

Steal ideas from places that solved a similar problem differently.

Background

IDEO · popularised in design thinking practice

Every problem has been solved somewhere else under different constraints. Analogical thinking is the discipline of finding those solutions and extracting the transferable principle – not copying the surface feature.

How to Run This

- 1 Define your challenge precisely. Vague challenge = shallow analogies.
- 2 Find 2-3 domains that face a structurally similar problem.
- 3 For each domain, describe how they solved it.
- 4 Extract the principle that made their solution work.
- 5 Apply the principle to your challenge – not the surface feature.

Facilitator Tips

Common mistake

Picking analogies too similar to your domain. Find the outlier: how does a hospital manage queues?

What good looks like

A principle that, when you say it out loud, someone says "that's so obvious – why aren't we already doing that?"

When to move on

When you have one transferred principle that would meaningfully change your approach.

About Wade Institute

Wade Institute of Entrepreneurship is Australia's leading centre for entrepreneurial education, based at the University of Melbourne. The Studio is Wade's free, AI-powered innovation workshop platform – making 24 structured frameworks available to anyone, each one facilitated by Pete, an AI coach trained in Wade's methodology.

Try this interactively in The Studio

Pete will help you find unexpected analogies and extract the transferable principles. You'll leave with an applied insight and a session report.

studio.wadeinstitute.org.au →

1 THE CHALLENGE

What problem are you trying to solve?

2 ANALOGY DOMAIN 1

A different world that faces a similar challenge.

HOW THEY SOLVED IT

What approach or mechanism did they use?

EXTRACTED PRINCIPLE

What transferable rule or pattern emerges?

3 ANALOGY DOMAIN 2

Pick a second, contrasting domain.

HOW THEY SOLVED IT

What approach or mechanism did they use?

EXTRACTED PRINCIPLE

What transferable rule or pattern emerges?

4 ANALOGY DOMAIN 3

Pick a third, surprising domain.

HOW THEY SOLVED IT

What approach or mechanism did they use?

EXTRACTED PRINCIPLE

What transferable rule or pattern emerges?

5 APPLIED INSIGHT

How will you apply the best analogy to your challenge?