

# A1: Needfinding!

Ashley, Daphne, Eliza, Leon



**Intro**

**01**



# OUR TEAM



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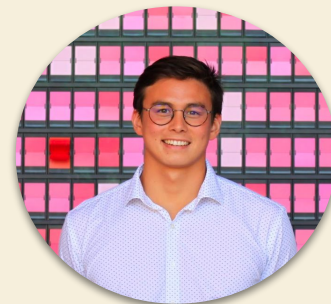
**Daphne Liu**

Junior  
Computer Science  
Salt Lake City, UT





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Coterm  
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Sydney, Australia



**Results &  
Analysis**

**03**



# PROBLEM DOMAIN

**Reducing mental overhead** through assistance or streamlining of routines, scheduling, or planning



**Needfinding  
Methodology**

**02**



# Interview Logistics

- **5** Interviews: **3** in person, **2** on Zoom
- Apparatus: Zoom transcribe, even for the in-person interviews
- Questions that we asked all interviewees:
  - What is your background?
  - If you could automate some things from your day to day life, what would they be?
  - What are some skills at previous roles that you take to make your life easier?
  - Can you give us a tour of what apps you use to start and go about your day?
- Asked specific questions tailored to each interviewee

# Participants

01

Rebecca

Event Planner at  
the OSE

02

Michael

Startup  
Co-founder

03

Kimmie

Senior at Palo  
Alto HS

04

Xiaokun

Head of an AI  
Dev Team

05

Mario

Mech-E  
Masters Student

01

Rebecca

Event Planner at  
the OSE

- 🗨️: Ashley
- 📝: Daphne
- 📍: Stanford Office of Student Engagement

### Why

- Professional in logistics and planning, incorporates lots of planning in personal life
- [**Extreme User**]- Professional planner w/ADHD

### How

- Went to OSE and asked

### Key Questions

- Asked her specifically about the best/worst part about event planning, and how that changes the way she lives her everyday life

"I don't like making doctor's appointments or dealing with healthcare... it is very emotionally draining... and you have to wait for them to get back to you"

**"I'm a chaotic person"**

"People don't know what they want- we need to pull things out of people"

"I need external motivation to get things done"

"I have ADHD- so I guess my memory is just as good as other people's"

"It's hard to start [tasks that require emotional energy]... you just drag your feet"

"Not everyone responds to all the questions we have. There is so much back and forth"

"You're organizing chaos and putting these moving parts all together like a puzzle"

"In your job you are accountable to other people, but in your own life you are not accountable to anyone else."

"Operations and logistics really see things outlined in a way that other people don't and it can be really frustrating when other people don't see what you're seeing"

"Medication would be different- I wouldn't need a reminder to take medication. I'm good at remembering those things"

"There is always something that goes wrong- you learn to expect the unexpected"

"I dislike doing finances the most... But as long as [all the finances] are written down [doing finance work] it'll be ok"

**"It's like a puzzle...you're putting all the pieces together"**

**"Doing taxes is really tedious and frustrating"**

tries to plan things in advance because there are better contingency plans, things are more expensive, specific activities in advance planning/booking

**wants to be organized but struggled**

wants something easy to whip up, a system that you don't have much friction on

uses calendar to write down things she wants to be held accountable for by other people, but not for personal tasks

likes the **visuality of goog cal- these hours are blocked off**

dislikes dealing with finances the most - need to remember to input everything into the budget

**planning jobs helped her learn how to organize**

**calendar creating pressure- you have to get this done now**

notion is not intuitive, had to look up lots of stuff for notion

She thinks on her feet and has energy and creativity

Says

Thinks

**Rebecca**

Does

Feels

**learned how to organize her life later on in life**

color codes calendar based on activity type (professional, exercise, social, appointment)

**did not use org tools until her job in logistics**

would use notes app to track time between medication, to see when to take the next dose

Plans themed parties for friends- creates facebook events with funny cover photos, inside jokes

friend groups' travel organizer- uses spreadsheets, canva to org trips

done professional org work for festivals, transit, student programming

Plans contingency budgets and estimates how much proposed money is needed

**checks google maps every day for the traffic**

blocks out time with rough estimate in google calendar if she was meeting with a friend, so she doesn't double book

**tries to have everything in one place**

**does not put personal tasks on calendar**

**does not put work email on personal device**

kept a planner before using digital org tools, but now doesn't like that you have to bring it everywhere

**uses google sheets/ google suite because it "does what i need"**

**most excited by people and when active, adrenaline inducing work is done**

appears like she would rather do everything herself- most of her problems come from looping in others

**likes notion for visuals- aesthetic and visual person**

Would rather restart a planning process again from the start in a more efficient manner than fall into the sunk cost fallacy

**enjoys the satisfaction getting planning done**

**enjoys coming up with ideas and meeting people the most**

Feels like anything that involves doing emotional labor for herself takes up more energy than usual

**enjoys coming up with ideas and meeting people the most**

**Feels annoyed when you have something squared away but it's not**

annoyed (not stressed out) when things don't go the way you've planned, because there is now more work to do

# Insights

## Observations

- Likes that planning things “locks” the time in for her, but does not put the most important things (like medication) on her calendar
- Enjoys planning things for others and her friends, but has no motivation to plan things for herself
- Thinks apps like Notion are sometimes difficult to navigate, instead resorts to Excel sheets/word docs
- Finds it hard to plan things when there is no direct cue involved (ex: recording down finances)

## Inferences

- Sees her calendar as more of a motivator than a second brain
- Likes involving others in her planning, but it is often her biggest source of frustration from their unpredictability
- Personal tasks add in emotional energy and removes external motivation
- Resorts to tools with less friction in their use (like google sheets vs notion) for personal use, versus tools aimed at aesthetics or complex planning

02

Michael

Startup  
cofounder and  
(previously full  
time student)

-  : Daphne
-  : Eliza
-  : Zoom

### Why

- Juggled startup work and school work simultaneously
- Co-founded a startup that does something that we feel is within our problem domain (automating the job search process)

### How

- DMed on Instagram

### Key Questions

- Asked him about how he came up with his startup idea and what tools he used to juggle his workload

daily active, monthly active, and churn (how many people are falling off) are better indicators of success

**filling out your resume on job apps is a useless task**

**Don't be worried about not having expertise in a field**

**not a huge fan of existing apps like trello or asana**

"Sometimes the best products that are made are made by people who are completely outsiders"

when asked by a VC why their service was different than ones that failed "i don't really care what everyone else is doing"

**"ignorance sometimes creates the best ideas"**

feedback is almost always negative, positive feedback doesn't really get written

stanford is a privilege and it opens lots of doors

**doesn't like doing laundry**

AI will be a great tool to help will automating tasks that are busy work

**likes the process of outlining**

**tools that he needs are probably tools that other people like him also need**

existing apps like notion, trello, asana dont necessarily meet all his needs

**doesn't like grocery shopping- knows why insta cart is so successful**

current planning apps aren't great, especially when you have to enter stuff

Says

Thinks

**Michael**

Does

Feels

has an executive assistant to answer emails and linkedin dms

checks notifications first when he wakes up

applied manually to 150 jobs freshman year

doesn't really use planning tools that much, really likes laptops notes app

envisions himself in other people's shoes

started company during his sophomore year/took leaves of absence

**runs a company**

created an app that automates job applications

**built something that made his life easier**

uses/has used notion, asana, trello, notes app to organize thoughts and tasks

**optimistic about the automation of mundane tasks with AI**

**annoyed by having to figure out what to wear according to the weather**

**frustrated with most planning tools**

its easier to guage how successful something is when you're solving a problem that you're dealing with

**annoyed with taking time to do things that are useless**

that negative feedback is what allows your company to grow, as long as you envision yourself in their shoes

## Insights

### Observations

- Uses iPhone Notes app a lot, also Asana, Trello but isn't a huge fan
- Hates doing laundry, cooking/cleaning, grocery shopping, lots of everyday tasks
- For his startup, built something that would make his life easier because he **“doesn't like to waste time doing things that are useless”**
- Company has seen exponential growth in users and especially interactions in the last 2 years




### Inferences

- Sometimes solutions that are more simple, like iPhone Notes are more helpful for bigger tasks than complicated software like Asana or Trello
- Finds tasks that are busywork, cumbersome, or repetitive to be “useless”
- **Focuses much more on outcome than the process (esp related to menial tasks)**

03

**Kimmie**

Paly High Senior

- : Eliza
- : Ashley
- : Peet's Town and Country

### **Why**

- Alternative academic experience- Highly organized, juggling multiple commitments + college apps

### **How**

- Reached out through mutuals

### **Key Questions**

- What's a habit you recently adopted, and one that you recently dropped?
- Where does the exact source of your stress come from?

# Kimmie

## Observations

- Enjoys how simple google calendar is and how you only need to think about small customizations
- Finds writing down tasks to often be enough to remember to do them- the list itself is not necessary after that
- Less stressed out after her tasks are planned out
- Wanted most to remove frequent but menial tasks

## Inferences

- Familiarity, ease of use is more important than amount of features, customization, or aesthetics
- Uses the calendar as an assistant to help her remember when things are to be done, and then uses her calendar as a rigid unchangeable guideline to dictate her day
- Stressed out when the timing of an event is unknown or if an event is not planned
- Dislikes having to do more menial thinking than necessary- setting alarms, ordering the same food each day, etc.

# 04

## Xiaokun

Head of AI Eng.  
Team at Sun-Net

- : Leon
- : Eliza
- : Zoom

### Why

- Chosen because of leadership position in software company (utility, gas/water software). Assume he is hyper-aware of time efficiency, own schedule and other's schedules

### How

- Recruited on LinkedIn via outreach to Engineering leads in the Bay Area

### Key Questions

- With the amount of freedom you have as team leader, how do you prioritize tasks and stay organized?
- What are some key timesaving strategies did you employ to maximize productivity during crunchtime?

# Insights

## Observations

- Worked 100 hours a week at some points during development crunch time, and **had to find ways to streamline his life to be geared towards work**
  - Ordering food instead of cooking, laundry service
- Said that when ordering food, he found he wasted time on deciding what to eat
- Uses just a long page of notion since doesn't really need to stay organized

## Inferences




- Will only plan what is necessary, as he aims to spend mental energy on work
- Wants decisions and physical tasks he doesn't consider a priority to be made for him
- Generally **needs help with completing menial tasks so he can be hyper-focused on work**



05

Mario

Second Year  
Graduate  
Mech-E

- : Leon
- : Daphne
- : Rains Apartments, Stanford

### Why

- Chosen to get a college student perspective, who also was a head of a Fraternity and has been an RA (or equivalent) since sophomore year (MIT)

### How

- Sourced via cold outreach through graduate student email list at Stanford

### Key Questions

- What do you think is the most stressful component of being an engineering student at Stanford?
- How do you stay connected with your fraternity, friends from MIT and people back home?

# Insights

## Observations

- **Schedules are never set in stone**, so has inconsistent workout schedules and socialization
- Has found it very difficult to remember to stay in-touch with people from MIT and back-home
- Religiously uses google calendar but things like chores and laundry take up time
- Chaotic scheduling for large groups of people




## Inferences

- **Dichotomy between expected time in tasks, actual time used, and wanted time**
- Overbooks days, leaving little to no time to do tasks that seem straightforward (like calling, going to the gym, socializing)
- Most disturbed when he finds that he has forgotten to call a friend or reply to an email (relationship based tasks)
- **Most setbacks are beyond his personal control** → usually circumstances or other people
- Would benefit from having less chores to worry about



Summary

04



# Key Learnings

- **Existing planning solutions don't satisfy these people**
  - People want tools that help simplify their lives, but don't have the energy to set up elaborate systems tailored just for them
  - Will pass over complexity for less friction, visual aspects
- Users voiced frustrations at **small, frequent tasks**- especially on ones that:
  - Require emotional labor (adds personal aspect)
  - Involve collaborating with other people (adding unpredictability)
  - Involve personal choices w/ simple decision-making (decision fatigue)

**How might we reduce overall mental toll without continuing to add onto one's bandwidth?**

→ thinking wrt to making small decisions and how those add up

# What's next?

- More interviews!
  - Extreme users → neurodivergent people
  - People who generally struggle with a lack of planning
  - Dig deeper into what kind of trivial things build up and bother people the most
- HMW statements
- Prototyping



**Thanks!!!**





**Appendix**

**06**



"Planning helps you put [your tasks] in a place, so you don't worry about it not happening"

"I have an hour after school where I do whatever"

"[Writing it down] is a safety net...the process of writing it down helps me remember it inherently"

"I drive to school and it's really annoying...traffic is unpredictable and it takes it 30 - 40 minutes to get to school...and I live down the street!"

"If you're too stressed out, you'll shut down"

"I'd like something what you don't have to keep pushing buttons [to start or stop studying] for"

"I'm worried about finding enough time in the day to balance schoolwork, college apps, and relaxing"

Calendar is more of an aid to her than a master plan, but is also treated like a master plan as she rigidly follows her calendar's flow and does not deviate from a task once the time is

wants something that blocks off periods of times for her

for medicine,, would set continuous reminders in her timer and alarm apps

rigidly follows the calendar- once it's in, it will not change

Prefers to know what is going to happen next and for how long- even if that action is unknown, a time is preferable

wants app trackers and just trackers where she does not need to input anything manually

wants something that automatically adds all her hw to her calendar

doesn't use notion as much as it requires so much customization

wants to save menu items so she doesn't have to spend five minutes writing it down

Says

Does

# Kimmie

Thinks

Feels

Works on SAT prep right after school as a "break" from what she's learning in school

used the pomodoro method but kept being annoyed by the breaks and timers

strictly abides by calendar, even if a task isn't completely done

Works on whatever is a priority first, and whatever she's trying to get ahead on last

used to use planners but now has transitioned to digital

preorders food so she doesn't have to wait in line

gets distracted when studying a bit (ie gets up to get food)

looks for a time for dinner with a friend; looking at calendar, looking at the tasks she needs to get done, looks for the biggest time gap there

tried notion but doesn't like building, prefers all tools to be there already

uses the timer app

uses the reminder app

blocks off time to do busy work at night so that she can do it when she's tired

sets out tomorrow's clothes on her dresser every night

spends > 25 mins getting to school due to traffic/carpools

uses facetime to organize carpools to school

runs, uses an app to track

uses google sheets and docs for college apps

Doesn't plan out free time unless it's with friends

has never forgotten about an assignment and always will get things done before the deadline

moves onto next tasks even if they're not done by the end of a calendar session

sorts and categorizes tasks herself right now (ex using sorting in google sheets)

wakes up same time every day- used to not include the weekends

plans when she has time, sometimes plans to fill that in the moment

stressed out about ordering a dress last minute

annoyed at how she needs to set alarms manually

likes a bit of customization but not too much because then it's too complicated to bother with

most of her stress comes from not knowing if a task will be done or no (it is not in her calendar yet)

stressed about school- there is constantly something due

relieved when she creates a plan to complete certain tasks

is more interested in getting an event's general information onto a calendar than a complete picture

really likes digital and google tasks

stressed as it relates to school work/ college preparation

At the beginning of his new role, prioritizing and staying organized was very unclear

**Prioritizing work over other things in life**

**Still willing to pay to outsource tasks even with more free time**

**Absolutely loves his work, and doesn't want to do much else**

**Currently he has much more time to do the things he wants to do**

He wants to find more ways to cut down on menial tasks and is willing to pay a premium for it

Certain restaurants bounded to different platforms + sometimes hard to keep track on variety

During crunch time, goal is to minimize life outside of work and get rid of anything unnecessary (100hr weeks)

**Finds that he wastes time picking which restaurant to order from**

**Work still isn't overly organized but isn't a source of stress**

**What he wants to do/enjoys outside of work is a close second**

**He thinks that chores encroach on his ability to live freely**

**Scheduling does not an issue when it comes to work itself**

**Ideally, chores are completely removed from his life**

Tasks that he views as non-productive or worthwhile that get in the way of work are the most frustrating

There should be some sort of automation that comes with ordering meals, where he doesn't have to decide and ensure variety on his own

He thinks chores take away from time to spend with his friends outside of work

**Other parts of his life could be made easier if pre-planned or automated**

**He thinks that his work is his number one priority**

Says

Does

**Xiaokun**

Thinks

Feels

**Decides what tasks to delegate to junior members as well**

Spends most of his time solving configuration problems and designing learning models

Orders food to reduce time spend shopping/cooking

Usually just has a list of tasks that need to be complete on notion and then he prioritises in his head

Now that project is done, work hours have halved but still continues to order meals + outsource meals

Spends his free time by hanging out with his friends, colleagues etc. after work and is trying to incorporate this more into his life

He spends free time doing the things he actually enjoys as mentioned above

**AI research and high system level design makes up a lot of his day**

**Uses dry cleaners to outsource all of laundry**

Wears very simple clothing to reduce the amount of time spent on picking an outfit

**Annoyed by some day to day activities during crunch time**

Would perhaps feel less stressed about tasks outside of work if it was not only outsourced but pre-planned as a package to schedule around

**He is happiest with as much autonomy over his life as possible**

Is much more comfortable with a highly specialized lifestyle that includes work and leisure only

He feels overwhelmed by aspects of life outside of work, but work itself is not overly stressful in isolation

He wants his life to be a lot like his job, where he has a lot of freedom and autonomy to choose what he does and delegate less interesting tasks

**Much of the difficulty with the major is due to group projects**

**Hard to remember to reply to emails some times**

**Workload not that bad, just scheduling and organising subgroups**

Hard to go to the gym/exercise consistently due to ever changing schedule from week to week

Life is very stressful right now because of school, job search and PHD applications

This is applicable to other well being related activities

Hates calendly, and cant use multiple google calendars to input

Very much looks forward to chatting with his friends and catching up with people back home after finishing work

**Finds it hard to remember to stay in touch with certain people**

**Chores including laundry and making food take up a lot of time**

Says

Does

**Mario**

**Uses google calendar religiously**

Often forgets to do most of these goals especially ones related to interpersonal relationships

**Has a list of goals for the week to complete outside of school**

Goals relate to reaching out to a certain person, completing a certain amount of applications etc.

Working on staying in touch with family and friends more regularly

Schedules everything in life including hanging out with friends, lunch, dinner etc.

Has tried to use calendly to organise group calls with friends from MIT, but has proven to be quite useless

**Often forgets to do stuff like laundry until it is very inconvenient**

**Working a lot on money management**

It is easy for him to lose tracks of interpersonal related tasks as work ramps up

He thinks his changing schedule due to school has definitely shaken up structure when it comes to wellbeing related activities

**Should always be improving himself by setting weekly goals**

**It's hard to organize group calls, and there is no app that offers solution**

It is hard to spontaneously keep in touch with friends back home, needs more organization to make it more regular

**Group work is hard for all the wrong reasons**

**Maintaining long distance contact with family and friends is very important**

His life is very busy and he needs a calendar to retain some structure

**Prioritization is difficult especially when it comes to emails**

Thinks

Feels

Things become the most stressful when there are multiple sources that are demanding time

**Guilt for not reaching out to friends/family**

Feels like he isn't allocating enough time to personal and well-being related activities

Sometimes becomes flustered when there is a lot of work at hand, and tends to lose out on small tasks such as emails which is frustrating

**Feels guilty when all of his weekly personal goals are not complete**

**Powerlessness when he can't find the time to talk with his friends back home**