

Needfinding: Time

My observations are on the theme of **Time**. The area of interest for this project is around procrastination and distraction during work. I wanted to observe the reasons why my users procrastinated and got distracted, if at all, as well as their mechanisms and strategies to overcome them. The task given to my interview subjects was to do a piece of work that they are least looking forward to doing (i.e. Work that they are avoiding doing or are least focused when doing it) for a few minutes while I observe them through my laptop webcam, and then to tell me the methods they use to stay focused and stay on track with work. One interviewee has ADHD (marginalised user) My findings found that most methods used to counteract procrastination are not very effective, giving scope for improvements.

Interview Questions

1. What does your work consist of in your job? What are the various projects, tasks you have to do on a daily basis?
2. What kind of work do you do? (what's the nature of the work – is it creative, data-heavy, simple, complicated...?)
3. Do you have problems with time management? For example when you take a “break” do you end up taking longer than you should? What do you do during your breaks?
4. **Take me through the most challenging task of your job/what is the one deadline this week that you dread doing.”** Work on it, take your sweet time, as if I wasn't there. But once in a while talk me through what you're doing, thinking”.
5. Can they complete the task?
6. Would you say you procrastinate, delay, or zone out of your work? What is the reason for that? Do you have lots of distractions (external reasons, nature of work is not rewarding, is boring, feels meaningless?) or would you say they are personal reasons (your thoughts)?
7. What about other factors such as : - (notifications, calls, chores around the house, are they demotivated? Are they not engaged because the work is boring? are they sleepy? Ask them their sleep patterns, does music help or distract them further? Do they prefer working alone or with other people around like in co-working spaces?)
8. How do you counteract your impulses/make sure you work?
9. Do you have any method/system/strategy you use to make sure you work and are productive? (reminders, alarms, friends?) If not, any reason why you haven't done so?
10. Take me through the method you use to stay focused. Observe breakdowns (when the user fails or struggles to do something.)

Arjun Nayar

Arjun works in the 'product' segment of a tech company from the comfort of his home. He uses a work laptop and a work phone, both of which were given to him by his company, for all work-related tasks. As far as his experience with procrastination, distraction, and productivity are concerned, there are some interesting reasons behind both which factors lead him to procrastinate and get distracted, as well as the methods he uses (often unsuccessfully) to counteract those urges.

Arjun seems to procrastinate most on tasks that do not require much creative or analytical thinking (drudgery), do not feel rewarding, and have relaxed deadlines. His daily work routine is to sit at his desk in his bedroom with his work laptop in front of him, and his personal laptop on the side. His personal phone is on his desk, playing music or a podcast through his EarPods. He has multiple windows open for his business communication platform, excel, google etc at any point in time.

As he performed the task of working on a piece of work, and as I asked him about how he tries to stay focused, I observed some noteworthy user breakdowns. Even though he uses his work phone and laptop during work hours, he has his personal phone with him, and he often whiles away his time on Twitter or YouTube. So having the phone with him, despite turning notifications off, **doesn't** prevent him from procrastinating. Incidentally, Arjun also takes therapy to reduce his social media usage, as well as being diagnosed with ADHD. Similarly, I observed that he watches football highlights on his personal laptop while he works on his work laptop. So his policy of not using his work laptop for personal use doesn't help him not get distracted. Additionally, he listens to music and podcasts to concentrate, but when he changes his music or finds a new podcast, he admits to ending up scrolling through Twitter.



(Arjun watching football highlights on his personal desktop despite only using a work laptop for work)

Swastika Interview

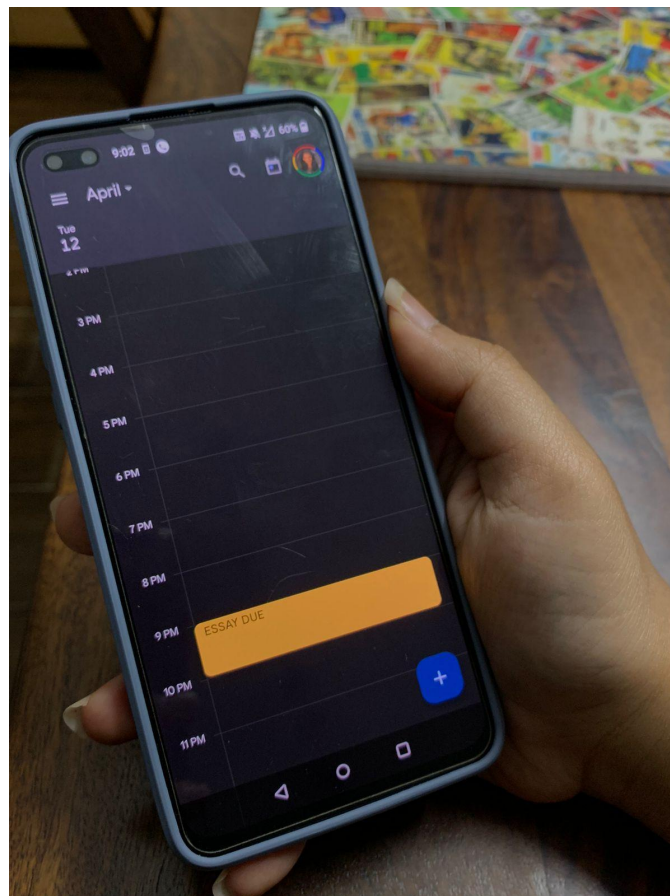
Swastika is a recent graduate who is applying for her master's degree. In the meantime, she does freelance work in the field of content writing. Most of her work is done in a co-working space with other friends (at a work friendly café), however the interview could only be conducted virtually with her working at home. Unlike Arjun, she works on her personal laptop.

Swastika feels most inclined to procrastinate when doing "boring" editing work for clients. Like in Arjun's case, this aspect of her work does not require much thinking, which makes the work less rewarding and enjoyable. She too listens to music for this type of work. She

feels that the later the deadline the more she procrastinates, and that in the last few days she panics and does it in a rush.

When doing the task, I observed that she had a surprisingly large number of windows and tabs open which were a mix of work-related and recreational documents. In attempting to find the right window which had the relevant Word document required for the task she had to flit through a number of windows and find the google chrome tabs that supported her work. On further questioning she admitted to getting easily distracted by google tabs that were irrelevant such as for Amazon, YouTube, other shopping websites which she hadn't closed for weeks, but never acted on it because she felt she might need them later.

As far as Swastika's strategies to fight against procrastination go, she turns off the Wi-Fi of her phone when working on important deadlines, with her phone face down on the table. However, even then, she has found that that is not much of a deterrent as she either procrastinates on her laptop or connects to Wi-Fi again on her phone. Another method is using the calendar app on her laptop or phone to put self-enforced deadlines, but on asking about the past deadlines, she admitted to not having met them and changing the deadline manually on the calendar app if she failed to meet them.



(One of Swastika's many self-imposed deadlines on her calendar which she can change easily).

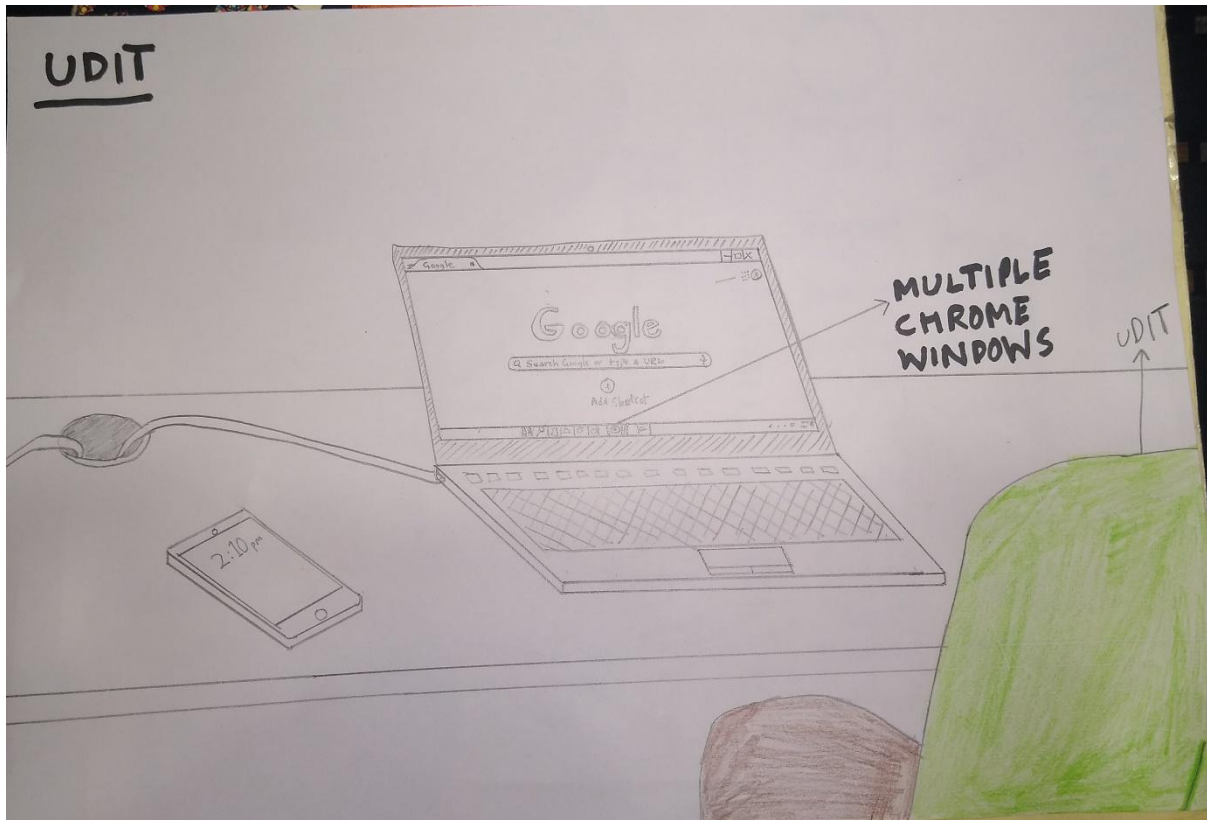
Udit Interview

Udit works as a social media influencer strategist for a shaving company. He works in an office with approximately 20 other employees on his floor. His work mainly consists of working on Excel and liaising with social media 'influencers' over pricing.

Udit is not happy with his current role as he finds the work monotonous and "soulless". He says his productivity is quite poor as he does not feel motivated to work at something he cares little about. As a result, Udit procrastinates a lot and gets distracted very easily.

When given the task of doing the work he would least want to do, Udit told me that after about 30 seconds he would open a new tab to check the cricket score or open Facebook, but for the purpose of this interview he wasn't going to do so. He is not very active on social media and does not consider it an 'addiction', however, he enjoys shopping online for clothes and shoes. Nonetheless, being in an office environment with his manager asking him for regular updates on his work, Udit says he can't afford to procrastinate as much as he would have working from home.

Udit's methods for staying focused are not as elaborate as the other two interviewees since there is not much scope for prolonged procrastination in an office setting, however, Udit often opens a new window on which he only includes tabs that are work related, to help him forget the existence of another chrome window with recreational websites. This method works up to a point, but he inevitably opens a shopping website on the new window, according to Udit.



(Udit's strategy of opening a new Google Chrome window so that there are no recreational open tabs to distract his attention from work)