Scaffold

Independent UX Research Project

Research Synthesis

Synthesis Overview

Following interviews and systems analysis, recurring behavioral and emotional patterns were grouped into thematic clusters.

The synthesis process focused on:

- cognitive bottlenecks
- emotional escalation
- environmental triggers
- support preferences
- decision overload
- ambiguity
- autonomy needs
- system failure points

The synthesis process reframed executive dysfunction not as a lack of motivation, but as a mismatch between system expectations and available cognitive bandwidth.

Affinity Cluster 01

AMBIGUOUS ENTRY POINTS

Participants frequently described tasks as:

- too large
- undefined
- difficult to sequence
- cognitively inaccessible
- difficulty locating a clear starting point

DESIGN IMPLICATION

Reduce ambiguity by surfacing only the next actionable step.

Affinity Cluster 02

EMOTIONAL ESCALATION

Task accumulation triggered:

- shame
- guilt
- panic
- self-criticism
- catastrophic thinking
- emotional shutdown

Participants often described existing productivity systems as increasing stress rather than reducing it.

DESIGN IMPLICATION

Avoid punitive framing, urgency loops, streaks, compliance tracking, or pressure-oriented interaction patterns.

Affinity Cluster 03

COGNITIVE OVERLOAD

Participants described:

- decision fatigue
- mental fragmentation
- inability to prioritize
- overwhelm during multitask environments
- difficulty retrieving sequencing strategies under stress

DESIGN IMPLICATION

Reduce simultaneous demands and externalize sequencing.

Affinity Cluster 04

SUPPORT VS CONTROL

Participants strongly differentiated between:

Helpful Support

- collaborative
- consent-based
- interruptible
- emotionally safe
- non-judgmental

Harmful Support

- nagging
- surveillance
- escalation pressure
- forced accountability
- coercive accountability

DESIGN IMPLICATION

Require explicit user approval before actions or interventions.

Affinity Cluster 05

NERVOUS-SYSTEM REGULATION

Executive functioning was deeply connected to:

- sensory environment
- emotional state
- stress load
- transition pacing
- perceived safety
- cognitive bandwidth

DESIGN IMPLICATION

Design for calm transitions, low visual noise, and reversible interactions.

Primary Insight

The problem was not motivation.

It was the cognitive and emotional labor required to translate intention into executable sequence while already overloaded.

Systems Insight

Scaffold increasingly evolved away from:

- productivity optimization
- behavioral enforcement
- automation-first thinking

Toward:

- cognitive scaffolding
- ambiguity reduction
- emotional safety
- autonomy-preserving support
- limited-scope AI interaction