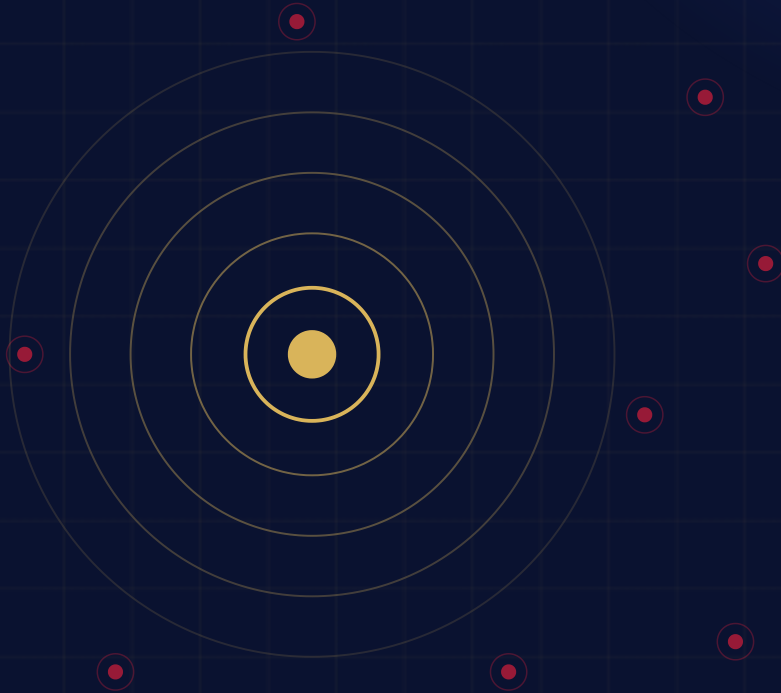




DEEP WORK

Small Enough to Start

456 learners have completed an OCH drill. 19 have submitted a mission. The gap is not a character flaw.

A mission is not hard because it is long. It is hard because it asks for an uninterrupted hour in a life built from interruptions.

KEY FINDINGS

- As at 17 October 2026: 456 OCH learners have submitted a drill, 19 have submitted a mission.
- Hard tasks need high motivation, and deep work needs an uninterrupted hour most learners rarely get.
- OCH commits to testing whether smaller first steps raise mission submissions by 4 December 2026.

As at 17 October 2026, 456 learners on the OCH platform had submitted at least one drill, and 19 had submitted a mission. Both are free. The tempting reading is that most learners lack commitment. This essay argues that the evidence points somewhere more useful: the difference lies in the size of the first step and in the state of attention people can bring to it. Those are design problems, and some of them are ours.

01 What the numbers show, and what they do not

A drill takes about five minutes and can be done on a phone between other things. A mission asks for an hour or more of sustained work, usually on a laptop, with a brief to read, a decision to make and an artefact to produce. The two numbers above are pilot figures from OCH's own database [6]. They are not a controlled comparison: missions unlock later than drills, there are fewer of them, and they are harder by design. But a ratio of roughly 24 to 1 is too large to explain by difficulty alone.

FIGURE 1 Learners who have done a drill, and a mission

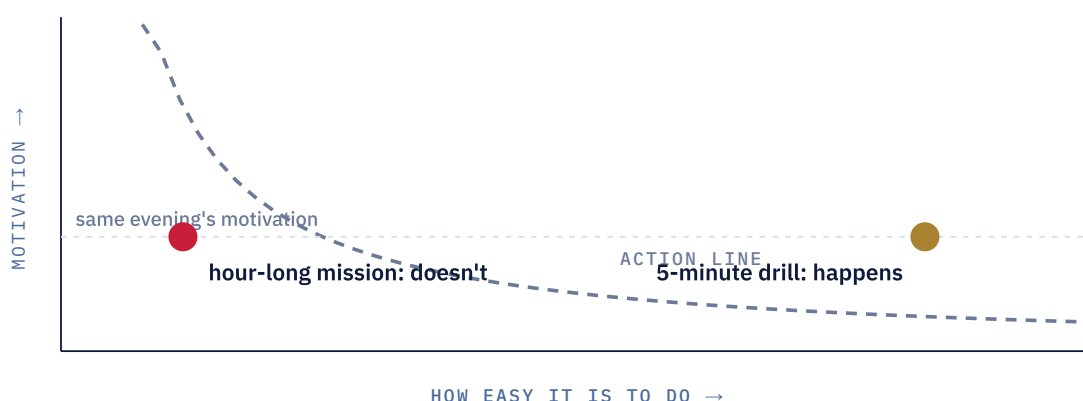


Distinct learners, OCH platform, as at 17 October 2026. Pilot figures; not a controlled comparison [6].

02 Behaviour needs more than motivation

BJ Fogg's behaviour model holds that a behaviour happens when motivation, ability and a prompt come together at the same moment. When a task is easy, modest motivation is enough. When a task is hard, it takes high motivation to cross the line, and motivation rises and falls through any day [1]. A five-minute drill sits comfortably above the line. A mission, for a learner with a shared laptop and an evening already full, often sits below it, however much that learner wants a security career.

FIGURE 2 Same motivation, different size of task



Conceptual, after Fogg's behaviour model [1].

A mission is not hard because it is long. It is hard because it asks for an uninterrupted hour in a life built from interruptions.

03 The attention a mission needs

Cal Newport describes deep work as focused effort that pushes ability to its limit, and argues that it is becoming both rarer and more valuable [5]. The research on attention explains why it is rare. Sophie Leroy found that when people switch away from an unfinished task, part of their attention stays behind, and performance on the next task suffers; she called this attention residue [2]. Gloria Mark and colleagues found that people who are interrupted often complete their work just as quickly, by working faster, but report more stress, frustration and effort [3]. And Eyal Ophir and colleagues found that heavy media multitaskers were worse, not better, at filtering out irrelevant information, though that finding is a correlation rather than proof of cause [4].

A learner with fourteen WhatsApp groups, a phone face up on the desk and a mission brief open is not short of willpower. They are trying to do deep work in conditions designed for shallow work.

04 An evening in Eldoret

ILLUSTRATIVE SCENE

A third-year student sits down in her hostel at nine in the evening to start her first mission. The laptop is borrowed until ten. She reads the first paragraph of the brief. Her phone lights up twice with class group messages, once with a family call she returns, and three more times before she reaches the decision the mission asks for. At 9:40 she has read the brief twice and written nothing. She closes the laptop and does a drill on her phone instead, which takes four minutes and marks her as active for the day.

05 What OCH is changing

If the problem is the size of the first step, the response is to make the first step smaller. OCH has begun adding recipes to mission pages: short, step-by-step guides that turn the opening of a mission into something that can be started in ten minutes. The daily drill, delivered on WhatsApp, works as the prompt in Fogg's model. Neither has yet been shown to move mission submissions, and that is the test this essay commits to.

06 What would change our mind

If smaller first steps and better prompts do not raise the share of active learners who submit a mission by the end of Cohort Two on 4 December 2026, the problem is probably not the size of the task. It is more likely to be motivation, relevance, or access to a device, and OCH will say so and change course. The figures will be reported against the 17 October baseline above.

07 What to do on Monday

For learners. Book two sixty-minute blocks this week and put your phone in another room for both. Make the goal of the first block tiny: open the mission, read the brief, and write one sentence about the decision it is asking for. Starting is the hard part.

For mentors. Break your next mission review into a first step a learner can finish in ten minutes, and tell them that is all you expect first.

For employers. Protect one block of uninterrupted time a day for junior staff. Most of what you hire them to learn requires it, and most offices make it impossible.

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Drafted with AI assistance and reviewed before publication. External figures were checked against the sources cited; scenes marked illustrative are composites, not reports of real events; OCH figures are dated.