



PROTOTYPE LIKE A PRO

BY DMITRY SERGEEV & CATHERINE CHUDINOVA



LET'S MEET



Dmitry Sergeev

Narrative Designer

10+ years in Game Development,
making PC, Mobile & Board Games
that bring joy millions players
worldwide.

Pissourians



Catherine Chudinova

Game Producer

Games we've made:

BLITZKRIEG 3



TRAINING GOAL

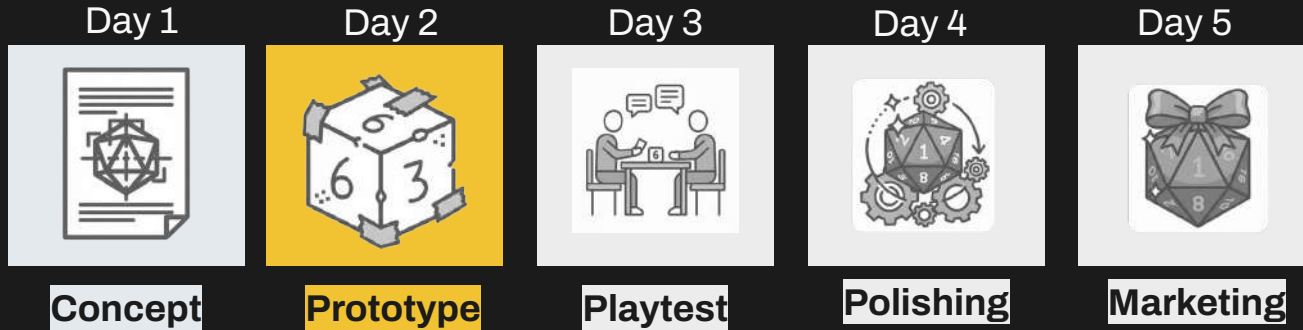
Create a board game that will help:

- build new connections between people
- bring together people from different cultures, backgrounds, and interests
- include people with disabilities through accessible and inclusive design
- have fun! :)

GAMECHANGE: COURSE STRUCTURE

Day 1	BECOME A GAME DEVELOPER	✓ Learn Game Design theory basics ✓ Turn a real social problem into a clear “game mission” checklist ✓ Create a concept of the future board game
Day 2	BUILD A PROTOTYPE	✓ Build your first playable prototype ✓ Create narrative conception of the future game ✓ Test your game inside the team
Day 3	PLAYTEST IS THE KING	✓ Let other students play your game (and watch what REALLY happens 🐼) ✓ Collect the honest feedback ✓ Upgrade your game: filter, transform feedback in a game improvements
Day 4	POLISH & PITCH	✓ Polish your final version so it looks clean and professional ✓ Improve the gameplay so it feels fair and exciting ✓ Prepare a short pitch: explain your game in 30 seconds like a creator
Day 5	FINAL GAME EXPO	✓ Present your game to everyone + show how it fights the social problem ✓ Let others play your final version (demo mode!) ✓ Vote for the best game and celebrate your finished project 🎉

GAME DEVELOPMENT STAGES



You have a concept

You have assumptions

You don't know yet if it works

TODAY'S TASK: BUILD A PROTOTYPE

- ✓ Build your first playable prototype
- ✓ Create narrative conception of the future game
- ✓ Test your game inside the team

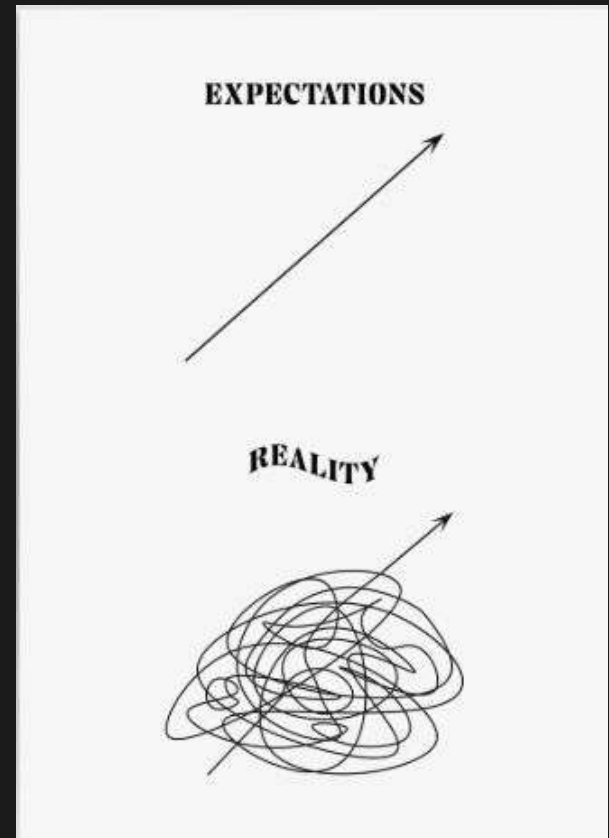
YOU HAVE AN IDEA. BUT DOES IT WORK?

In your head:

- It feels exciting
- It feels balanced
- It feels clear
- It feels fun

But players won't play your idea.

They will play your system.

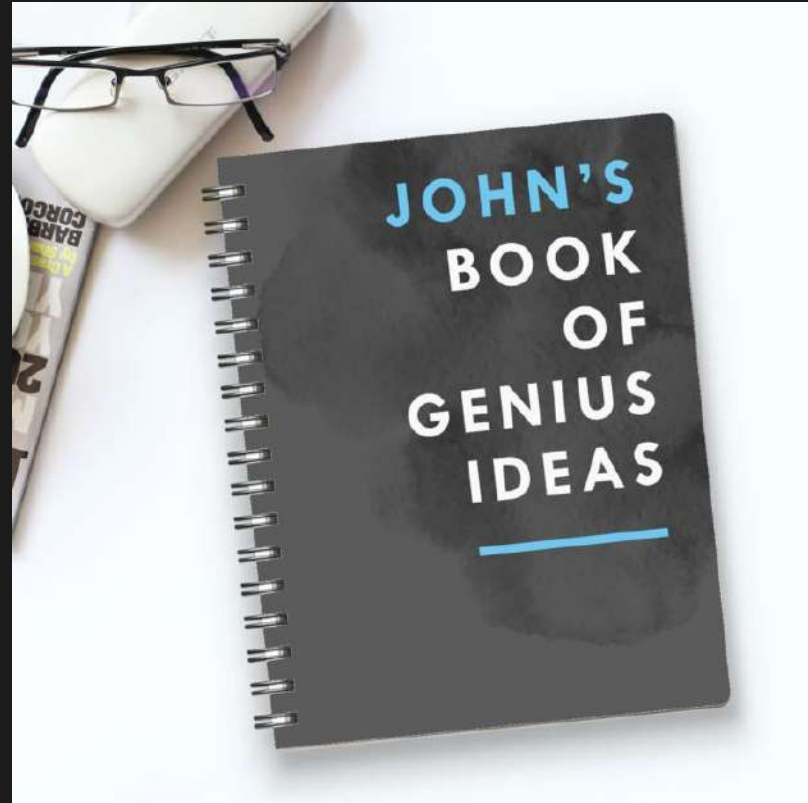


THE *BEGINNER'S TRAP*

New designers:

- Fall in love with the concept
- Believe instead of test
- Protect the idea from criticism

Prototyping replaces imagination with reality.



WHAT IS A **PROTOTYPE**?

A prototype is a **simplified version of your game** built to test specific ideas.

What is a **PROTOTYPE**

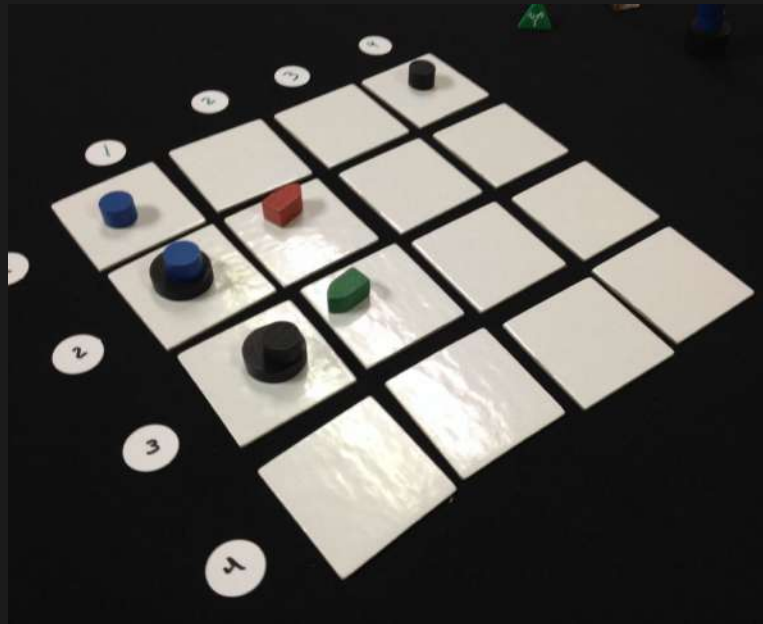
- ✓ A testing tool
- ✓ A way to validate hypotheses
- ✓ A way to fail cheaply and early

What is **NOT**

- ✗ Not the final game
- ✗ Not a polished version
- ✗ Not a pretty draft
- ✗ About art or visuals

Purpose:

To learn what works — and what doesn't — as quickly as possible.



WHAT IS A *HYPOTHESIS*?

Design of every game = set of hypothesis

When you say:

- “Players will understand this rule.”
- “This ability won’t be overpowered.”
- “The game length feels right.”
- “There is meaningful choice.”

You are making assumptions.

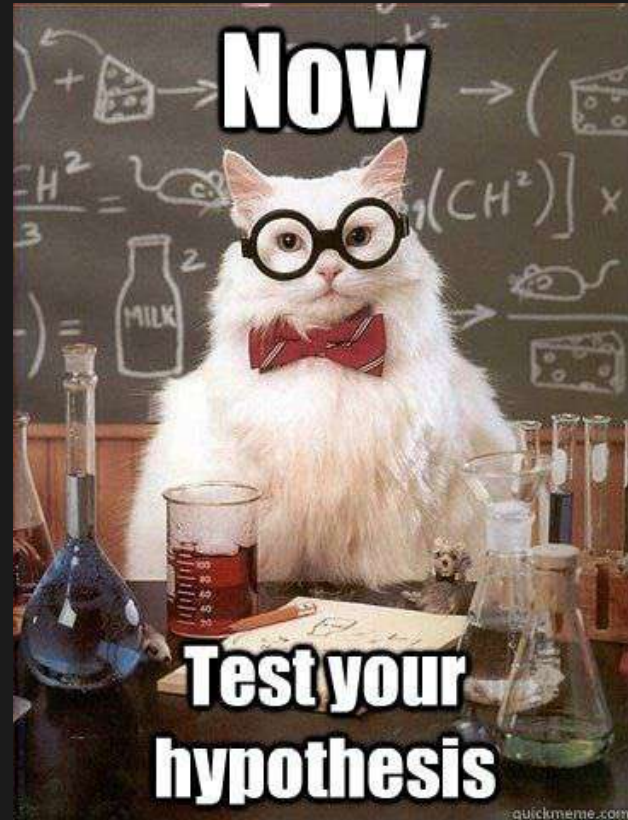


WHAT IS A **HYPOTHESIS**?

Hypothesis — is an assumption you can test and potentially prove wrong.

If you cannot test it — it is opinion.

Good designers make testing assumptions.
Bad designers protect them.



A GOOD HYPOTHESIS HAS 3 ELEMENTS

Clear Statement

“This combat system encourages strategic decision-making.”

Observable Behavior

Players compare options, plan multi-step moves, and coordinate actions.

Measurable Signals

- Increased average turn duration
- More ability swaps per turn
- Higher diversity of abilities used per battle

If you don't know what to observe — you can't test it.

WEAK VS STRONG HYPOTHESES

✗ Weak:
“Is the game fun?”

Why weak?
Too broad. Not measurable.



✓ Strong:
“Do players hesitate between at least two viable actions during their turn?”

Why strong?
Clear statement. Measurable. Observable.



HOW TO USE HYPOTHESES IN PROTOTYPING

Step 1

Write down all your hypothesis.

Step 2

Prioritize them from the highest to the lowest impact. Choose top impact hypothesis to test.

Step 3

Design the smallest prototype that can test it.

Step 4

Define what success looks like.

Step 5

Run the test!

Step 5

Decide if hypothesis was confirmed by the test:

- Confirmed
- Partially confirmed
- Rejected

EXAMPLE

Hypothesis

“This resource system creates strategic tension.”

Test

Prototype only the economy loop.

Observation

- Do players struggle to choose what to spend?
- Do they regret choices?
- Do they plan ahead?

Result

If players spend instantly without thinking → no tension

✗ Hypothesis rejected.

THE REAL POWER OF HYPOTHESES

Without hypotheses:

- ✗ You test randomly
- ✗ You change everything at the same time
- ✗ You get confuse

Prototyping without hypotheses is **guessing**.

With hypotheses:

- ✓ You iterate deliberately
- ✓ You improve faster
- ✓ You know why you change something

Prototyping with hypotheses is **design**.



TYPES OF HYPOTHESES



Mechanical

Does it function?



Balance

Is something dominant?



Flow

Does it flow properly?



Emotional

How does it feel?

Each prototype must answer **one clear question.**

5 PRINCIPLES OF *PROTOTYPING*

- 1 **One Question** Test one thing at a time.
- 2 **MVP Principle** Build only what is necessary.
- 3 **Fail Fast** Learning > Perfection.
- 4 **Easy to Change** If it's hard to modify, it's probably wrong.
- 5 **Function First** Playable > Beautiful.

RULE #1: TEST ONE THING AT A TIME

Before building a prototype, answer: **What exactly am I testing?**

How to do it:

- Write your test question at the top of the prototype.
- Make it measurable.
Not: “Is it fun?”
But: “Do players hesitate between at least two options?”
- Remove everything that doesn’t affect this question.
- Stop the test once you get the answer.

Red flag:

If you can’t explain what you’re testing in one sentence — the prototype is unfocused.



RULE #2: MVP PRINCIPLE

Build Only What Is Necessary

Your goal is to simulate behavior, not content.

Practical rules:

- Start with 10-20% of planned components.
- Reduce player count for early tests.
Shorten playtime (15-20 min max for first version).
- Use placeholder values instead of calculated balance.

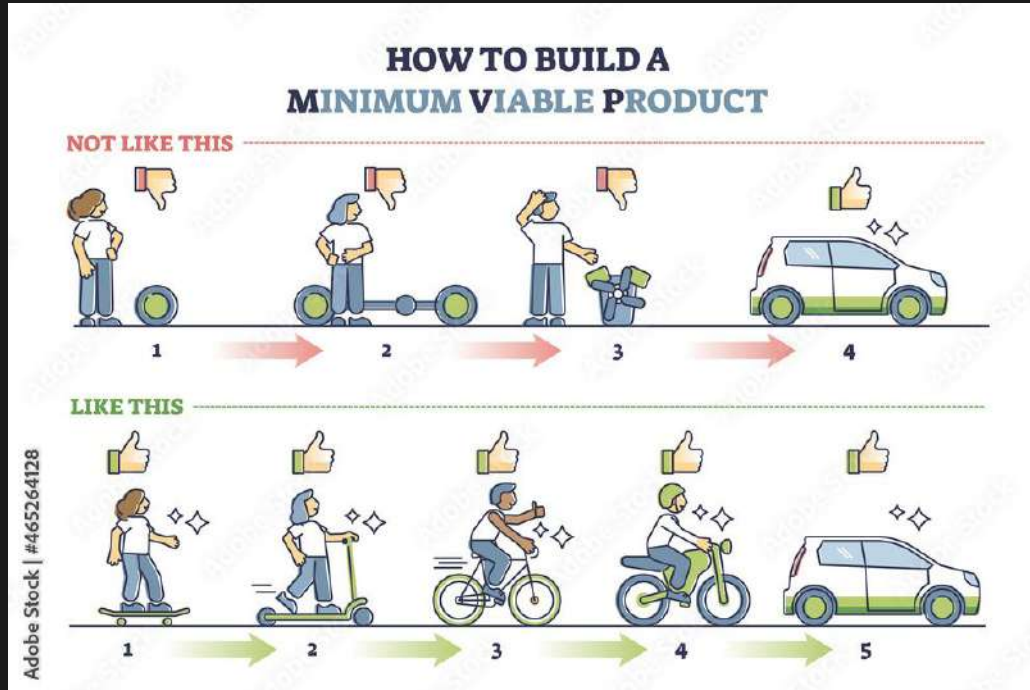
Ask yourself:

If I remove this element, can I still test my core mechanic

If yes → remove it.



RULE #2: MVP PRINCIPLE



MVP = Minimum Viable Product

RULE #3: *FAIL FAST*

Learning > Perfection

Speed increases iterations. Iterations improve quality.

Practical rules:

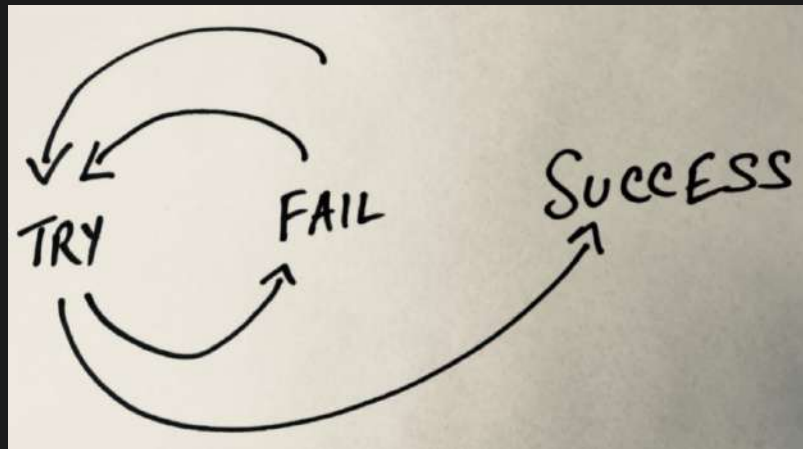
- First prototype within 1 hour.
- First test within 2 hours.
- Change immediately after testing.
- Avoid “I’ll fix it before testing.”

Important mindset:

Embarrassing prototype = good.

Delayed prototype = dangerous.

If it feels too polished, you waited too long.



RULE #4: EASY TO CHANGE

If It's Hard to Modify, It's Wrong

Your prototype must expect change.

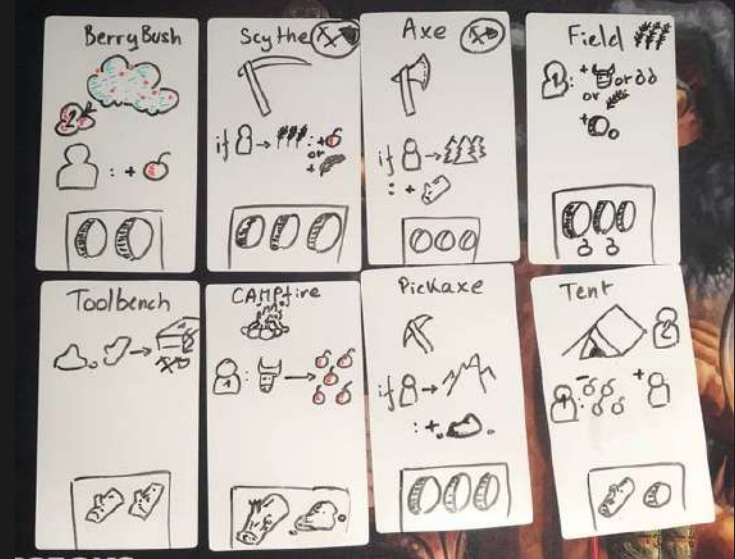
Practical setup:

- Write numbers in pencil.
- Use sleeves for cards.
- Use sticky notes for abilities.
- Keep rules in editable digital format.

During iteration:

- Change one major variable at a time.
- Track what you changed.
- Test the impact immediately.

If you hesitate to change something, you're emotionally attached.



RULE #5: *FUNCTION FIRST*

Playable > Beautiful

The prototype must reveal system behavior.

✓ What you need:

- Clear turn structure.
- Clear win condition.
- Defined end state.
- Real player decisions.

✗ What you don't need:

- Final art.
- Balanced wording.
- Polished layout



If it works while ugly — it's strong.
If it only works when polished — it's fragile.

WHAT BREAKS FIRST

No meaningful choices turns feel like “do the obvious thing”

Broken pacing: the game drags, or ends before anything matters

Runaway leader: one player gets ahead early and the rest can't catch up

Dominant strategy: one tactic beats everything → no variety

Rules friction: players constantly ask “What can I do?” / “When does this happen?”

Low interaction: players feel like they're playing alone

Randomness issues: luck decides too much (or too little)