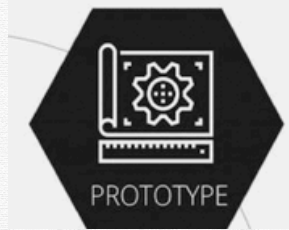


The journey through the design process

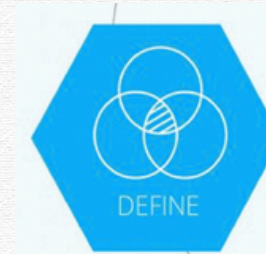
By Yesuf Mustefa



In the beginning of this quarter I was unaware of the importances of the whole design process. With my passion towards prototyping taking control of the wheel, I often neglected the other parts of the design process like, Empathize, Define, Ideate. All I was concerned with was making a cool design that made an impact in people's life. I felt in the trap being only concerned with outcomes. Soon I realized that this way of thinking isn't optimal and it only creates a design that isn't user centered.



During the empathizing process, I initially believed that my role was simply to listen to what participants wanted and use their input as a template for my design. However, I soon realized that I wasn't the sole designer in the process—they were designers too. Their perspectives and involvement actively shape how the process unfolds. In my very first workshop, a participant said, "Remove all assumptions." Those three words were mind-blowing because, up until that moment, assumptions had guided much of my thinking. That experience, along with witnessing how participants advocated for their communities, deepened my understanding of why we must put the user first.



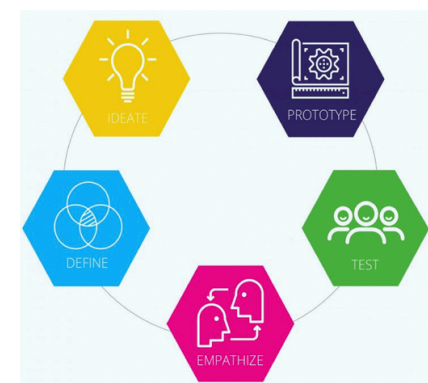
I once assumed that simply going through the Empathize phase would reveal the problem for me. However, I quickly realized that empathizing often uncovers multiple issues rather than presenting a single, clear answer. Through the GID Lab internship, I learned that problems are rarely black and white; they exist in layers, requiring careful reframing to uncover their true essence. Working on a poorly structured elevator pitch helped me understand what makes a strong one. Initially, my team and I struggled to clearly communicate our ideas, which made us realize the importance of refining and defining a message before presenting it.



During the Ideate phase, I noticed a common challenge—not just for myself, but for others as well. In the workshops, people were often hesitant to share their ideas out of fear of judgment. I found myself doing the same, holding back ideas because I worried they weren't good enough. This fear created a roadblock, making it difficult to explore creative solutions.

However, I saw a simple yet powerful shift unfold—people started taking chances by saying their "bad" ideas out loud. Instead of hiding behind anonymity, they embraced vulnerability, realizing that even imperfect ideas could spark better ones. Witnessing this changed my perspective. I stopped overthinking and started contributing freely, understanding that the ideation process thrives on open, unfiltered brainstorming.

Through the GID Lab internship, I learned that the best ideas often come from unexpected places, and the willingness to take risks in a supportive environment leads to true innovation. Letting go of the fear of judgment made me a more confident designer and helped create a space where creativity could flourish.



At the start of this journey, I was deeply passionate about prototyping, believing that the real impact of design came from creating something tangible. I saw the other phases—Empathize, Define, and Ideate—as secondary, assuming the problem would reveal itself along the way. However, through my experiences in workshops and the GID Lab internship, I came to realize that design is not just about the final product; it's about the process that shapes it. Empathizing taught me that I am not the sole designer—users play an active role in shaping solutions. Defining showed me that problems are rarely simple; they require deep analysis and reframing. Ideating challenged me to embrace uncertainty, let go of perfectionism, and take creative risks. Each phase plays a crucial role in crafting meaningful, user-centered solutions.