

Stress Related to Complex Experiences

Executive Summary

The goal of this project is to find out what the different factors are that cause people to be stressed or anxious when they are dealing with the complex experience of navigating the court system. It is also to find out how their stress or anxiety can be mitigated and what can be done to make them have a positive court experience. The questions chosen for the study are 1. What are aspirational, anxiety-mitigating characteristics of complex experiences? 2. What are expectations for a positive engagement?

An analogous space of 'Moving to a New Country for Education' has been considered. A very important part of any process is knowing that you have a good understanding of it so that you are confident in your actions. Stress and anxiety about complex experiences like moving to a new country are most probably caused because of having an incomplete picture of all the things that have to be done to settle in a new country independently. I can say this because I had experienced it firsthand when I moved from India to the United States to pursue a master's degree. These two questions are selected because answering them will provide a good understanding of what exactly can be done to mitigate the stress and anxiety caused by moving to a new country and to understand how this information can be used to make people have a positive experience. The questions selected are related to people's feelings about complex experiences. Since it talks about people's feelings, it belongs to the left quadrants. To answer these questions, a complex experience has to be defined. And since it is a very broad term and can be interpreted in various ways, it is still the 'Discovery' phase. Thus, these questions belong to the lower left quadrant.

To answer these questions, one-on-one and out-of-context interviews were conducted along with a small activity to gain insights about what causes people to be stressed, how they mitigate it and what makes them have a positive experience. The interviews were conducted with people who were admitted to a university of their choice in Boston, and moved here not earlier than 6 months ago.

The major findings were that people were getting stressed because of uncertainty – they didn't know what exactly they had to do after moving, and because they had certain expectations from themselves – that they have to get through the initial difficulties. People dealt with being stressed by either talking to family and friends or keeping their stress to themselves and keeping a positive spirit to move forward. People who didn't talk to family and friends only relieved a small portion of their stress since no one was there to calm them down. However, people who spoke with family and friends were much more relieved of their stress. The major finding about having a positive experience was that if people completed a certain task without having to put in unnecessary effort or time, they considered it to be a positive experience.

One of the personas identified was 'The Communicator'. A person can be said to be a communicator if they talk to family and friends whenever they have difficulties and feel stressed about it. They trust the advice received from family and friends.

Schedule

	Start Date	End Date	Actual Time
Phase 1 – Align			
Prepare for kickoff, understand the research objective and questions	24 th January	24 th January	4 hours
Alignment workshop to organize the research questions according to the NCredible framework	24 th January	24 th January	4 hours
Choose the research questions for the study and find an analogous space	25 th January	25 th January	1 hour
Create a schedule for the project	25 th January	25 th January	3 hours
Phase 2 - Plan			
Define the sample with the ideal and adjusted participant criteria	25 th January	25 th January	3 hours
Share sample with the stakeholder	25 th January	25 th January	1 hour
Edit and finalize the sample	26 th January	26 th January	1 hour
Define the context and dynamic of the study	26 th January	26 th January	6 hours
Share the context and dynamic with the stakeholder	27 th January	27 th January	1 hour
Edit and finalize the context and dynamic of the study	27 th January	27 th January	1 hour
Create questions and activities for each of the research questions	29 th January	29 th January	8 hours
Draft the introduction and conclusion to make the final protocol	30 th January	30 th January	1 hour
Share the protocol with the stakeholder	31 st January	31 st January	3 hours
Edit and finalize the protocol	1 st February	1 st February	3 hours
Create the required material for activities and make a note-taking system	1 st February	1 st February	2 hours
Phase 3 – Gather			
Conduct research with P1	5 th February	5 th February	1 hour
Conduct research with P2	7 th February	7 th February	1 hour
Conduct research with P3	8 th February	8 th February	1 hour
Conduct research with P4	9 th February	9 th February	1 hour
Conduct research with P5	11 th February	11 th February	1 hour
Phase 4 – Analyze			
Organize the collected data	15 th February	16 th February	11 hours
Analyze the stories and identify patterns	17 th February	18 th February	11 hours
Create personas based on the patterns identified	19 th February	19 th February	2 hours
Deconstruct the patterns, document the actionable insights and draft the answers to the research questions	20 th February	22 nd February	11 hours
Create the final deliverable	22 nd February	24 th February	15 hours
Review the final deliverable with the stakeholder	24 th February	24 th February	0 hours
Make the required edits to the deliverable	24 th February	24 th February	0 hours
Practice explaining the information in the final deliverable	24 th February	24 th February	0 hours

Phase 5 – Apply			
Share the final deliverable with the stakeholder	24 th February	24 th February	0 hours
Conduct a sunset review	24 th February	24 th February	0 hours

The NCredible framework used in this study to organize and map out the research questions has been developed by twig+fish research practice Kothandaraman & Ludin (2016). Some of the tasks from phase 4 and tasks from phase 5 have not been performed in this study, because of which 0 hours have been allotted to them.

Budget

The hypothetical budget of the research study consists of 3 things: the researcher's salary, participant compensation, and miscellaneous expenses.

Information from three websites was used to calculate the approximate salary of an entry-level UX researcher. According to glassdoor.com, the average base pay of a UX researcher is 75,259\$/year. According to nngroup.com, it is between 65,000\$/year and 70,000\$/year Nielsen (2018). According to LinkedIn, it is 87,700\$/year. Taking the average of these rates, the salary of an entry-level UX researcher is 76,820\$/year. Considering that a week involves 40 hours of work, 1 month equates to 160 hours or work. This means that the hourly rate of an entry-level UX researcher is 40\$. The number of hours required for this research study is 92 and thus, the researcher's salary is 3680\$.

For finding out the participant incentive, information from three websites was used. According to userinterviews.com, the incentive provided to a general consumer is 100\$/hour. According to nngroup.com, it is 72\$/hour Nielsen (2003). According to Kathryn Brookshier, who is a UX researcher at indeed.com, it is 88\$/hour Brookshier (2018). Taking the average of these rates, the incentive provided to a general consumer is 87\$/hour. Five participants were interviewed for this study. This means that 435\$ from the budget was used to incentivize the participants.

And finally, miscellaneous expenses like materials used for the study and travel approximately add another 500\$. This brings the total expenses of the research to 4615\$.

Sample

	Ideal Sample	Ideal Selection	Adjusted Sample	Adjusted Selection
Behaviors	People who have moved to a new country for education	People who have moved to the United States for education within the last six months	People who have moved to Massachusetts for education	People who have moved to Boston for education within the last six months
	People who haven't stayed in or visited the	People who haven't stayed in or visited	People who haven't stayed in or visited the	People who haven't stayed in or visited the

	country they are moving to for education	the United States before	United States before and currently live in Massachusetts	United States before and currently live in Boston
Abilities	<p>People who can bear the expense of living and studying in the United States</p> <p>People who have a good academic profile and got admitted to a university they wanted</p>	<p>People who can bear the expense of paying fees to their university along with paying rent and other living expenses</p> <p>People who have a good academic profile and got admitted to a university they wanted in the United States</p>	<p>People who can bear the expense of living and studying in the United States</p> <p>People who have a good academic profile and got admitted to a university they wanted in Massachusetts</p>	<p>People who can bear the expense of paying fees to their university along with paying rent and other living expenses</p> <p>People who have a good academic profile and got admitted to a university they wanted in Boston</p>
Demographics	<p>Adults of mixed gender</p> <p>People who are not from the country they moved to for education</p>	<p>A balanced selection of males and females</p> <p>People who are not from the United States and moved to the United States for education</p>	<p>Adults of mixed gender</p> <p>People who are not from the United States and moved to Massachusetts for education</p>	<p>A balanced selection of males and females</p> <p>People who are not from the United States and moved to Boston for education</p>
Psychographics	<p>People who believe that moving to a more developed country for education is going to be better for their career</p>	<p>People who believe that moving to the United States for education is going to be better for their career</p>	<p>People who believe that moving to Massachusetts for education is going to provide them good opportunities</p>	<p>People who believe that moving to Boston for education is going to provide them good opportunities</p>

The ideal sample is adjusted to reduce costs and complete the project within the specified timeframe. It would be less expensive and less time consuming to find a recruit who moved to Massachusetts for education than to find people from other states. The sample is adjusted to find someone who moved in the last six months since they will remember their experiences better than people who moved long back. It would be also beneficial to find someone who lives in Boston so that conducting an in-person interview would be feasible.

Context of Study

	Ideal	Adjusted
Method	Diary Study, Interview	Interview
Context	Out-of-context	Out-of-context

Method: Ideally a Diary Study would be conducted from two weeks before moving to two weeks after moving to understand what causes stress during the final stages of preparation and what causes stress after moving. Along with this, a 1:1 interview would be conducted with each individual to understand how their experience is different from others and what causes them to be stressed. So, the person would be recruited from two weeks before moving to three weeks after moving. The additional one week after the four weeks of diary study would be for scheduling and conducting the interview. The ideal method is adjusted because conducting a diary study would not be possible. It would be difficult to find people who are about to move to a new country. By adjusting the method and only conducting interviews, the small experiences that people might have during their moving process, which have a cumulative effect, will not be understood because it might be difficult for people to remember the small details which occurred a few months ago. Thus, only in-person interviews were conducted between 26th January 2020 and 14th February 2020.

Context: A Diary Study is out-of-context because an observer will not be present to observe the stress-inducing experience as it is occurring. Interviews are also out of context since they will be conducted after people have moved to a new country and not while they are in the process of moving. By being out-of-context, understanding a perspective different from the individual who is experiencing it will not be possible. The level of detail of the information gathered would also be less as compared to being in-context.

Dynamics of Study

	Ideal	Adjusted
Dynamic	Dyad	Individual (1:1)

The ideal method for conducting in-person interviews would be as a dyad (i.e. two researchers and one participant). One person would moderate the interview and ask questions and the other person would take notes. This way, even if some detail is missed by the moderator, the note-taker would have written it down. However, since the research study had to be conducted individually, the adjusted method was to conduct the interviews one-on-one (1:1).

Protocol and Activities

The interview is aimed to answer the following two questions:

- What are aspirational, anxiety-mitigating characteristics of complex experiences?
- What are expectations for a positive engagement?

Along with the interview, an activity was conducted. The participants received two sheets of paper on which they briefly wrote down two experiences they had. The activity was meant to help them get started with sharing their experiences and get them into the flow. The interviews lasted about an hour.

Intro (2 minutes):

Hi, my name is Jaitra and I'll be conducting your interview today. First of all, I would like to thank you for participating in the study and for your time. The goal of today's study is to understand people's feelings when they go through certain experiences. I'll ask you some questions about your experiences and would like to know your candid responses. Please know that this is not a test of your knowledge and you don't need to worry about wrong answers. We will be spending about an hour for this interview. I would like to inform you that I will be taking notes while you speak, and with your permission, I would also like to record this session, which will only be used for the purpose of this study and will be deleted later. Will that be okay?


(Responds yes) Great, Thanks! Let's get started with the interview.

*[Start recording the session]

(Responds no) Okay, no problem. Let's get started with the interview.

Interview (60 minutes):

Let's start with a small activity. I'm going to give you two sheets of paper. I would like you to briefly fill in two experiences that you had. It could be something that happened recently or something that you remember on the top of your head. For one of them, I would like you to write about a stressful experience and for the other one, you can write about a positive or stressful experience whichever you prefer.

Experience:	_____
_____	_____
It was a	 Experience
I was trying to	_____
_____	_____
My Expectations were	_____
_____	_____
Because	_____
_____	_____

*[Pass the sheet of paper and wait for 5 minutes]

*[Take back the sheets of paper]

Tell me more about what happened (pointing to the stressful experience) (5 minutes)

- Can you describe what was going through your mind when this happened?
- What were some factors which made you dislike the experience?
- Which of these factors do you think caused you to be stressed?
- How did you react to being stressed?

[if the 2nd experience is stressful, ask the same questions again] (5 minutes)

[if the 2nd experience is positive, continue with the questions below]

2x2 Question - What are aspirational, anxiety-mitigating characteristics of complex experiences? (20 minutes):

- Okay so now, can you help me understand what the difference is between a stressful experience and a complex experience, according to you?
- Can you tell me about an experience you had which was complex?
- What were some factors that you disliked about this experience?
- And which of these factors caused you to be stressed?
- How did you react to being stressed?
- Compared to this experience, how stressful was your experience of moving to Boston for education?
- What were the factors that caused you to be stressed about moving?
- Did any specific stressful incident occur before or after moving?
- What did you do to calm yourself down?
- How successful were you in becoming calm?

Now that we spoke about stressful experiences, let's talk about positive ones.

[if the 2nd experience was stressful, ask the question below] (1 minute)

- Can you tell me about an experience you had which was positive?

[if the 2nd experience was positive, continue the questions wrt this experience]

2x2 Question – What are expectations for a positive engagement? (15 minutes):

- What were some of the factors that you liked about this experience?
- And why do you think this experience was positive?
- What do you think makes an experience positive in general?
- When you moved to Boston, what would have made your experience positive instead of stressful?

This concludes my list of questions. Do you have anything else to share or any questions for me?

(They say yes and continue – 5 minutes)

(They say no)

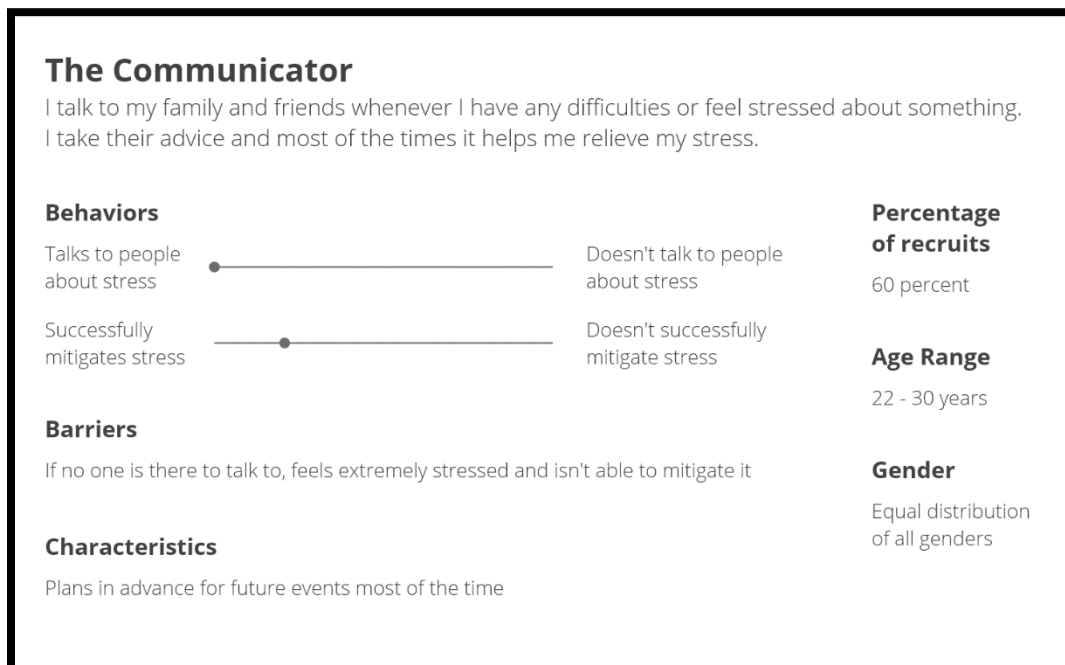
Closing Remarks (2 minutes):

I would like to once again Thank You for participating and providing honest responses to the questions and for your time. I will go ahead and stop the recording now.

*[Stop recording]

Persona

The two personas identified from the recruits were 'The Communicator' and 'The Withholder'. The Communicator is the person who talks with family and friends in order to relieve their stress. They follow the advice of people they trust. On the other hand, the Withholder is the person who doesn't share their problems with anyone. They feel that taking other people's advice isn't going to help them because they aren't in the same situation.



The Withholder

I generally don't talk to anyone about difficult situations which make me stressed. I try to think about the worst thing that could happen and try to make myself calm.

Behaviors

Talks to people about stress

Doesn't talk to people about stress

Successfully mitigates stress

Doesn't successfully mitigate stress

Percentage of recruits

40 percent

Age Range

22 - 30 years

Barriers

Since they don't ask for advice or help, they generally remain stressed because there is no other point of view of looking at the situation

Gender

Equal distribution of all genders

Characteristics

Deals with situations as and when they occur most of the time

Three of the participants (P1, P2, P3) interviewed fit the first persona i.e. The Communicator. Whenever they have to deal with a stressful situation, they said they talk to family and friends to try and relieve their stress. They trust the advice of their family and friends and most of the time their stress is mitigated to a good extent. The remaining two participants (P4, P5) fit the second persona i.e. The Withholder. Whenever they encounter a stressful situation, they said they just keep it to themselves and try to think about how to deal with it. They don't take advice from other people. They just feel a bit better about the situation after thinking about all the possibilities that can happen, but their stress is barely mitigated. However, it gives them a positive spirit to move forward. P4 falls into both the personas but when asked what he does most often, he said that he generally keeps to himself and only talks with family and friends in certain situations.

Analyze Data and Formalize Themes

Three major themes were identified after interviewing the participants. They are 1. What causes stress, 2. How people deal with stress 3. What people think is a positive experience. Stress is caused by either having a lot of things to consider, not knowing what to expect or having a mix of emotions. Dealing with stress involves talking with family and friends or people who have been in the same situation and taking advice from them, not sharing the situation with someone and keeping the stress to oneself, and keeping a positive spirit and moving on. In order for an experience to be positive, the task has to either be a step in the direction of achieving the goal or the goal has to be achieved without any extra effort or time being wasted. The factors under each theme can be organized into groups.

1. What Causes Stress

- Uncertainty
 - A lot of things to consider
 - Not knowing what to do or what to expect
 - Having a mix of emotions – uncertain about what one is feeling
- Expectations

- o Expectations about self – worrying that expectations will not be fulfilled

2. How People Deal with Stress

- Talking to people
 - o Taking advice or help from family and friends
 - o Taking advice or help from someone who has been in the same situation
- Keeping to Self
 - o Thinking about the worst possible thing that could happen
 - o Keeping a positive spirit and moving forward

3. What People Think a Positive Experience is

- Finishing a task without any unnecessary difficulties or problems
- Feeling a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment after doing something
- Effort and time put into something not being wasted, i.e. result should be in proportion to amount of effort or time put in

The personas created are a direct result of the second theme. By developing personas based on the second theme, characteristics of participants who fit the first and third themes can be seen. Participants P1, P2, and P3 fit the theme of talking with people to deal with stress. They get stressed because of a lack of clarity about what exactly has to be done. They are unclear because they consider a lot of things and try to make a plan of what to do when. Their stress is relieved by talking with family and friends or people who have been in the same situation. After talking with them, they have a better understanding of what to do and are not as uncertain as before. Thus, the uncertainty which was causing stress gets mitigated. On the other hand, participants P4 and P5 fit the theme of keeping to self when dealing with stress. They don't plan in advance, but have certain expectations in mind about the goal they want to achieve. Worrying about successfully achieving the goal is what makes them stressed. They think about the worst thing that could happen if things go wrong and try to convince themselves that they can deal with it. This reduces their stress only to a small extent but gives them a positive spirit to move forward. The third theme was common among both the personas. For all the participants, when talking about their experiences, a positive experience was some combination of completing a task with a sense of accomplishment without feeling like their time or effort had been wasted.

How this Applies to the Research Questions

The three themes identified can be used to answer the questions: what can be done to mitigate stress during a complex experience and what makes an experience positive. The most stress-inducing factor identified is uncertainty. It is caused because of not knowing what to do or getting confused because of having a lot of things to consider. In order to mitigate stress caused by uncertainty, the entire process of navigating the court system for each type of case should be well defined and documented. If the people who visit the court know what exactly they have to do and where they have to go to perform those tasks, their stress will be mitigated to a considerable extent.

The second factor which causes people to be stressed is setting expectations. Even though this factor can't be controlled, some of the stress associated with it can be mitigated. People who have stress because of setting expectations, will definitely still be stressed before going into courts, but since they deal with problems as they occur, if each individual step of the process is optimized, there won't be any

stress once they start their court process. For e.g., if tasks A, B, and C have to be performed after going to the court, and task A involves filling a very detailed form, there will be some stress involved if the person filling the form has questions. However, if there is information available about problems that most people face while filling forms, instructions can be provided for those problems along with the form itself. Likewise, if every step is optimized, stress can be reduced.

Another way to mitigate stress, according to persona 1 – The Communicator, is talking to people. By talking to people who have gone through the same situation or someone they trust, people will understand the process better and also feel the human connection as they will be talking to someone who has been in their exact same situation before. There will be trust involved if they speak with some representative of the court who can explain the process to them or answer their questions. It can even be in the form of a helpdesk or a customer support line. Basically, someone people can talk to, to help with their problems. Thus, by dealing with uncertainty, people's expectations and having someone to talk to, stress about complex experiences can be mitigated.

The second question is about people's expectations of a positive experience. People have a positive experience if they feel that they didn't have to put in unnecessary effort or time into completing a task. This doesn't mean that the task should be simple and can't require effort. It means that if a task requires effort, the result should be in proportion to the effort or time required for the task. For e.g., if a person filled a detailed form, but that form was not required at any point in the process, it is time and effort that got wasted. Getting a sense of satisfaction after completing a task is something that makes an experience positive.

Next Steps for research

After understanding what can be done to reduce stress and make the experience positive for customers, the next step is to identify how exactly it can be done. One way of mitigating stress, as stated above, is dealing with people's uncertainty. And the way to do this is by documenting the entire process. So, the next step is to identify how this information can be made available to people. For e.g., it can be made into an app that shows where in the process the customer is and what has to be done next, or it can be made into a checklist which people can follow, etc. Since this is thinking about the implementation of ideas, it falls into the 'Definition' quadrant of the 2x2. A question such as 'How can documentation of the process be made accessible to people' can be put into the bottom right quadrant of the 2x2 and further research can be conducted to answer that question. Similarly, ideation can be done about how to optimize each step of the process, and how to make someone or something available to answer people's questions.

References

Kothandaraman, M., Ludin, Z. (2016). Designing Credible Studies: A Research Framework. User Experience Magazine, 16(3). Retrieved from <http://uxpamagazine.org/designing-credible-studies/>

User Experience Researcher Salaries. (n.d.). Retrieved from:
https://www.glassdoor.com/Salaries/user-experience-researcher-salary-SRCH_KO0,26.htm

Nielsen, J. (2018, November 29). Salary Trends for UX Professionals (1998-2019). Retrieved from
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/salary-trends-usability-professionals/>

User Experience Researcher Salaries. (n.d.). Retrieved from:
<https://www.linkedin.com/salary/explorer?countryCode=xx&geoid=103644278&maxYearsExperience=0&minYearsExperience=0&titleId=14292>

UX Research Incentives. (n.d.) Retrieved from:
<https://www.userinterviews.com/ux-research-field-guide-chapter/ux-research-incentives>

Nielsen, J. (2003, January 19). Recruiting Test Participants for Usability Studies. Retrieved from
<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/recruiting-test-participants-for-usability-studies/>

Brookshier, K. (2018, June 5). Guidelines for Paying UX Research Participants. Retrieved from
<https://medium.com/mixed-methods/guidelines-for-paying-ux-research-participants-f6eca2dc9cc3>