SESSION 9

Permission to Ideate

Design Thinking for MBAs

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 | Faculty: Patrick Ray

Find the Duct Tape

This is a **weekly practice**. Every week, you should be identifying and documenting workarounds, improvised fixes, and duct-tape solutions in the world around you.

Quick share (pairs, then full group):

1. Turn to a neighbor. Share one duct-tape fix you spotted this week.
2. What problem was it trying to solve? Who created it and why?
3. What does it tell you about the system it lives in?

Duct tape = evidence of unmet needs. Train your eye to see these everywhere.

~10 minutes

> **Helpful Hint:** *Look for hand-written signs, propped-open doors, taped-over buttons, Post-it reminders on machines. These are all signals of a design gap.*

Why We Waited This Long

- Four sessions understanding the problem. Stakeholders. Causal loops. Reframing. Problem definition.
- That **discipline of restraint** pays off now.
- Today you build solutions. But every idea must connect back to something you learned.

> **Helpful Hint:** *No orphan solutions. If you can't trace it to your research, it's a guess.*

Solutions Tic-Tac-Toe

Draw a 3x3 grid. Fill all 9 squares with solution concepts for your problem.

Rows (Risk): Low / Medium / High

Columns (Scope): Individual / System / Policy

The rule: no two ideas should be variations of each other. If you could easily combine them, they're too similar. **Make them incompatible.**

Push into the uncomfortable squares.

~25 minutes (including share-out)

The Grid

	Individual	System	Policy
Low Risk	*your idea here*	*your idea here*	*your idea here*
Medium Risk	*your idea here*	*your idea here*	*your idea here*
High Risk	*your idea here*	*your idea here*	*your idea here*

> **Helpful Hint:** *If every square is a variation on the same idea, start over.*

Constraint Storm

Now we push your thinking further. For each constraint, generate **as many ideas as possible** before the next one appears.

How it works:

1. A constraint will appear on screen
2. You have **2 minutes** per constraint
3. Write down every idea that fits the constraint, no matter how wild
4. Quantity over quality. Don't self-edit. Just write.

Constraints force creativity. The stranger the constraint, the more original the idea.

~15 minutes total

CONSTRAINT 1

Your solution must cost under $1.

What can you do with almost nothing? Think behavior changes, information, social nudges, reframing.

2 minutes

CONSTRAINT 2

Your solution must cost more than $1 million.

Go big. Infrastructure, systemic overhaul, large-scale programs. What becomes possible when budget is not the bottleneck?

2 minutes

CONSTRAINT 3

Your solution must involve robots or automation.

Where could you remove humans from the loop entirely?
What repetitive process is begging to be automated?

2 minutes

CONSTRAINT 4

Your solution must be a physical piece of hardware (not electronic).

Think mechanical, tangible, spatial. A tool, a structure, a physical redesign of the environment.

2 minutes

CONSTRAINT 5

Your solution must be implementable in 24 hours.

What could you build, launch, or change by tomorrow? Strip away everything except the core action.

2 minutes

CONSTRAINT 6

Your solution must require zero technology.

No apps, no software, no electronics. How would you solve this in 1950? Think people, process, policy, physical space.

2 minutes

CONSTRAINT 7

Your solution must serve a completely different stakeholder.

Not your primary user. Pick someone on the periphery of your problem. What would you build for them?

2 minutes

What Did the Grid Reveal?

- Which idea would you **never have reached** through conventional brainstorming?
- Which squares were hardest to fill? Why?
- Did any ideas make you rethink your problem definition?
- Which ideas are most connected to your **stakeholder research**?
- Did any constraint spark an idea that surprised you?

From Idea to Hypothesis

Select your top 1-2 concepts from the grid or constraint storm. Reframe each as a testable hypothesis:

We believe **[solution]** will **[outcome]** for **[stakeholder]**

because **[insight from our research]**.

> **Helpful Hint:** *The "because" clause is the whole point. It must trace back to your research.*

Writing Your Hypotheses

For each of your top 1-2 concepts:

1. Write the hypothesis using the format on the previous slide
2. Make the outcome **specific and testable** (not "improve satisfaction" but "reduce the time new employees spend searching for answers in their first week")
3. The "because" clause must reference a **specific insight** from your stakeholder research, observations, or causal loop

If you can't write the "because" clause, the idea isn't grounded. Pick a different one.

~15 minutes

Connect to Your Research

For each concept, answer:

- What **specific problem insight** does this address?
- Which **stakeholder** does this serve?
- What would have to be **true** for this to work?

> **Helpful Hint:** *That last question becomes a full activity in Session 11. For now, just name your top assumption.*

What's Next

- 👣 Monday (Session 10): **Mid-Project Gallery Walk**
- Teams set up stations with their problem definition, research highlights, and top concepts
- Class rotates through stations, leaving written feedback at each one
- Show your thinking, not polish. **Traceability matters more than slide design.**

> **Helpful Hint:** *Your station should answer "Why this solution for this problem?" with evidence.*

Find the Duct Tape: Each week, identify and document one workaround or improvised fix in your notebook.

See you Monday!