

# USING PARALLELS TO THINK DIFFERENTLY

A short guide to learning from other worlds to unlock creativity and strategy

## WHAT THIS IS

This guide introduces the *parallels* technique. A creative and strategic thinking tool used to spark fresh ideas and insights by exploring how *others* approach similar challenges in *different* contexts.

It's inspired by *Be More Strategic, Chapter 6: Be (More) Imaginative, Be a Creative*, where Charlie encourages us to *look beyond our own walls* and learn from unexpected sources.

"The best ideas often come from worlds far from our own. Parallels help us see our challenges through new eyes."

## WHY IT MATTERS

When you're stuck in a familiar environment, you tend to recycle the same patterns of thinking.

Exploring *parallels* helps you:

- Break habitual thinking and assumptions
- Find inspiration from sectors that have solved similar issues differently
- Discover transferable insights and creative approaches
- Reframe problems through fresh perspectives



By stepping outside your normal frame of reference — into the world of Lego, Disney, or the police — you widen your lens, and with it, your imagination.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

You can do this alone or as a team exercise.

Start with a specific *challenge or opportunity* you're exploring, something that feels stuck, complex, or in need of new energy.

Then choose **6–8 “parallel worlds”** to visit mentally, physically, or virtually.

These can include organisations, industries, professions, or systems that do something differently or exceptionally well.

### Examples:

**Lego, Disney, The Police, An Airport, A Supermarket, A School, A Start-up, A Court**

## STEP 2: CHOOSE 6–8 PARALLELS

Pick organisations or worlds that face similar patterns of challenge, but in completely different contexts.

### For example:

- **Lego:** Innovation and play
- **Disney:** Storytelling and customer experience
- **The Police:** Crisis response and coordination
- **An Airport:** Flow management and customer journeys
- **A Supermarket:** Supply chain and service consistency
- **A School:** Learning and engagement
- **A Start-up:** Agility and experimentation
- **A Court:** Fairness, trust, and process discipline

## STEP 3: EXPLORE EACH PARALLEL



Spend 5–10 minutes per “world” (solo or as a group).  
Be curious. Don’t evaluate yet.

**Use these guiding questions:**

1. **Who exactly are they?** Describe their world, culture, purpose, and pressures.
2. **What do they do particularly well?** What stands out about how they operate? (e.g. clarity, customer care, simplicity, adaptability)
3. **How exactly do they do it?** What processes, behaviours, rituals, or mindsets make it work?
4. **If they were in our position, what would they do?** How might they view or respond to our challenge?
5. **What would they be willing to risk or compromise on?** Where might they act boldly or make tough trade-offs that we currently avoid?

**Be literal and bold.** Write freely, even if it feels strange or ridiculous.  
Often the “crazy” ideas hold the seeds of brilliance.

## STEP 4: CAPTURE INSIGHTS AND EMERGING IDEAS

After exploring all 6–8 parallels, review your notes and look for patterns:

- What ideas or principles repeat across different worlds?
- Which examples surprised you most and why?
- What might we borrow, adapt, or experiment with?

Now distil your findings into two lists:

**Key Insights:** What did we learn from others?

**Emerging Ideas:** What could we try, prototype, or apply in our context?

## STEP 5: SHARE AND REFLECT (TEAM OPTION)

**If you’re running this as a group exercise:**



1. Divide into small teams. Each team takes one or two parallels.
2. Give them 10–15 minutes to explore using the questions above.
3. Have each group share their “what we learned” and “what we’d try” insights.
4. Discuss as a full team: which ideas feel most energising or useful?

**Bonus variation:** Run the same session online using breakout rooms and shared boards each labelled with a “parallel world” card.

## WHAT TO DO NEXT

- Choose one or two promising ideas from your parallels and turn them into small experiments.
- Share your learnings back with the wider team, what worked, what didn’t, what surprised you.
- Repeat the parallels exercise quarterly or whenever you face a new strategic challenge.

**Tip:** Combine this with the **Six Thinking Hats** or **Problem Statement** guides for structured exploration and analysis.

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## REMEMBER:

*Creativity thrives at the edges of your world.*

*The moment you step outside your normal perspective and borrow insight from another – you expand your imagination, your options, and your strategy.*

