Practice experimentation **from the first stages of innovation**

The stakes

Prototypes are a particularly powerful means to give impetus to the innovation process. Prototypes make it possible to share ideas, gather reactions, and initiate collective momentum. And digital tools have recently emerged to build prototypes rapidly, at low cost and without necessarily requiring technical expertise. But the reflex to realize ideas concretely in this manner is still far from natural. How can you encourage your organization to develop the right reflexes?

Four reflexes to practice

Using prototyping more systematically and earlier in the innovation process demands a change in mindset, which can be encouraged by applying a few simple rules.

Banish perfectionism	**A major obstacle** to producing prototypes is the **belief that the latter must reflect a fully developed version of an idea**: • Encourage people to put their ideas into practice rapidly with a rough prototype. • Limit the time between the expression of the idea and the presentation of an initial prototype to combat the tendency to spend too much time and effort refining the initial version. • Introduce the prototype as an "imperfect working model," designed to stimulate thinking and discussion among the various stakeholders.
Treat the prototype as a means to gather feedback	A prototype must be primarily aimed at **collecting all relevant information to adapt an idea**, rather than at jumping to conclusions concerning its potential success or failure: • Before experimentation, formally articulate key questions to pose and key points to watch; the excitement of expected success or the disappointment following failure may easily prevent people from seeing important lessons. • Observe reactions to prototypes from different perspectives to gather a richer set of data. E.g., use several different observers; take videos, notes or photos; use checklists; etc. • Always try to learn lessons from prototypes, even if they are very rough or unsuccessful.
Remove the stigma from failure and recognize it as a learning opportunity	Using prototypes early in the innovation process naturally increases the chances of **detecting potential problems or hitches**. The resulting feeling of failure must be managed: • Communicate clearly that people can advance more quickly using several successive imperfect prototypes than with a single more refined prototype. • Step up the pace of testing and hold frequent updates to make failure seem less disastrous and bolster motivation. • Set a budget and a time limit to cut your losses and disappointment if prototypes don't pan out. • Be careful to identify and share the lessons drawn from both successful and unsuccessful experiments beyond the borders of the concerned team.
Promote cooperation between inventors and testers	When a prototype is introduced, people are often **enthusiastic** and some testers even want to **participate in the development process**. Capitalize on this momentum to enrich the prototyping process: • Acquire the reflex of going outside the team and the company to request feedback and input from other sources. E.g., students, experts, customers, suppliers, etc. • Maintain motivation by asking inventors to interact with testers to make it easier for the latter to suggest ideas and creative variants, be notified of changes and improvements to the innovation, etc.