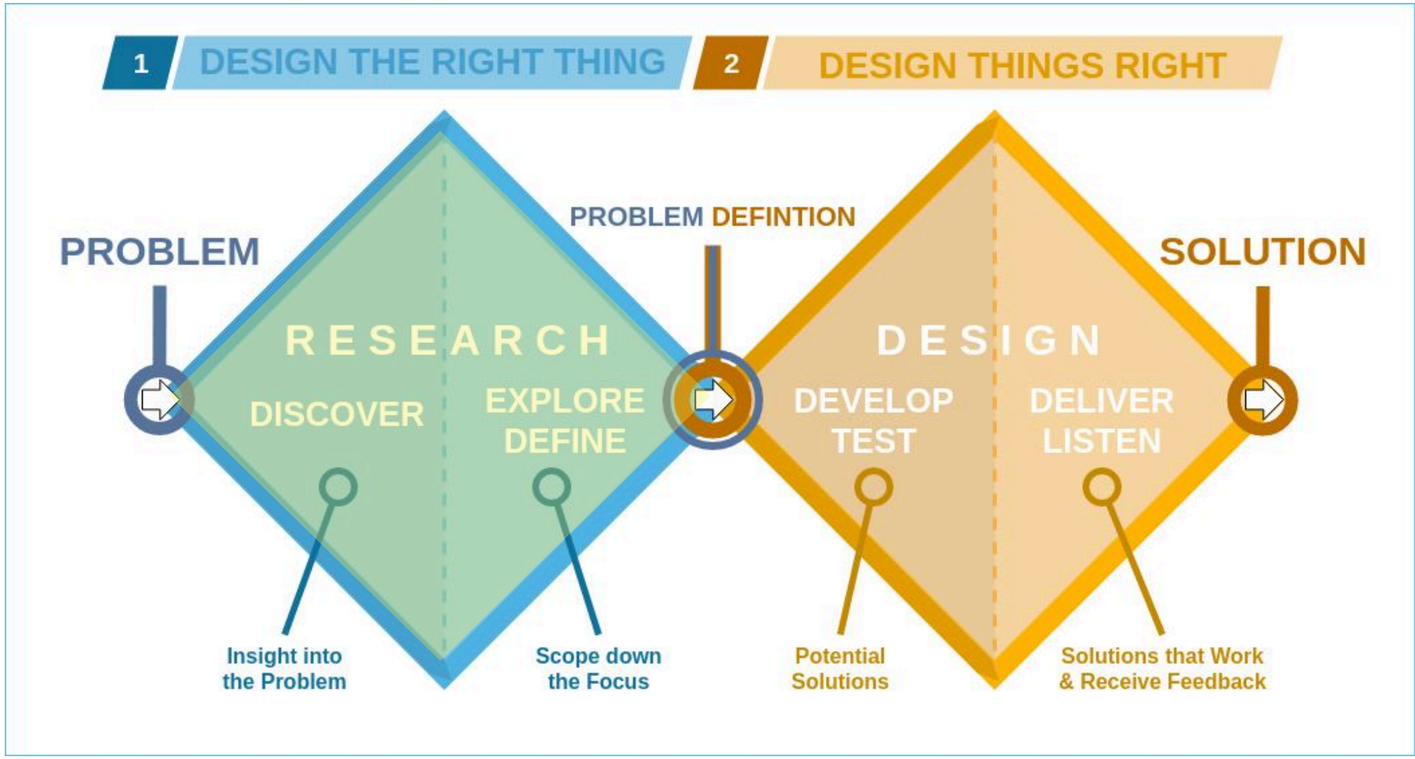
The Future of Mindful Gaming for Older Adults

My Daily Double Diamond Design Thinking — Project 3

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Project Overview
What this project explores

This project focuses on the Discover and Define stages of the Double Diamond methodology.

The challenge

The goal was to explore challenges older adults face when engaging with digital games and to identify meaningful design opportunities for more accessible and enjoyable experiences.

Why this matters

Rather than jumping directly to solutions, this process emphasized understanding users first and clearly defining the problem.

Discover: Activities

Activities Used:
- Empathy Mapping
- Freelist Brainstorm

Focus Areas:
- Emotional responses to gaming
- Accessibility challenges
- Cognitive load
- Initial engagement barriers

Key Insight:
Early user frustration comes from confusing interfaces and unclear entry points.



Empathy Map

Persona Information

Margaret Thompson

Age: 72
Retired elementary school teacher
Lives independently in suburban home
Owns iPad, uses email YouTube

About Her

Margaret values routine and independence. She completes crosswords daily and watches quiz shows to keep her mind active. She feels cautious using unfamiliar apps and avoids technology that feels overwhelming.

HEARS

- "Tech moves too fast."
- Family suggests new apps
- Brain health advice

SEES

- Cluttered interfaces
- Youth-focused ads
- Fast-paced visuals

SAYS & DOES

- "I'm not tech savvy."
- Completes crosswords
- Avoids new downloads

THINKS & FEELS

- Wants mental sharpness
- Fears making mistakes
- Values independence

PAIN

- Overwhelming UI

GAIN

- Confidence & calm

Empathy Map

Persona Information

David Chen

Age: 68
Retired Accountant
Lives in downtown condo
Uses smartphone, tablet, gaming console daily

About Him

Robert enjoys staying mentally active and follows technology trends. He plays casual mobile games occasionally but finds most modern games overstimulating or repetitive.

HEARS

- Friends discuss fitness apps
- articles on brain teasing
- “Stay sharp after retirment”

SEES

- flashy mobile ads
- In-app purchase pop ups
- Competitive leaderboards

SAYS & DOES

- “Most games feel Shallow.”
- Plays games like suduko
- reads tech blogs daily

THINKS & FEELS

- Values efficiency
- Enjoys competition
- likes statistics

PAIN

- Repetitive gameplay

GAIN

- Engaging challenge

Freelisting — Discover Activity

Would you please list all the factors that influence whether an older adult feels comfortable using a digital game?

Freelisting with Peer #1: Jonah

- Large readable text
- Clear instructions
- Simple navigation
- Low time pressure
- Minimal ads
- Familiar themes
- Touch-friendly buttons
- Tutorial mode
- No complex controls

Freelisting with Peer #2: Anna

- Emotional safety
- Calm visuals
- Predictable pacing
- Voice guidance
- Accessibility options
- No competition stress
- Encouraging feedback
- Social connection
- Routine integration

Common Themes

- Clarity & Simplicity
- Emotional Safety
- Accessibility
- Low Cognitive Load

Reflection: Conducting this freelisting activity with younger peers revealed that most associations focused on reducing stress, simplifying interaction, and ensuring emotional reassurance. Interestingly, neither participant initially associated gaming with competition or entertainment for older adults, but rather with comfort, familiarity, and safety. This suggests the opportunity space lies in designing mindful experiences rather than traditional games.



Discover: Reflection

What I learned

Older adults are not resistant to gaming — they are resistant to confusion.

Emotional safety plays a major role in adoption.

Impact

This shifted my perspective from “How do we teach older adults gaming?”
to
“How might we redesign gaming to feel welcoming from the start?”

Define: Activities

Activities Used:
- Rapid User Profiles
- Five Whys

Root Cause Identified:
Digital games are designed primarily for experienced users, unintentionally excluding older adults.

Refined Focus:
The problem is not lack of interest — it is perceived accessibility.





"I want to keep my mind active, but I don't want to feel confused or embarrassed."

Profile 1: Margaret Thompson (72)

Retired elementary school teacher living independently.

Situation and Context

What is the typical context of the real people represented by this archetype?

- Lives alone in a condo
- Uses an iPad daily for news and video calls
- Has free time in afternoons
- Limited prior gaming experience

Goals and Motivations

Beyond our product and service, what motivates this person?

- Maintain cognitive sharpness
- Build confidence using technology
- Establish a calming daily routine
- Feel independent and capable

Fears and Frustrations

What keeps them up at night? What does a bad day look like?

- Small text and cluttered screens
- Fast-paced interactions
- Fear of pressing the wrong button
- Feeling "too old" for technology

Tasks and Tactics

What does the person do to accomplish their goals?

- Downloads simple puzzle apps
- Watches YouTube tutorials
- Asks grandchildren for tech help
- Uses apps with clear navigation



"I enjoy a challenge, but it has to make sense."

Profile 1: David Chen (68)

Recently retired accountant adjusting to increased free time.

Situation and Context

What is the typical context of the real people represented by this archetype?

- Recently retired after 35 years
- Misses structured mental challenges
- Uses a laptop more than a tablet
- Occasionally plays Sudoku online

Goals and Motivations

Beyond our product and service, what motivates this person?

- Keep analytical skills sharp
- Replace work-related mental stimulation
- Feel productive in retirement
- Compete lightly with friends

Fears and Frustrations

What keeps them up at night? What does a bad day look like?

- Games that feel childish
- Overly flashy graphics
- Hidden rules or unclear scoring
- Feeling that games lack purpose

Tasks and Tactics

What does the person do to accomplish their goals?

- Searches for "brain training" apps
- Reads reviews before downloading
- Prefers games with statistics or progress tracking
- Sets small daily challenge goals

Define Activity — Five Whys

Problem: Older adults hesitate to engage with digital games.

1. Why? → Because many digital games feel overwhelming or confusing.

2. Why are they overwhelming? → Interfaces are designed for fast, experienced users.

3. Why are they designed that way? → The gaming industry primarily targets younger audiences.

4. Why does that create hesitation? → Older adults feel the experience is not built for them.

5. Why does that matter? → When users feel excluded or incompetent, they avoid engagement entirely.

Root Cause: Digital gaming environments unintentionally signal exclusion rather than accessibility.



Define: Reflection

Challenges

Separating surface frustrations from deeper design assumptions, while using Rapid User Profiles to better understand different user motivations and abilities.

Avoiding assumptions about ability.

Breakthrough

Recognizing that emotional comfort is a design feature.

This clarified that the future of mindful gaming should focus on approachability, not simplification alone.

Case Study / Analysis Section

The case study demonstrated how thoughtful onboarding and simplified interfaces increase engagement among older users.
It reinforced that successful design for older adults does not remove complexity entirely — it structures it progressively.



Project 2 Case Study: Discover Define

Reflection 1 — Design Team Topics / Disciplines

- User Research
- Cognitive Aging
- UX & Accessibility
- Emotional Wellbeing

Explanation

The design team conducted extensive user research to understand older adults' cognitive and emotional needs. They studied cognitive aging to identify common mental challenges. Accessibility and UX principles guided interface decisions, while emotional wellbeing research ensured the design promoted confidence and reduced stress during gameplay.

Reflection 2 — How Might We Statements

- HMW design games that build confidence rather than stress?
- HMW create experiences that are emotionally safe for older adults?
- HMW reduce cognitive overload while maintaining engagement?

How We Arrived at These HMW Statements

We analyzed the insights from user research and rapid user profiling. By clustering common themes across older adults' goals, frustrations, and needs, we identified emotional safety, confidence, and cognitive accessibility as recurring challenges. These informed the three HMW statements above, linking directly to observed pain points while keeping design opportunities actionable.

Develop: Reflection

While this project centered on Discover and Define, reflecting on early ideas reinforced the importance of grounding future solutions in research rather than assumption.

Clarity in problem definition creates stronger innovation later.



Closing

What This Project Demonstrated

- Discover builds empathy through research
- Define creates clarity and focus
- Emotional design is essential in accessibility
- Clear problem framing strengthens future innovation

Next Steps

Move into Develop by prototyping mindful, accessible gaming concepts grounded in these findings.

