

PARIS Team Session Guide

The PARIS Method is a simple five-part structure for thinking clearly about a challenge — where it came from, what to do about it, what success looks like, what it teaches you, and what it takes to pull off. While originally developed as a career reflection tool, its most powerful organizational application is for cross-functional teams.

Rather than treating project plans as fixed lines ($P \rightarrow A \rightarrow R \rightarrow I \rightarrow S$), this guide structures PARIS as an iterative loop ($P \leftrightarrow A \leftrightarrow R$) that retests assumptions, surfaces real-time insights, and assesses skill gaps as the work unfolds.

A Loop, not a Line

A project's PARIS is never fixed the day work begins. A team's PARIS is a living reference revisited to ask: Has the problem changed? Is the result we agreed on three weeks ago still the right one? Redefining the problem or result out loud is what enables conscious trade-offs instead of allowing timelines to slip quietly.

SESSION ARCHITECTURE: THE THREE COHORTS

A complete Team-PARIS engagement is structured into three distinct phases across a project lifecycle. This prevents the framework from being a 'one-and-done' form and structures it as a continuous learning loop.

Project Phase	Timing	Core Objective	Key Focus Areas
Phase 1: Shared Alignment (Kickoff)	Week 1 (Before deep work)	Build shared understanding of the problem and desired results, testing assumptions upfront.	P (Problem / Risk) R (Result) S (Skills Gap)
Phase 2: The Adaptive Loop (Check-in)	Mid-Project (e.g., Week 3/6)	Test whether the problem has evolved and make conscious scope or target trade-offs.	$P \leftrightarrow R$ (Loop) I (Mid-Course Insights)
Phase 3: Playbook Capture (Closing)	Project Close (Launch)	Translate team learning into an organizational playbook to accelerate future initiatives.	$I \rightarrow S$ (Insights & Skills)

PHASE 1:

THE ALIGNMENT KICKOFF (WEEK 1)

Goal: Move the team from a generic task list to a deep, shared ownership of the problem and a concrete, measurable result. Force the team to name risk and skills gaps on Day One.

Step 1: Frame the Problem (P)

Do not start with 'what are we doing' (Action). Start with: What is the problem we are actually solving? A well-framed team problem must dissect into three distinct parts:

- **Situation:** The neutral context. What is the setting? Who is involved? (e.g., 'Inkwell needs to launch its e-reader in Taiwan in 8 weeks').
- **Complication:** What makes this difficult, uncertain, or new? (e.g., 'The search and predictive text logic assume a Latin alphabet, which breaks in Traditional Chinese; local regulations require unbudgeted data-handling adjustments').
- **Risk:** What is actually at stake if we fail or do nothing? (e.g., 'Failing in Taiwan compromises our entire East Asian expansion strategy'). **This is the key piece teams usually skip.** The size of the risk is what gives the endeavor success its weight.

Step 2: Define Success (R) & Identify the Skill Gaps (S)

Define a measurable **Result** before listing **Actions**. Success must be concrete, observable, and **repeatable** (e.g., matching home-market first-month adoption while establishing a reusable localized launch playbook), rather than a one-off result accomplished through unrepeatable heroics.

Directly pair this with a **Skills Gap Check (S)**: Ask each team member to name their level of confidence and gaps. If a team lead is managing cross-timezone engineering or local regulatory reviews for the first time, admit the gap immediately so the team can pair them with a peer or counsel in Week 1, not Week 5.

Insight Check: Naming Core Assumptions Upfront

Ask the team: What are we assuming right now that might not hold true? In the case of Inkwell, the core assumption was that 'localization means translation.' Naming this assumption pre-project ensures the team is highly sensitized to test it immediately via active user trials, rather than discovering it too late.

PHASE 2:

THE MID-PROJECT ADAPTIVE LOOP (WEEK 3-6)

Goal: Check if real-world complications have altered the problem. Redefine Problem or Result out loud, forcing trade-offs instead of silent deadline slippage.

The Moment the Problem Changes

At Week 3, a designer's user trials might reveal that predictive search is fundamentally unusable in the local alphabet. This is not a delay — it is a **change in the core Problem**. The team must return to the PARIS loop:

- **Re-evaluate P&R:** Realizing 'translation' is actually an 'input mechanics' problem. This forces an honest, collaborative trade-off: Do we delay the launch, or do we narrow the scope to ensure a usable, narrower product on schedule?
- **Action Alignment:** The engineering and design teams immediately pivot to build and test the narrower, high-value input features. The project lead updates stakeholders with clear, logical trade-off rationales.
- **Mid-Project Insights:** Ask the team in Week 6: What are we now seeing that we didn't see in Week 1? This turns "bug fixing" into a shared realization of where the organization's regional knowledge was actually lacking.

PHASE 3:

PLAYBOOK CAPTURE & PROJECT CLOSE

Goal: Close the loop. Convert personal and localized project experiences into reusable, organizational structures.

Building the Organizational Playbook

Rather than a standard, retrospective 'airing of grievances,' close the project with a forward-looking PARIS loop: What would we tell the team taking on the next market or similar challenge? The answers to this question become the seeds of an active regional playbook. For example, Klaus (engineering) documents how to catch input localization issues early, and operations maps the local regulatory steps to run in parallel with development in future sprints.

Facilitator Tip: What to Listen For

Whichever letter of PARIS the team rushes past fastest is usually the one worth slowing down on. People under-describe the **Problem** out of modesty, under-describe the **Action** by defaulting to a generic 'we pulled together,' and skip **Insight** entirely because the experience has not yet been structured into shared language. Your job as facilitator is to pause and ask the follow-up question.

FACILITATION FRAMEWORK: CORE QUESTIONS

Use these specific, targeted prompts during team sessions to draw out the deep, unsaid elements of the project:

PARIS Element	Kickoff Session (Week 1)	Mid-Project Check-in	Post-Project / Playbook Close
Problem (P)	What are we actually solving? What is the setting, the complication, and what is at risk if we fail?	Is the problem we named in Week 1 still the real one, or has it changed?	How has our understanding of the underlying challenge evolved?
Result (R)	What does 'done well' look like? Is it measurable, concrete, and repeatable?	Is our agreed-upon target still the right one, or are we in a trade-off?	Did we achieve our result? Did we establish a repeatable template?
Action (A)	What are the key, high-leverage decisions and choices that matter? Who owns what?	What actions do we need to shift or narrow based on the updated problem?	What were the pivotal choices that actually saved time or resolved the issue?
Insights (I)	What assumptions are we making right now that might not hold true?	What are we seeing now that we didn't see at kickoff? What did we assume?	What did this teach us? What did we assume on Day One that was wrong?
Skills (S)	What skills does this require? What are our individual and team gaps?	Are we experiencing bottlenecks due to skill gaps or timezone-distributed delays?	What skills did we build? What gaps remain that the wider org must solve?

TEAM-PARIS WORKSPACE TEMPLATE

Use this template as a shared workspace (printed or digital). Fill in each section collaboratively, and return to it to sketch updates during mid-project loops.

PARIS Section	Team Workspace Notes (Fill in collaboratively during sessions)
PROBLEM (P) • Situation: • Complication: • Risk (What's at stake?):	
RESULT (R) • Target Success: • Repeatable Aspect: • Metrics:	
ACTION (A) • Key Decisions: • Owner Assignments: • High-Leverage Paths:	
INSIGHTS (I) • Key Assumptions: • Early Trial Tests: • Mid-Course Learning:	
SKILLS (S) • Gaps Identified: • Support Plan: • Strengths Demonstrated:	

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