



IDEATE: WORKSHOP DOSSIER

FiftySix Design Talks – 2026 Cycle 1

Introduction FiftySix Design Talks is a biannual framework consisting of two cycles per year, with each cycle dedicated to a single theme and concluding with one usable industry deliverable. Workshop 2 of the 2026 Cycle 1, titled "Ideate," served as the architectural stage of the "Define" phase. Following the diagnostic phase which identified a lack of an ethical ecosystem and supportive platforms, this session was tasked with designing a tangible, zero-cost industry tool. Operating under the Robinson Principle, the workshop focused on radical resourcefulness—using only existing assets, human capital, and open tools to bridge the "Value Gap."



Session Overview

On 4 March 2026, the second workshop was convened at Studio 4, Valletta Design Cluster (VDC). The session aimed to translate the shared bottleneck into a "Release Candidate" for public use by the end of the cycle.

Participants

The workshop brought together a strategic mix of institutional leaders, industry practitioners, and academic heads to map the current ecosystem:

- Joanne Attard Mallia (Head of VDC)
- Francesca Cassar (Community and Projects Executive at VDC)
- Francois Mangion (Director & Architect at I+A)
- Philip Farrugia (Professor at University of Malta)
- Becky Grech (Head of Product Design at MCAST)
- David Sciberras (CEO & Co-founder of Invent 3D)
- Thomaz Cauchi (Artist and Tattooist)
- Adrian Mizzi (CTO at QP)
- Raphael Attard (Student at MCAST)
- Theresa Vella
- Denis Vella
- Clara Azzopardi (junior architect & visual artist at Sforma Studio)

Moderator

Joeaby Vassallo (Director at I+A)



The Robinson Framework

The workshop was governed by two strict constraints:

1. The Robinson Principle: Solutions must require no new funding, no policy changes, and no permission structures.
2. The Robinson Index: A scoring matrix evaluating concepts based on Adoptability, Feasibility (€0 Build), Alignment, and Velocity.

Workshop Synthesis & Discussion

The transition from diagnostic frustrations to practical outputs was evidenced by a shift in table discussions. The following synthesis captures the consensus reached as participants moved toward architecting active solutions:

1. Addressing Knowledge Fragmentation via TRL

Discussion centered on using Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) to provide designers with a clear sense of "where they stand." It was noted that many ideas fail because designers attempt to seek funding or manufacturing (TRL 5-7) while still in the basic research phase (TRL 1-2). The consensus was to use the TRL scale as the backbone of the "Designer's Path to Market," ensuring every stage has a clear entry and exit gate.

2. Integrating IP Protection at Every Stage

A recurring theme was the "Ethical Ecosystem." Participants concluded that IP protection is not a final step, but a continuous one. The discussion led to a mandate for "IP Milestones" to be baked into each readiness level—from non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) at the concept stage to formal patenting or design registration before market entry.



3. The Requirement for an Ethical Buffer (The Support Board)

Participants argued for a "human interface" to complement the static playbook. This Support Board—composed of practitioners and institutional leaders—will act as a directional guide, helping designers navigate the TRL stages and protecting inventors from predatory relations by providing a direct line to the Commerce Department.

Final Deliverable Consensus: The "Navigator" Playbook

The workshop reached a consensus on a dual-layered deliverable to be developed for Workshop 3:

1. The "Integrated Playbook" (The Designer's Path to Market)

A comprehensive, open-access guide that breaks the journey into five stages (Idea, Research, Development, Deployment, Market), mapped against:

- TRL Benchmarks: Clear technical requirements for each stage.
- IP Milestones: Specific legal protections required at each transition point.
- Resource & Entity Registry: A directory of VDC facilities, local manufacturers, and funding opportunities (National/EU) relevant to that specific stage.

2. The "Support Board" (The Human Hub)

A strategic point of focus where designers can receive peer-to-peer and institutional guidance. This board ensures the "Playbook" remains a living document and that designers are "pointed in the right direction" rather than hitting institutional dead-ends.



Key Institutional Action

The workshop concluded with a specific mandate to secure a technical meeting with the Directorate: Industrial Property Registration. The objective is to refine the "IP Milestones" within the Playbook, ensuring the tool is legally robust and provides immediate utility to the Maltese industrial sector.

The Way Forward

The cycle now transitions to Workshop 3: Test, where an "Alpha" version of the Playbook—already drafted as a 0.1 version—will be stress-tested by real users.

Objective: To present feedback on the draft Playbook and finalize the Release Candidate for the final panel discussion.

