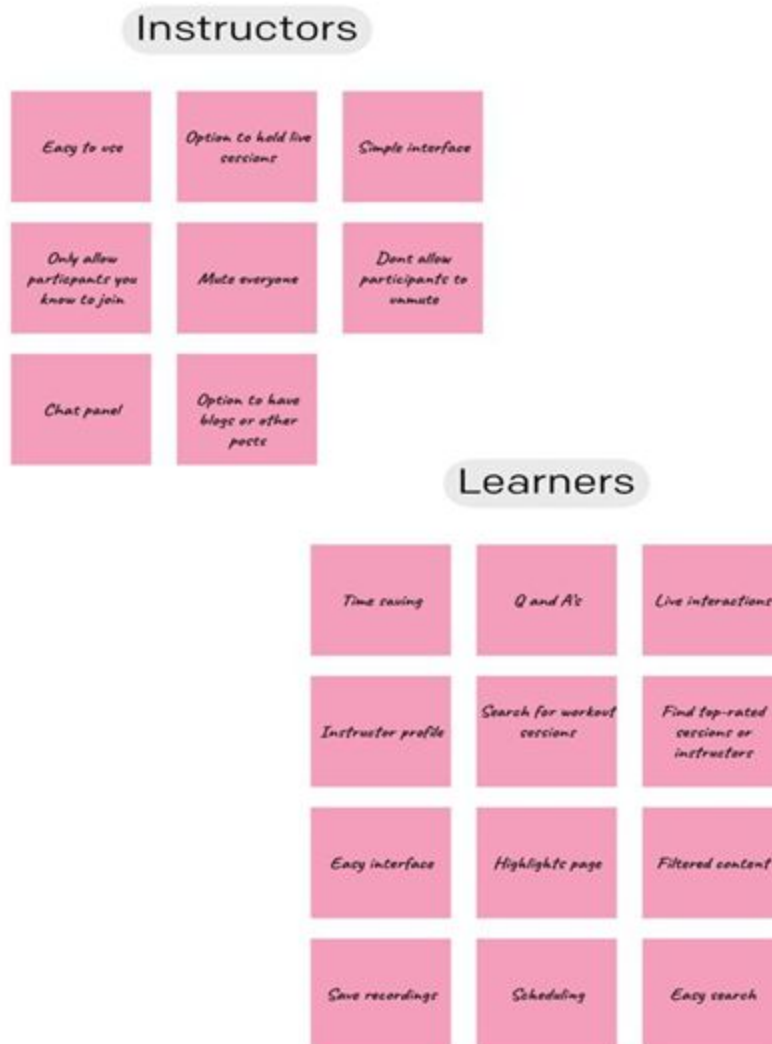
While I was on a phone call with these users individually, I made sure to make notes on the discussion that ensued [Fig 1]. And with the help of these notes, I made use of Affinity Diagramming to find out common themes that users are drawn to and/or look for, to make scheduling and online platforms more interactive and engaging [Fig 2a][Fig 2b].



[Fig 1] Some pages from the notes made during the observation phase



[Fig 2a] Using Affinity Diagramming to figure out the larger theme



[Fig 2b] Rearranging sticky notes from above Affinity Diagram

DESIGN PHASE

One of the users who was interviewed happened to be an instructor for Zumba sessions. She used Zoom to conduct her classes online during the quarantine period and her feedback for this platform was full of praise. Upon asking others, similar responses were obtained about this platform. This got me thinking that the app I create should perhaps have the functionality for joining Zoom meetings. The ‘Zoom Boom’ has gotten many users familiar with this platform and designing a screen in the app that has few (or none) unique functionalities other than the ones Zoom already provides would not see very many users shifting to this app I plan to create.

However, having both an instructor as well as a student's (or learner's) perspective to hosting/attending online sessions, made me think of re-organizing my Affinity Diagram from above into two groups [Fig 3]. This, coupled with everyone's needs for scheduling and managing their time led me to the idea for my app - ConnectMe.

Keeping in mind user findings, ConnectMe was developed to cater to both instructors and learners. Learners signing in would be able to search for groups such as acting or cooking. Within the group, they would be able to search for instructors who hold sessions or workshops related to the topic. Learners would be able to read about them, look at some of their posts or uploaded videos and find out when they hold their sessions. With a simple click of a button, they would be able to add that session to their calendar on the app - provided the session doesn't pose a conflict with any other event in the calendar. The calendar on the app also allows them to sync it with their personal calendars. In this manner, learner's would be able to search for online sessions across a multitude of groups in line with their interests with ease and keep joining workshops without having to keep track of possible conflicts with their day-to-day activities.

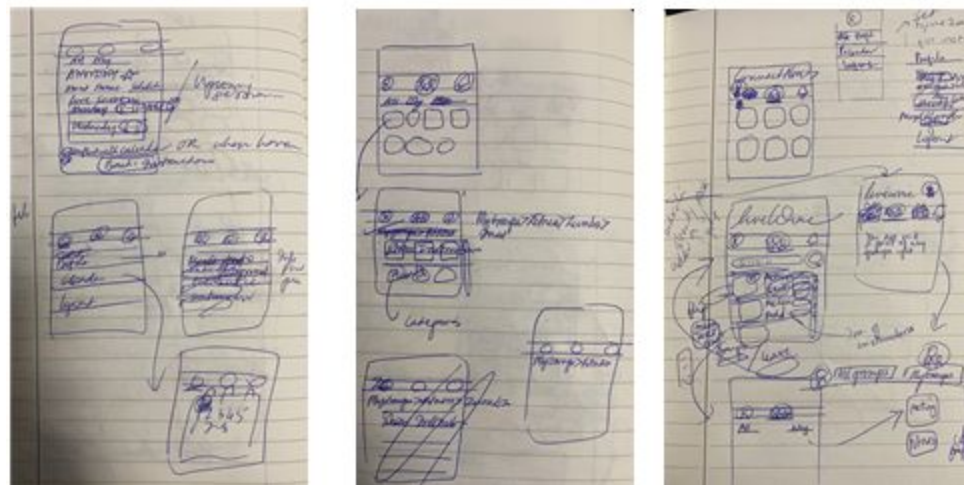
Instructors, on the other hand, would be able to customize what they display on their “page” in a particular group. While setting up this page, they would be asked to provide their Zoom meeting link so that when learners click on

the session they want to join in their calendars or from the notifications panel, they would be redirected to Zoom for joining that meeting.

Also, the same user could be an instructor for some groups and a learner on others. Therefore, instructors and other individuals simply looking to learn and keep active while isolated due to COVID-19 would both be benefited with ConnectMe.

My designs for the app relied primarily on recognition by using aspects or features that users were already familiar with by using other mobile or desktop applications. Also, I made sure it aligned with their mental models of what an icon or a button is bound to do, making the app simple and intuitive to use. I combined this with using grid systems and gestalt principles to create effective groupings thus contributing to ease of navigation in a screen.

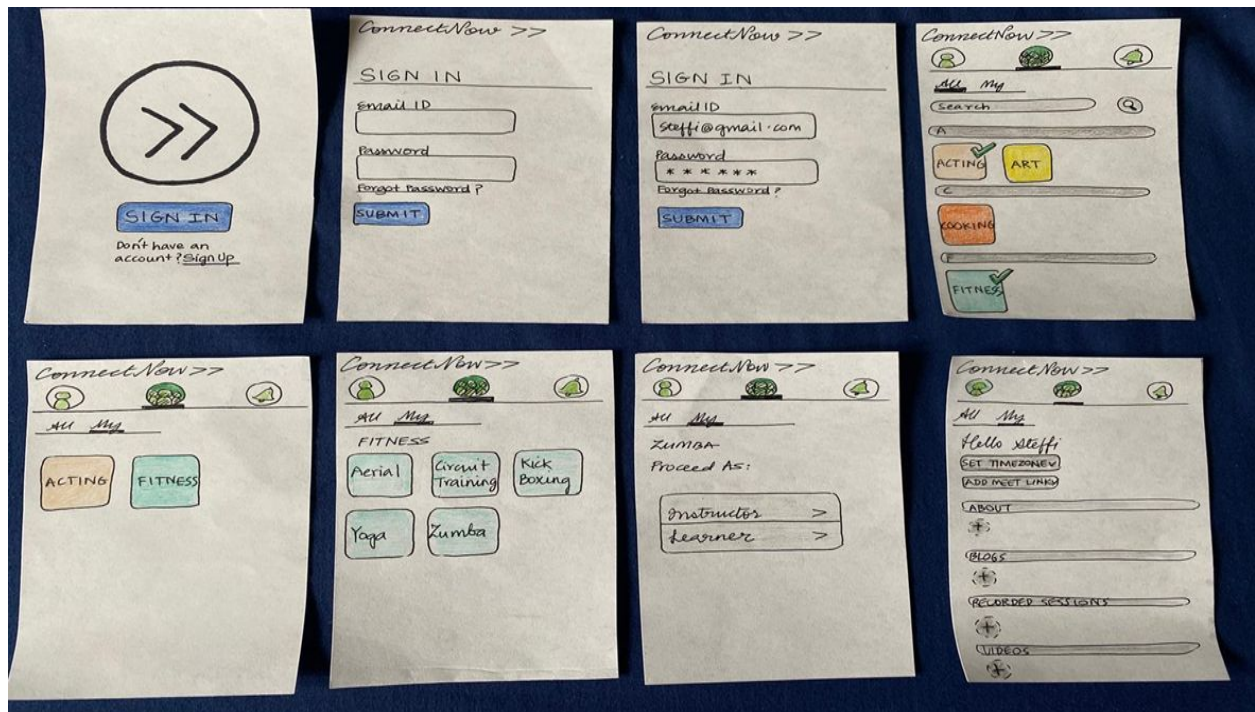
While drawing the initial sketches, not only was I taking into consideration the flow between different screens, but I was also testing out/thinking of design ideas for different elements [Fig 3].



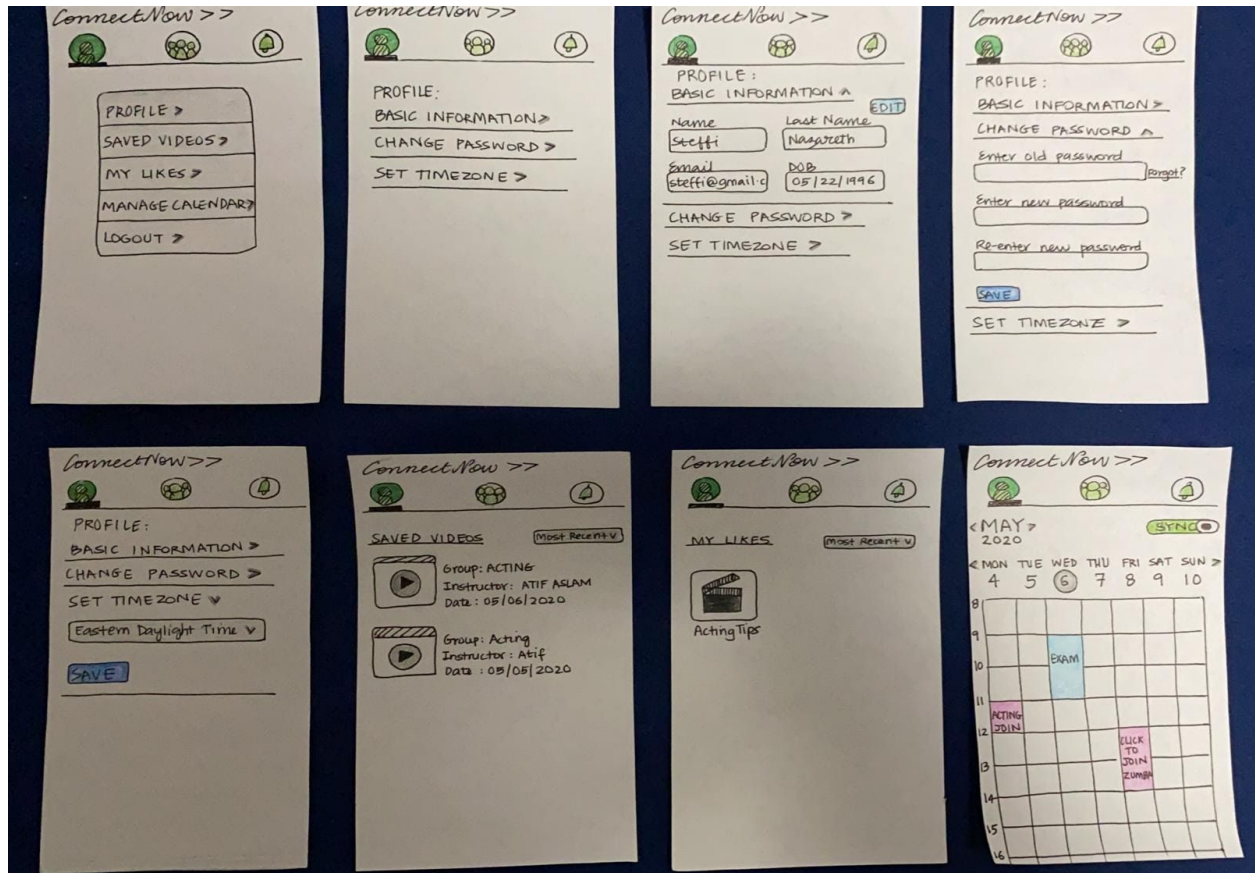
[Fig 3] Some initial sketches

Say a user wanted to look up online sessions for Zumba. They would have to sign up or sign in, search for the Fitness group, add it to 'My Groups', navigate to it and then search from an instructors page which session they would like to join. If the session conflicts with their calendar, it will be preemptively greyed out by the app itself. This way users will be aware of which sessions they can join [Fig 4a].

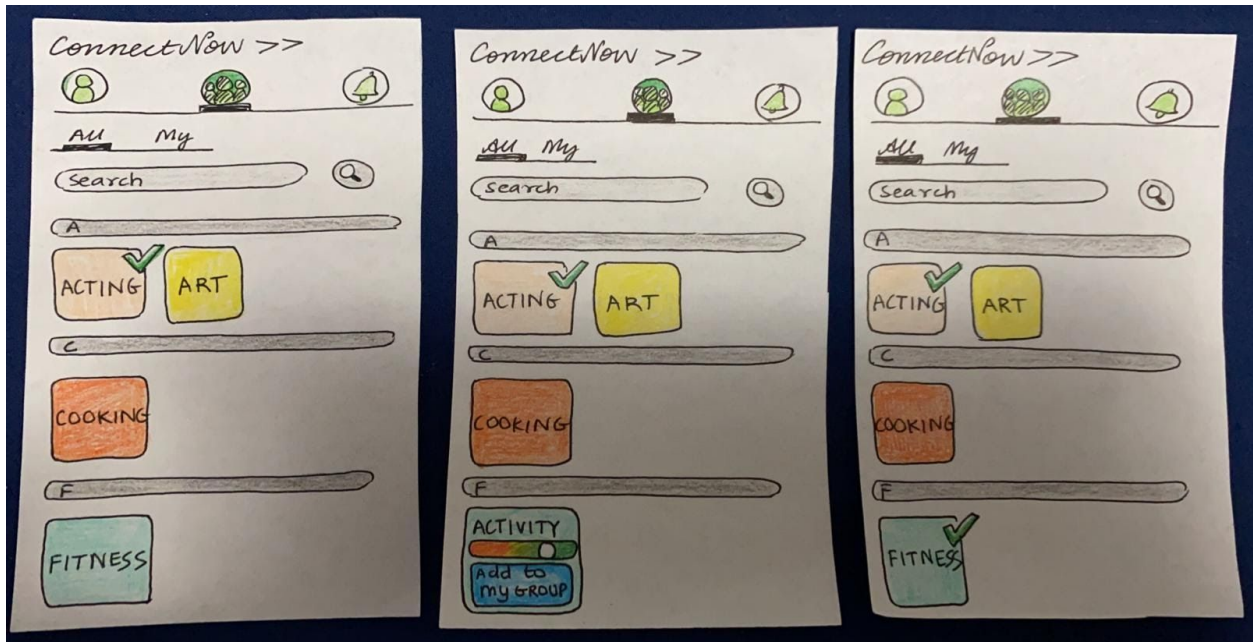
A user if he wanted to join the app as an instructor for Zumba, would have to follow the same initial process of navigating to the group. However, when asked to proceed as a learner or instructor, the user would click on 'Instructor' leading him to his own page that he can customize for learners to see [Fig 4b]. Also, on this page, the user has the option to set the timezone he is in. This way, when a user who signs in as a learner sets their timezone, the classes the learner views under 'schedule of classes' for a particular instructor will be adjusted to suit the learner. In addition, to this, there is an easy provision for instructors to add a zoom link to their online sessions. This then allows learners to join the sessions from their calendar or the notification with one click.



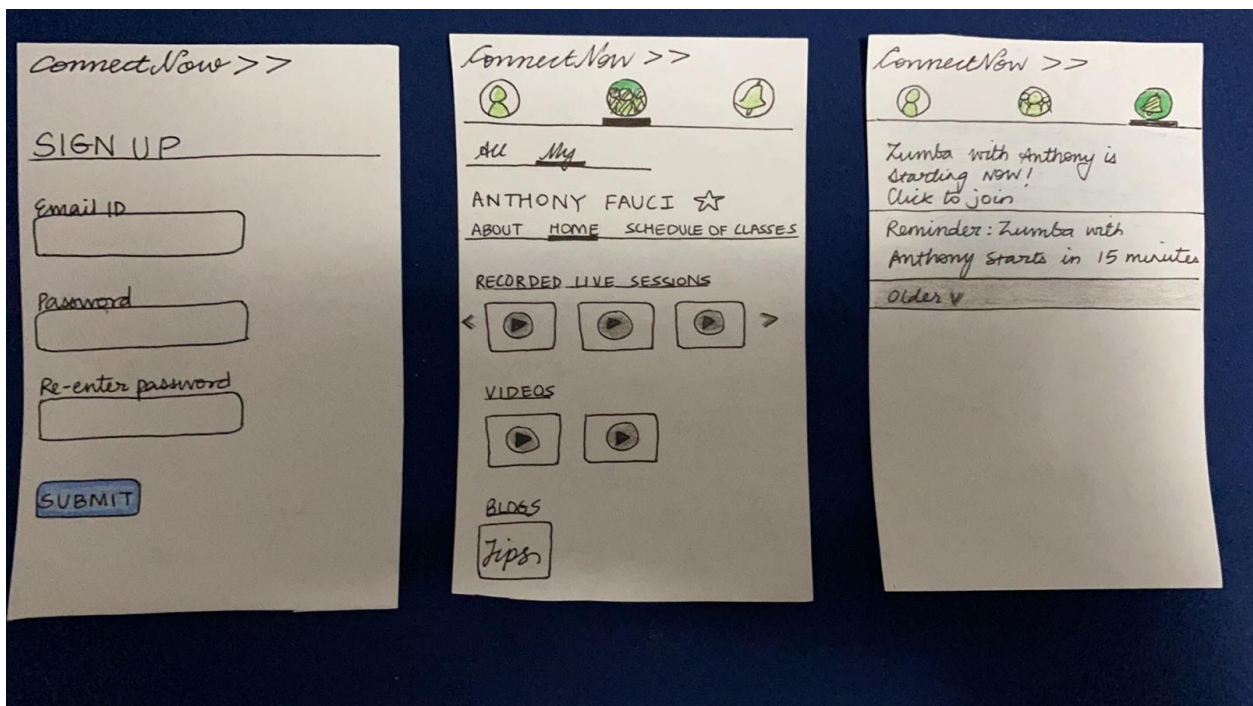
[Fig 4b] Paper Prototype: Using the Zumba group as an Instructor



[Fig 4c] User Profile Screens



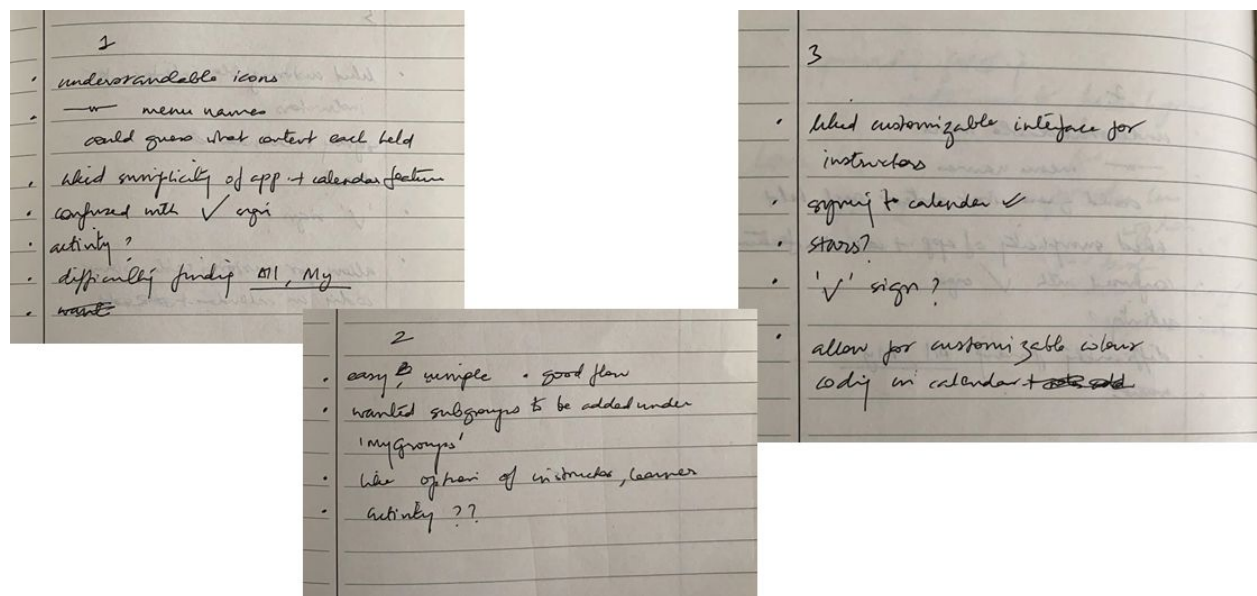
[Fig 4d] Adding Fitness group from 'All groups' to 'My groups'



[Fig 4e] Additional Screens

EVALUATION PHASE

For evaluating the prototype, I made use of the 'User Think Aloud Testing' method with the help of 3 users. The method allowed me to assess how the users interacted with my design if they were by themselves. I asked them to think aloud while doing so, which allowed me to take notes when they were hesitant to perform a certain task or simply confused by what was presented on the screen. In addition to this, I also noted down some elements of the app they liked and other suggestions they had[Fig 5].



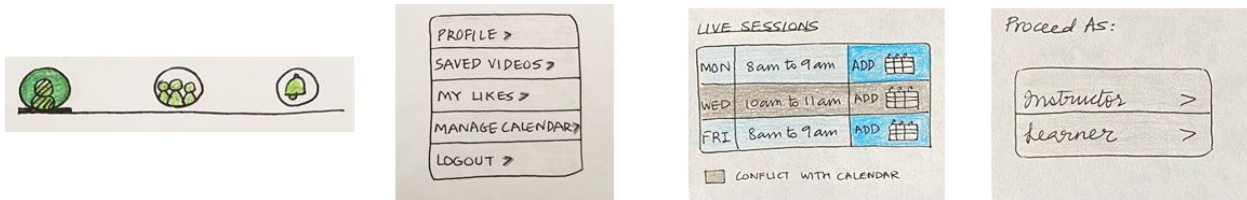
[Fig 5] Notes from user testing

The findings from the evaluation were such:

[1] Likes

- 3 out of 3 users
 - Found the flow between screens easy to understand
 - Understood the three icons to indicate 'Your profile', 'Groups' and 'Notifications'
 - Understood menu names
 - Liked option to join group as Instructor or Learner

- Liked greyed out sessions indicating conflict in schedule



- 1 out of 3 users
 - Liked the option for customizable Instructor page

[2] Dislikes

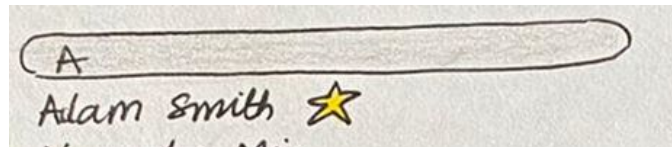
- 2 out of 3 users confused due to 'Activity' label
 - The third user was able to guess when prompted



- 2 out of 3 users confused due to 'tick' sign on group icons
 - 1 of them didn't realize it due to less visibility of the *All* and *My* labels under groups
 - The other realised it when they saw the tick after clicking 'Add to my group' option on the flipside of the group icon



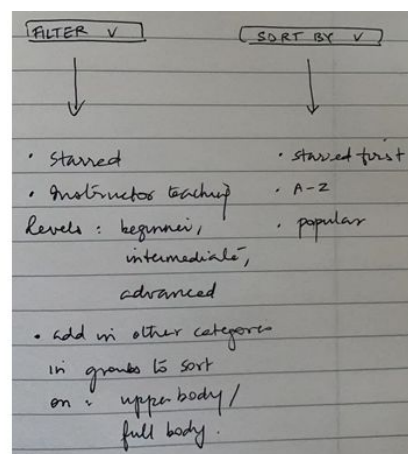
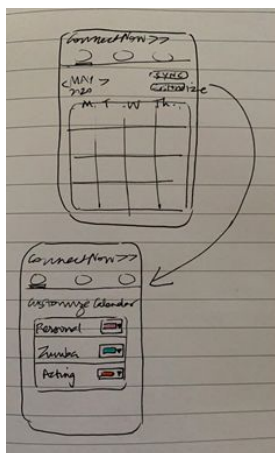
- 1 out of 3 users confused due to 'star' sign against instructor names
- The third user was able to guess when prompted



Also, the users collectively had suggestions for:

- Customized colour coding in calendar on app
- More filtering and sorting options for the instructors
- Filtering on categories within the group

I would revise my design by firstly taking into consideration the elements the users seemed to dislike. I would get rid of the 'Activity' bar which was designed to show how active the group was. The idea was lost on almost all of the users. Next, I would get rid of the 'Tick' option on the group. Users, when they click on the group icon, would instead be able to notice a label that says - 'Added to My Groups'. Also, as the users suggested, I would add more options for filtering and sorting for instructors as well as groups. For instructors, the filter could be on instructor teaching levels and for other groups, take for example fitness, the filter could be on what body area the workout targets - upper body, lower body, etc.



In addition to this, I realised that users had to add a group to the 'My groups' section first for them to view the sub-categories. I would revise this by allowing the users to first view subcategories and then add either the group or one or all of the sub-groups to 'My Groups' instead.

In this manner, the UI for the app in the next prototyping iteration would reduce confusion amongst users by incorporating their suggestions and working on the elements users disliked in the testing phase.

REFERENCES

- [1]<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0033350617302731>
- [2]<https://www.qualtrics.com/blog/confronting-mental-health/>
- [3]<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>