Flow

Contextual Inquiry

Value Proposition:

Help the amateur creator finish their projects by streamlining their creative process and increasing their self-motivation.

Team Member Roles:

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Problem and Solution Overview:

Finishing a creative endeavor can be extremely daunting, difficult, and discouraging, and when this is combined with the many barriers one faces when attempting to finish their creative project, the individual often gives up, or puts their project on the back burner indefinitely.

Our product will help individuals to streamline their creative process through organizational tools, making each task seem less intimidating and more manageable. It will also provide mechanisms such as reminders and deadlines for the individual and others to hold themselves accountable, and a networking aspect that will allow them to share their progress so that they can receive feedback from other creators. We believe that providing organization, accountability tools, and more readily available feedback will significantly increase individuals' motivation, resilience, and likeliness that they will complete their project.

Contextual Inquiry Customers:

As part of our contextual inquiry, we interviewed three individuals who had shown previous interest in creative projects: a poet, a pencil artist, and book art/magazine artist.

Thomas Plank
20 – 22 Years
Stanford Student
Poet

Thomas Plank was chosen because he's displayed a passion for and interest in creative pursuits, his poetry, and we believe our product will be aimed at people who have already made the conscious decision to start and finish a project. Thomas started seriously writing poetry here at Stanford, and is currently taking an independent study with a published poet on campus.

The interview was conducted in his room so that he could show the specific types of pens and notebooks that he prefers to use and go over the process that he has developed in the recent years for writing his poetry. The interview began with asking him to describe the process of a poem from start to finish, with interjections along the way to ask for details, examples, and "why" questions.

Charu Srivastava
18 – 20 Years
Stanford Student
Pencil Artist

Figure 1.

Charu Srivastava makes pencil drawings of still-lives and portraits as in Figure 1. She was selected because she draws as a hobby, and its possible that our product will be aimed towards people who perform creative tasks as a hobby, and help these people improve their workflow and stay motivated. She doesn't have a specific workplace/studio in which to interview her because she works wherever she can find the subject she wants to draw. Figure 2 was where she was interviewed, in her room. Like Thomas Plank, we asked to hear the process of how she goes about starting a painting, deciding whether or not to continue it, and then finishing it off.

Figure 2.

Name Withheld
23 – 27 Years
UCSB Graduate Student with B.A. in Book Arts
Book Art/ Magazine Artist

Figure 3.

Our final interviewee was a woman who graduated from UCSB with a major in book arts. She is primarily involved in the making and design of books themselves. Although she does this for a living and not a hobby, many of her work habits paralleled those of hobbyists, and still provided many answers that helped confirm and quantify the general problems we'd like to address to help incentivize the creative process. The interview was conducted in her studio, where all of her work is performed. The studio was also the area in which she brainstormed all of her ideas (Figure 3 and Figure 4), so we were also able to observe how she planned and organized tasks.
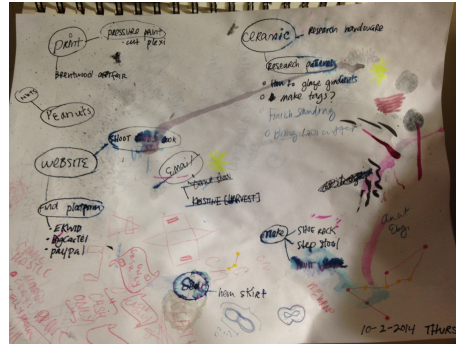

Figure 4.

Contextual Inquiry Results:

By combining these three interviews we were able to discover some themes about the creative process that were common to all three of them, as well as some that though relevant to only one or two, seemed critical to them.

1. For some creators tactile sensations and motion are an important part of creativity. (For example, a ballpoint pen being preferred over a word processer.)

2. Individuals often have a lot of self-doubt about their project both when beginning and when hitting a barrier. A validating second opinion is often the best way to assuage that doubt.

3. The spaces in which they create things often have significant meaning and influence on individuals' creative process and flow

4. Once momentum on a project or process is lost, it is extremely difficult to regain.

5. Creators can sometimes feel overwhelmed by the breadth and size of a project, and this can often times result is detrimental procrastination.

6. Constructive and encouraging feedback from others can be vital, but also intimidating and difficult to seek out.

Task Analysis Questions and Answers:

1. Who is going to use the system?
Hobbyists with projects that they must use some sort of creative process to finish, such as the poet, and pencil artist we interviewed. Although the book artists gave us helpful insights, we decided after some consideration not to target professionals. We can define creative process as any process where the path to achieve the goal is not fixed, and the creator has to innovate along the way.

2. What tasks do they now perform?
The main task that our users want to perform is the finishing of their project. The subtasks that this will break down into vary greatly from medium to medium (a musician is not going to have the same specific tasks as a novelist). However, there are some higher-level tasks that have seemed universal for creators:
1. Getting and cataloging inspiration (ex. The pencil artist needing to find a subject to draw)

2. Brainstorming (for the poet, although he may know what he wants to write about he still needs to decide *how* to write about it)

3. Doing real work on their project (the book artist needs to actually start creating her ideas)

4. Check with other people for validation/ a second opinion (all of our interviewees emphasized the importance of this.

5. Finishing (Taking the constructive feedback, editing, and producing a finished product.)

3. What tasks are desired?
The desired tasks are for the individuals to overcome to following barriers. The interviewees expressed that these barriers are what make finishing their project difficult and we want them to be able to overcome them with the help of our product.

1. Loss of Momentum; to help keep the individuals momentum up we want to help them set up a rigid set of deadlines that they must keep working to reach. This way there is never a pause in their creative process.

2. Lack of community to get that validation from or a second opinion from; as of the moment, two of our interviewees get validation and second opinions from friends and acquaintances on a face to face basis, however at least one

of them has expressed discomfort with the interaction that has lead him to put off getting feedback. The book artist has had great success utilizing Instagram, but acknowledges that it is not truly a feedback driven platform. We hope to provide a safe, readily anonymous network that will make getting a second opinion easier.

3. Fear of failure; as noted earlier, creators are often plagued with self-doubt and tend to look for validation and second opinions to assuage that. By providing a more readily available community we hope to make that validation and encouragement easier to find.

4. Scheduling problems; especially for a hobbyist, it can be difficult to find time to work on your project. Our interviewees have said that they need to make a concious effort to block out time during the day or week so that they can work. We hope organization and deadlines will help them to schedule that.

4. How are the tasks learned?

The only way to learn how to create anything is to practice it. Individuals will have to discover exactly what they need to do to make their creative process successful and all we can do is help to guide them in the right direction. Thus, we have to be conscious of making our product specific enough that it is helpful, but flexible enough that it can be used by creators of different genres, and work styles.

5. Where are the tasks performed?

Our interviewees prefer to do different tasks in different spaces. By analyzing the interviews we managed to separate these into three spaces. We should try to have a product that will be helpful in all of these spaces.

1. The Inspiration Space: this is often out in the world where interesting things our happening. Our book artists told us that her inspiration comes from all around her.

2. The Meditative Space: this can sometimes be where one brainstorms, and considers feedback. It is also where the creator sometimes goes to reflect on why they are working on their project, which can help with motivation.

3. The Creative Space: this is where the real work of the project gets done. It is often times a studio, where one has access to all their tools and can really focus.

6. What's the relationship between customer & data?

It's difficult to define the type of "data" that our customers will be working with. Instead, we've chosen some examples of items that we will consider "data" that our customers have told us about that have influenced their creative projects. These include past creations by the customer, creations by mentors or others, inspirational objects, and feedback from editors and peers. These items

generally serve two purposes. They help to motivate the creator, and they also help to inform the decisions they make (as in the case of inspirational items and editor/peer feedback.) Ideally our product will make it easier to acquire this data, and also make it easier to organize. If the individual has all the data organized and in one place on our product it will be easier to access and utilize later.

7. What other tools does the customer have?

The tools that the interviewed potential customers have used vary greatly depending on what types of projects they're working on. The tools used fall into three categories. The first category contains the tools that are actually used for creation: pens, paper, instruments, creation software, etc. The second category contains tools used for inspiration: blogs, books, magazines, music. And finally, there are a few tools used for keeping motivation. The book art/magazine designer uses Instagram to connect to a community, and put up photos of mile-markers on her project, and the poet uses his mentor to get feedback and motivation. We hope that our product will become the tool used for motivation, as only one of our interviewees said that they had any tool for that purpose, and the tool that they did use, Instagram, is not really designed for that purpose. We also hope to help the individual organize their inspirational tools.

8. How do users communicate with each other?

The potential customers that we spoke to have three main reasons for communicating with other creators: for inspiration and collaboration, to get feedback, and to share their work.   They generally communicate through a combination of social media, for example Instagram in the case of the designer, and also physical meet-ups. The poet prefers to share his poetry in a face-to-face setting, and have a real conversation to get his feedback. However, all the interviewees told us that it was often difficult to get in touch with other creators, and this lead to them not communicating as much as they would like. Our product hopes to put individuals in contact with each other in a more intuitive and convenient way so that the communication can increase exponentially.

9. How often are the tasks performed?

How often each of the tasks are performed vary greatly both on the genre of creation, and the individuals own working style. Some individuals may spend the majority of their time brainstorming, while others spend all their time on the editing process. The big question is how often each individual is doing anything related to their project, and this is where we want out product to shine. We actually hope to increase how often individuals work on any tasks related to their project.

10. What are the time constraints on the tasks?

Creative hobbyists biggest time constraints are often other commitments. It can be difficult to find time to work on hobby when the rest of the individual's life is so busy. On the flip side though, our interviewees expressed time constraints on the creative process as well. The poet was very concerned with losing his momentum; if

he let a half finished poem sit for too long, it would never be as good as it could have been. The pencil artist also said that she feels a need to get things down from her eyes to her paper as quickly as possible so that other thoughts and things don't obstruct what she wanted to draw. When starting something, the pencil artist also said that she needs get the idea of it down quickly so that she can decide if it's worthy of spending more time on. This balancing act of time commitments and constraints can be difficult to balance, and it's almost inevitable that some things will fall through the cracks. Through careful organization and scheduling tools, we hope our product can minimize the things that do.

11. What happens when things go wrong?
        For most creative processes, when things go wrong they're hard to fix. The two options are either to try and patch it/make a quick fix or to throw it all away, go back to the drawing board, and redo it. Unfortunately, these sort of all or nothing problems are commonplace, and are just part of the creative process.

Tasks our Application will Support:

1. Keeping the individual's project/progress/tasks organized and manageable
   - A Complex Task
   - Problem: A general problem our interviewees experienced was being overwhelmed by the size of their projects or being unable to efficiently prioritize/decompose tasks into manageable sizes, and accommodating them in your routine. Similar to this, the book artist in particular noted that often times she would find inspiration, but have difficulty getting it down quickly and efficiently enough; she could take a picture, but not write on it, etc.
   - Solution: A tool to organize and breakdown the project in your head, along with a timeline to schedule the now decomposed tasks and set deadlines on them. The organizational would tool would also include all of the inspiration gathered and categorized according to which task it corresponded to so that it was all easily available and flexible.
2. Providing tools for self motivation
   - A moderate task
   - Problem: Our interviewees have experienced motivational ruts in both continuing to work on projects to completion and starting new projects.
   - Solution: Keep them in touch with other creators/artists, with whom they can share their work for feedback, or browse their creations/workflows and draw inspiration from them. Also give them the tool to set deadlines for themselves, and make those deadlines public so that others can hold them accountable.
3. Obtaining meaningful and unbiased feedback
   - A simple task

- o Problem: All of our interviewees expressed the importance of feedback and second opinions, which they use for validation of ideas, as well as constructive criticism to improve on what they had already created. However, at least one of them also indicated that it was difficult for them to seek out feedback both because they were uncomfortable exposing something important to them for fear of judgment or rejection, and because worry over the qualifications of those giving the feedback.
- o Solution: Connect all the users in an anonymous network so that other creators are at the fingertips of each other for questions and advice. You can look at the creations of other to judge whether you think them qualified to give you advice, and the anonymity helps with worry of judgment or biased feedback.

Three Best Application Ideas:

1. A gamification of the creative process that utilized the individuals' curiosity as motivation. After completing a task on time the user was moved to the next level, or room. Other users could see how far each individual had gotten in their game and communicate.

2. A mobile Mind Map in which the user could organize all their tasks and set schedules, reminders, and deadlines. This would help with motivation and organization.

3. An application that focused specifically on streamlining the feedback process. All of our interviewees were adamant about the importance of feedback and also how difficult it was to find it, so a possible idea is an application all about connecting like-minded people.

Application Analysis:

Application Idea	Significance	Feasibility	Interest
Gamification	X	Y	-
Mind Map	Y	Y	Y
Streamlined Feedback	Y	Y	-

For the application we decided to pursue further, we combined the idea of a Mind Map and the idea to streamline the feedback process. We decided that at its core the most important thing we wanted our product to accomplish was increasing self-motivation. Many of our interviews indicated that validating and productive

feedback was one of the most important influences on their motivation. Our prospective customers also talked about how procrastination and loss of momentum was one of the most detrimental things to productivity, thus the Mind Map with deadlines, reminders, and well-defined organized tasks also seemed like an effective tool for increasing motivation. In addition, one interviewee in particular said that she is often overwhelmed by the size of an endeavor, which counter-intuitively prompts her to put it off. Organizing large projects into manageable portions would assist with this as well. Although either of the original ideas would have most likely been significant in some way on their own, we decided that they would be more effective combined.

Our final idea consists of an organizational map, which the creator can use to decompose their project into smaller chunks, and then into separate tasks. The creator can set deadlines for themself for when each task should be completed. After completing a task, they can upload that finished part to their map. The maps will be made public to other users, so that they can all provide feedback and encouragement to each other. Other users will also be able to see the deadlines each person sets for themself, so that they can assist in holding each other accountable. Another key part of this project is its anonymity. It will be easier to receive feedback when it is from someone that you don't know because the criticism seems less directed at yourself. It is also easier to be honest in your feedback when you don't worry about the specific person you are speaking too, only their project.

Sketches of Important Screens:

Edit ← [pencil / refresh icons] → Get Feedback

— Jazz Score —

Record Bass
Find Drummer
Record Piano

Week 1   Week 3   Week 5

| Mind-Map | Timeline |

5. Timeline

Make Private ← [share icons] → Share

flow

New Jazz Score

Add Task   Add Note/Idea

| Mind-Map | Timeline |

3. Mind-Map

flow

3/4 Bass Verse   12/8 Bass Chorus

Find Drummer   Bass   Record Piano

New Jazz Project

C minor Pentatone   Sax + Piano Duet

| Mind-Map | Timeline |

1. Brainstorm

New project page – Mindmap