BEYOND THE
PROTOTYPE

WRAP IT UP

SHARE YOUR STORY

CHART THE COURSE

EXPAND THE INNER CIRCLE

CULTIVATE THE CULTURE

GET GUIDANCE
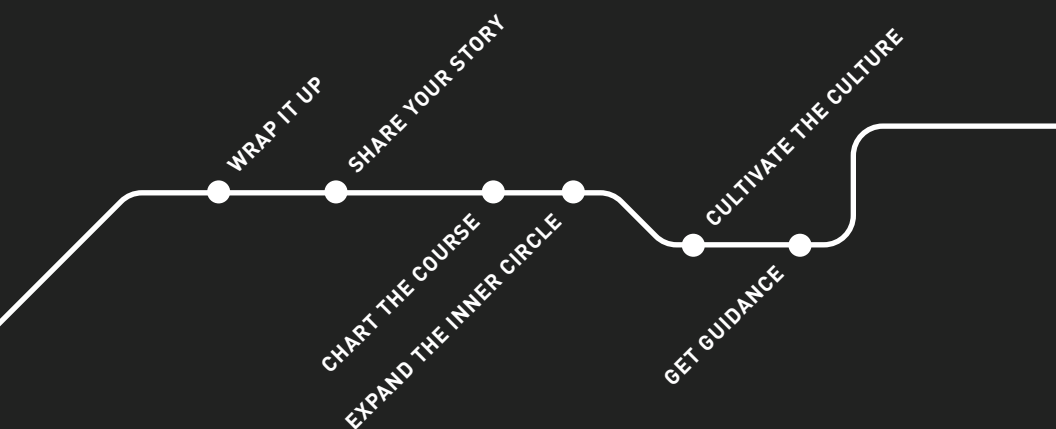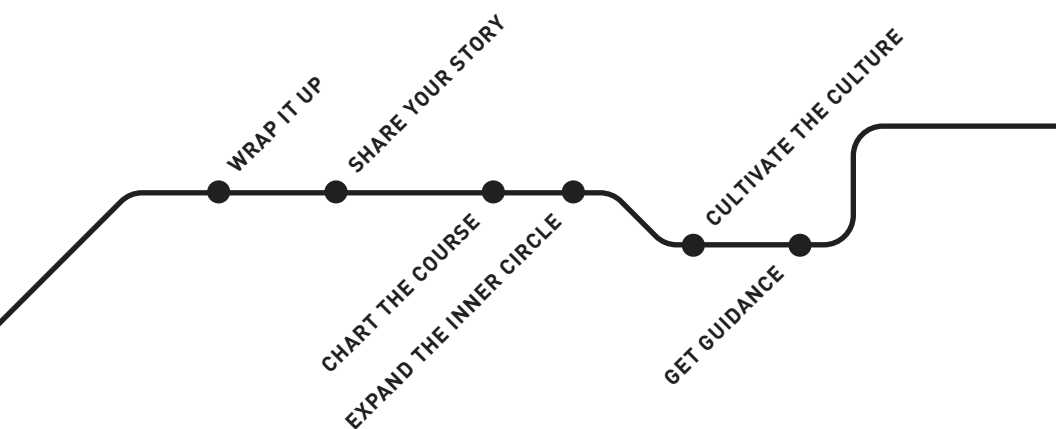
A roadmap for navigating the fuzzy area **between ideas and outcomes**

Douglas Ferguson

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Version 0.1

For Tamara, Bowie, Dirty, Sammy, and the Shrink.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

You've got it in your hands. It's just like you imagined. You can't wait to show it off to the world. (Nope, it's not your newborn baby.) It's your prototype.

Before diving in further, don't get scared off or confused by the term 'prototype'. If you don't think you've ever made one, you probably have. A prototype can mean many things and take many forms. It might be a simple mock-up of the on-demand breakfast taco delivery app you've been dreaming up. Or, your "prototype" might be a vision document that tells the story of the new chain of 4D movie theaters you want to build. A storyboard of a script, a napkin drawing, a rough draft pitch deck. These are rapid prototypes. A prototype is just a quick simulation of the real thing that you create to uncover deeper insights and expose the riskiest assumptions about your idea.

Maybe you've used your prototype to do some research and user testing that gave you the confidence that your idea has some legs. Maybe it's been tucked away in a drawer somewhere. Whatever it looks like, you have a robust idea, a compelling concept, a set of features, a bundle of consumer insights, and a validated prototype.

But, the burning question is: what next?

That's what this book is all about. It's for people who have struggled to move a critical project forward. It's about those

times when you know where you want to go, but you can't get beyond business-as-usual to push it over the finish line. It's about overcoming that slump when you have a notion of what something could be but feel bewildered about how to march forward and build it.

Beyond the Prototype is your guide to navigating that fuzzy area between exploration and implementation.

Sprinting is one way

As a professional Design Sprint facilitator, I lead companies of all sizes through the five-day Design Sprint methodology, developed by Jake Knapp at Google Ventures. To me, it's one of the best frameworks for jump-starting a project, creating a prototype, and exploring a user-validated approach to any business challenge.

Because of my love for Design Sprints, I've written Beyond the Prototype largely from the perspective of this method. Sprints are just one way that people and companies develop ideas. You definitely don't have to run a Design Sprint to get value out of these pages. (Although, I hope you'll be inspired to try one.)
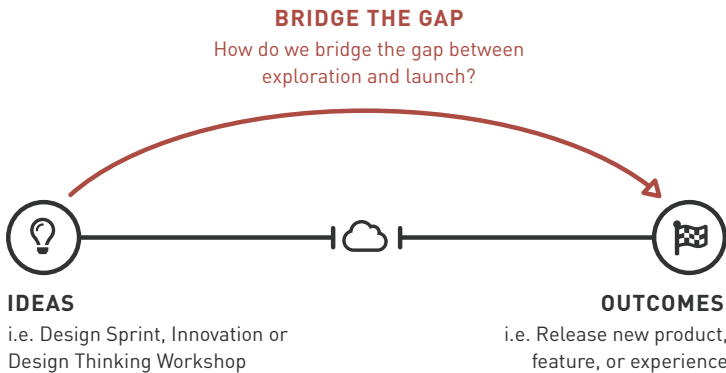
If you haven't participated in a Design Sprint, you'll learn the basics here. If you want to know more, read *Sprint: How to Solve Big Problems and Test New Ideas in Just Five Days* by Jake Knapp, Braden Kowitz, and John Zeratsky.

While I talk about how to avoid common pitfalls post-sprint, my advice can be applied to any situation when you need to build and maintain momentum around a burgeoning idea. The recommendations here relate to any innovation or design effort where you are struggling to shift from coming up with ideas to making something and putting it out in the world.

Mind the gap

I've witnessed plenty of companies and teams struggle after their Design Sprint. The path forward isn't as prescriptive or precise. It's a gray area. It's fuzzy. In this gap between ideas and execution, things can grind to a halt or worse, fall apart.

BRIDGE THE GAP
How do we bridge the gap between
exploration and launch?

IDEAS
i.e. Design Sprint, Innovation or
Design Thinking Workshop

OUTCOMES
i.e. Release new product,
feature, or experience

and fall off the walls like snowflakes. Teams get sucked back into their usual ways of working. More "urgent" initiatives take priority. Momentum wanes. There are many reasons for this: you face tricky internal politics, lack critical design skills, or perhaps

you're struggling inside a corporate culture that isn't conducive to launching something like you've envisioned.

You're not alone, though. Even today, most organizations aren't poised to traverse the gap between ideation and execution. Very few move gracefully from discovery-style projects into development and implementation. (Evidenced by the fact that many internal innovation initiatives worry more about number of ideas generated versus outcomes.) The good news is that I've outlined a better way.

Six steps for moving forward

It takes planning and action to move ideas past the early stages of a project or after a Design Sprint. Just as the Design Sprint outlines a clear five-day process, I've created a six-step plan for moving any innovation initiative, vision project, or prototype forward. The tactics emerged from my experiences and learnings with clients including U.S. SOCOM, the Air Force, Adobe, Dropbox, Fidelity, HomeAway, Liberty Mutual, Humana, SAIC, World Bank, and IDBC.These experiences have helped me uncover the recommendations I'm sharing here.
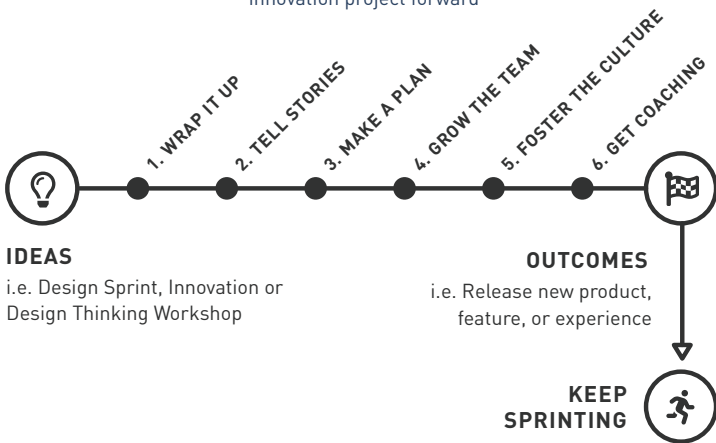
Here's a sneak peek of what's inside:

+ I delve into Design Sprints and what can happen in the post-sprint slump.

+ Starting with the importance of reflecting on your project, tying up loose ends from the sprint, and crafting a story that you can share with others.

+ Insights on how to make a concrete plan for extending your work while growing and supporting the right team.

+ The importance of fostering a culture that can sustain this type of work and offer guidance on when and how to get expert coaching.

+ Bonus: All of my recommendations for planning and executing a very successful Design Sprint.

Sprinkled throughout *Beyond the Prototype*, you'll also find my favorite nuggets of wisdom from innovation leaders, expert tips, practical activities you can do tomorrow, and stories from top companies.

Pay attention to the six critical moments I spell out, and you'll be able to maintain rigor and keep things moving toward execution. Through this book, I'm your coach and guide to the post-Sprint life. Imagine me alongside you, facilitating, keeping everyone on track, and pushing you toward your ultimate goal.

BEYOND THE PROTOTYPE
6 step plan for moving your
innovation project forward

1. WRAP IT UP 2. TELL STORIES 3. MAKE A PLAN 4. GROW THE TEAM 5. FOSTER THE CULTURE 6. GET COACHING

IDEAS
i.e. Design Sprint, Innovation or
Design Thinking Workshop

OUTCOMES
i.e. Release new product,
feature, or experience

**KEEP
SPRINTING**

Legend

Here's what to look for in each chapter

WISE WORDS
Anecdotes and brief
case studies.

SPRINT STORIES
Little tricks, ideas,
and suggestions.

PRO TIP
Quotes from my interviews with
innovation thought leaders.

IN PRACTICE
Assets and worksheets for
putting tactics into practice.

DESIGN SPRINTS 101

Design Sprints

I wrote *Beyond the Prototype* from my perspective as a Design Sprint facilitator. Design Sprints can be run a lot of different ways, so to make sure we're on the same page I'll provide some background and details on the sprint I'm referring to in this book.

While at Google Ventures, the designer Jake Knapp created a week-long process for tackling unwieldy business problems. He called it, "The Design Sprint." Over five days, the sprint takes a team through a **design thinking**-based process to uncover insights, prototype an idea, and test it with users.

Why Should You Run a Design Sprint?

+ Align a team around a shared vision.

+ Answer critical business questions.

+ Discover the essence of a creative challenge or problem.

+ Cut through endless internal debate by building a prototype that your customers can give real time feedback on.

When Should You Run a Sprint?

+ When kicking off a new initiative.

+ When looking for new breakthrough features for a product.

+ When you need to switch gears or iterate on a current product.

+ When your team is stuck and needs help deciding a next direction.

+ When you haven't talked to your users enough.

+ When you're stuck, misaligned as a team or unsure what direction to take with your product or service.

The Process

The sprint is a tried-and-true formula, with clear plans and activities for each day:

Day 1 | Map: Day one is about making a plan and getting focused. The first day's activities help you define key questions, your goal, hear from internal experts and pick an area of focus.

Day 2 | Sketch: The second day gets everyone's creative juices going. But, instead of group brainstorming, the process prioritizes individual sketching of solutions.

Day 3 | Decide: On day three, the team looks at the potential solutions and works together to decide on what to storyboard and prototype.

Day 4 | Prototype: On day four, the team creates a rapid prototype based on your storyboard, so you have something visual and tangible to test with users.

Day 5 | Test: On the final day, you show your prototype to five different users in one-on-one interviews to gather feedback and get a gut-check on your possible direction.

The Design Sprint Mindset

Through a five-day sprint, you gain first-hand experience not only with specific activities but a completely new way of thinking. It's these mindsets or attitudes that you first learn in the sprint that you'll hear a lot about in this book.

Design Sprints are laser-focused on solving one specific problem and helping teams gather information to make a decision. The side effects that come from spending hours with the same group of people while managing big conversations and trying to create change are huge.

The sprint requires that teams work together to break down complex problems while embracing quick-and-dirty prototyping. Sprints will also require participants to observe and learn from end-users and communicate in new ways and incorporate feedback faster than they're used to.

The insights found through the sprint exercises can be revolutionary to the way teams work. As Ambar Muñoz, Senior Product Manager at Adobe shared about their sprint: "The structure of the Design Sprint enabled our team to hone in on the crux of the problem from a user perspective and walk away with an actionable strategy." One week can bring a project to a

new level or save months of time and resources. The mindsets and bonding teams experience during the short time together is also valuable in changing how teams work. These benefits are salient and undeniable, but there is no guarantee they will last and is at risk of getting lost in the post-sprint slump.

**WISE
WORDS**

" The big idea of the sprint is to take a small team, clear the schedule for a week, and rapidly progress from problem to tested solution. "

-Jake Knapp,
  creator of the Google Ventures Design Sprint

THE POST-SPRINT SLUMP

WHY TEAMS STRUGGLE AFTER A SPRINT

The Post-Sprint Slump

Design Sprints can be transformative for companies and teams, but unfortunately, they're not magic. They can create alignment through intense focus on an issue, product, feature, or next step. But, in order to build what you started in your sprint, you'll need more than just five days.

You might be in a post-sprint slump if:

+ You never reviewed your sprint learnings as a group to make a plan for next steps

+ The sprint team went back to business-as-usual and isn't meeting regularly or advancing the project forward

+ You have no idea how you would take your prototype to the next level of design and testing

+ You haven't been able to adopt a test-and-learn approach to decision making

+ You don't think you have the right in-house skills and expertise to keep progressing

+ So, before diving into the six steps to combat the slump, what are some of the big reasons that teams or organizations falter after a design sprint?

Dropping the Mindset

You can run sprints all day long, but if you don't champion the sprint mindset and act on it, the work's not going to go anywhere. Your design sprint will create a North Star (or a portion of it) that your team can work towards. It can be hard for that vision to move forward when barriers pop up and momentum is slowed. The creativity and ideas were enlightening to unleash in the sprint but they desperately need discipline, structure, and follow-through if they're going to get anywhere.

While the five-day Sprint process opens up big ideas and calls for big shifts in the way work is typically approached, the hope is that what happens in the five days becomes more than just something a team did one time. Real change begins when the mindset and ways of working permeate everyday routines and tasks.

Teams can struggle if they follow the rules and agenda of a sprint, but don't commit to adopting the principles and ways of working after the sprint. It's easy to get together in a conference room and commit to collaborate, experiment, and prototype more—but what does that look like day-to-day?

Avoiding Rejection

If the ideas you came up with during the sprint challenge the status quo or shake up the business-as-usual model, you might run into people who oppose the ideas and say they can't be done. Your new ideas and ways of working are at risk of being rejected. Maybe there are other initiatives that are considered more

WISE WORDS

" **The post-design sprint slump is real, especially in a small company. While the leadership team understands the power of methodologies such as Design Sprint to tackle big problems, short-term goals such as urgent customer migrations or landing the next big enterprise deal usually take priority. The key is to keep the conversation alive with minor progress checkpoints, and clearly earmark the larger deliverable in the roadmap.** "

-Pradeep GanapathyRaj,
  VP of Product at Zipwhip

important or maybe there are just too many "good" ideas floating around your organization. Or, you may run into funding issues. As Steph Cruchon, CEO of Design Sprint LTD, shared: "I've found it common for the team to run into budgetary issues because there is no project yet. Budgets are tied to projects, the Design Sprint just revealed a new project and thus there is no budget allocated for it."

A lot of organizations have barriers towards new visions, products, or directions—whether explicitly or unintentionally. Most organizations (and people) are highly resistant to change. How much resistance will vary. Do you work at a large, legacy company with entrenched ways of working? Or, are you at a small startup that perhaps has the opposite problem—no clear processes in place yet? Fear of rejection keeps many teams from taking their sprint plans to the next level. But—it doesn't have to.

All About Momentum

Ok, I've perhaps worried you a bit with all that can go wrong after a sprint. Whether it's losing focus, forgetting what your True North is, hitting barriers, or fear of rejection, there are concrete ways to overcome and plan for all of them. I'll show you how.