SESSION 9

Permission to Ideate

Design Thinking for MBAs

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 | Instructor: Patrick Ray

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.

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

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

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.

🕐 ~30 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

"If every square is a variation on the same idea, start over."

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**?

From Idea to Hypothesis

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

We believe **[solution]** will **[outcome]** for **[stakeholder]** because **[insight from our research]**.

"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?

> *"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 Presentations**

- 5-6 minutes per team + 2 min Q&A

- Cover: problem definition, top 1-2 concepts as hypotheses, connection to research

- Show your thinking, not polish. **Traceability matters more than slide design.**

> *"Your presentation 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!