

A Few Ways to Identify Valleys

Look at your lean and user design data with this lens

Role play explaining your situation to someone from another planet

List out the who, what, when, where and how

Ask lots of questions

Go on physical or virtual field trips to learn from other industries, fields, roles, settings

Purposeful Leaps

Be intentional about finding other mental models that could offer possibilities

Seek out diverse user stories, experiences, needs and wants

Random Jumps

Be open to learning from anything and anyone to find helpful connections

Steps to Try

Stop before you start. We tend to autopilot into our usual ways of approaching things and miss the chance to think creatively and see problems with our current mental models. Try creating a habit of pausing to identify mental valleys early and consider whether they are useful and appropriate anymore.

Use various methods to identify mental valleys. Get a good list.

Frame your topic for maximum exploration. It's helpful to create both a narrow and broad view of your topic:

- **Narrow:** What do you need creative thinking about and why?
Example: We need creative thinking about how to identify stakeholders.
- **Broad:** For the sake of what? Revisit (or better define) your end goal and design targets. Are you trying to deliver a product or service that is convenient for users? Is safety a driving feature?
Example: We need creative thinking about how to ensure end users say our solution is easy for them.

Plan to make some leaps for both your narrow and broad topic. Pick an unhelpful mental valley from your list to directly challenge. Dig into existing user and process data with new eyes. Plan some field trip research. And so on. Mix together a few methods.

Collect ideas for both your narrow and broad topic to explore. Guard against instant rejection. And pay attention for ideas getting reaction (these might be the most creative).

What innovations have positively impact your life, work or personal? Try to identify the underlying mental valley(s) that were rewritten.

A Few Resources

[30 mental models to add to your thinking toolbox](#) – Ness Labs article

[Unsticking Stuck Mental Models: Adventures in Systemic Change](#) – Article and webinar recording

[How to Challenge Your Mental Models and Think Differently](#) - Article

[Thinking Differently](#) – open source PDF booklet from the UK National Health Service

Question	Currently	Alternative Ideas
Who is typically involved?		
What is typically done or provided?		
Where is it typically located?		
When?		
How?		

4 Ws and How

Setting Ideas	Industry Ideas	Role Ideas
Grocery store	Aerospace	Teacher
Park	Software	Librarian
Beach	Brick & mortar retail	Florist
Urban neighborhood	Online retail	Nurse
Rural neighborhood	Education	6-year-old child
Hotel	Hospitality	Politician
Book store	Publishing	Comedian
Museum	Waste Management	Parent
Restaurant	Banking/Financial Services	Artist

Field Trip Examples

When we say [word,] what does that really mean?	Are there multiple ways we could arrive at a solution?	What if we were told to deliberately break the rules? What would we do?
Why is it this way?	How would customers change our usual approach if they could?	What do we really need creative thinking about?
What are we ultimately trying to achieve? (e.g., convenience, safety, flow, accuracy, etc.)	What if we didn't have [usual approach]? How would we cope?	What "job" are customers actually trying to do?

Sample Questions