"Time Balance" Team
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Contextual Inquiry 1

The person observed and interviewed for this contextual inquiry is Jack, a salary based software developer who only works from his home office. He is given a daily or weekly task to complete by pulling a task from a list created by himself and other employees. The current overall task of his department is to build a complete suite of web tools to manage the company efficiently. He spends a majority of his time at home and would like a better way to schedule his daily routine around a full day of work.

Jack currently uses a simple timer to track his work progress, and his natural habits to fill in the remainder of the day. He also focuses on how much energy he exerts during the day, as sitting behind a monitor all day is not healthy. He focuses not on the time spent exercising, but the overall caloric burn. He would like to balance work, hobbies, sleep, and exercise. He has a very similar routine each day, and could easily program his day into a schedule, but does not do so because any spontaneous adjustments to his schedule results in a cumbersome process of adjustments in the program. He also has a hard time context switching between general events, such as stopping and resuming work, so he does not usually break up his tasks throughout the day.

The first element that we learned was the lack of usefulness of our current design. Jack was unsure that he might balance anything better if he had to start and stop a handful of timers to help track himself. He was far more interested in having an alert to tell him when to switch tasks. We came to the conclusion that if he were able to program in his ideal "balanced" day into a tracker, it would need a set of alarms to alert him when it was time to do the next thing, and an available "snooze" button that automatically shifted everything in his schedule. Jack liked the idea of having templates for his daily routines so he could easily load up a normal day into a scheduler, but would still require an easy way to modify it "on the fly". At the end of each day, he would like to see a report of his actual "time-balance" and exercise goals.

Another element we learned about was the design package. Jack was not too excited to have an app on his phone that tethered him to it for 24 hours. We presented the idea of a wearable watch design which could include a pulse sensor to monitor his heart rate. This caught his interest as a way to directly monitor how much exercise he gets, schedule his balance of tasks throughout the day, and be easily available and visible on his wrist. We will add these ideas to our list of designs.

We feel that observing time-balancing requires observing a full schedule, yet it is difficult to observe someone for such a lengthy time. This presented as a difficulty for this contextual inquiry. For this inquiry and the remaining inquiries, we will conduct an initial interview of "time-balance" expectations, attempt to acquire feedback about some current design ideas, and conduct a follow up interview after asking the participant to politely maintain a time journal and a record of scheduling mishaps.