Emergent Learning and Signet's EL Maps™

What is Emergent Learning?

In a changing world, there are no right answers...at least not for very long. There are only *hypotheses* that represent your current best thinking about what it will take to succeed.

Emergent Learning is about building the capacity of organizations to adapt to achieve results, given changing realities. It is about creating organizations that can learn how to learn.

Emergent Learning is pragmatic. Literally, Emergent Learning is learning that *emerges* from our own work in the course of doing our work. Knowledge about core challenges *emerges* from real work. The capacity to produce results *emerges* over time as we focus on tracking results and adjusting our thinking.

If you are an operational team, your core challenge might be maintaining quality standards and reducing costs. If you are a program team, it might be managing scope and stakeholder expectations. If you are an executive team, it might be building successful relationships with stakeholders and local government agencies.

There are **no simple solutions** to these challenges. They require discipline and collective action. And as the environment changes, they require learning through experience...together.

Those organizations that depend on finding the "right" solutions to their core challenges will always suffer from lingering doubts and internal debate. A disciplined Emergent Learning practice can help turn debates into inquiry; bets on vague solutions in to learning experiments.

EL Maps

A universal complaint is that "Lessons Learned" aren't ever really *learned*. The quality of lessons "learned" varies wildly. Not everyone agrees with what the true lessons are, and even when they do, they can be difficult to communicate.

EL Maps provide a **common structure and language for sharing insights** and looking for patterns across programs, functions and geographies. They can help organizations transform piles of "Lessons Learned" documents into a strategic learning agenda that produces robust knowledge around core challenges.
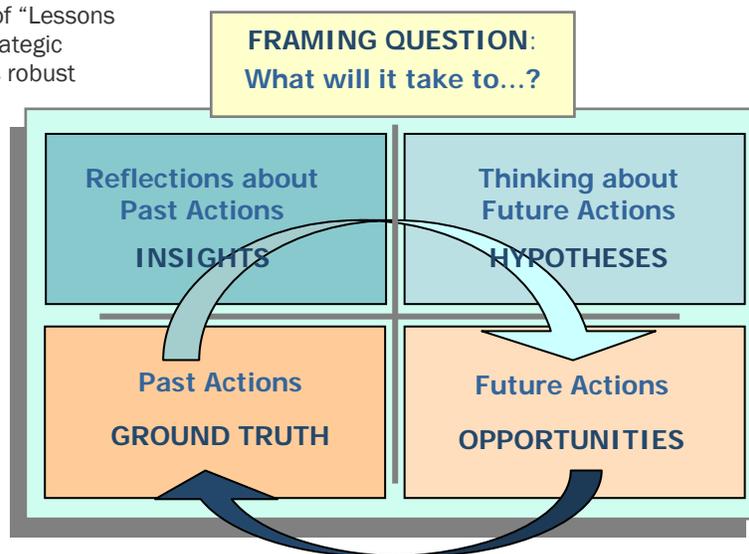
The visual structure of EL Maps helps groups think through what they already know about a core challenge based on their experience, translate that into a testable hypothesis, and look for opportunities to test it out. **Sometimes the biggest aha comes from realizing that you are asking the wrong question**.

EL Maps reflect the whole learning cycle: today's Hypotheses become tomorrow's Ground Truth, which leads teams to refine their thinking through the next cycle of action.

EL Maps are scalable. They can be used by groups as small as two individuals to clarify their thinking, or groups as large as 100, to allow the group's collective wisdom to emerge. They can be used by program teams, whole organizations or cross-organization collaborations.

Knowledge left on the table is a huge wasted resource. EL Maps can help focus teams at all levels on harvesting, sharing and applying these valuable lessons.

FRAMING QUESTION:
What will it take to...?

Reflections about Past Actions	Thinking about Future Actions
INSIGHTS	**HYPOTHESES**
Past Actions	**Future Actions**
GROUND TRUTH	**OPPORTUNITIES**

EL Maps are more than a tool. They are a blueprint for how living systems learn.

—Arie de Geus

Applications of Emergent Learning using EL Maps

EL Maps can be used in a wide range of applications. Here are just a few examples of how organizations have used EL Maps to maximize learning and improve performance:

Launching a team learning discipline

A team of team leaders used EL Maps to learn across a series of project launches, reflecting first to bring all of their wisdom to the table, then testing out solutions and tracking and communicating results from launch to launch.

Annual planning

A non-profit professional organization uses EL Maps each year to reflect on lessons learned from the previous year and build those insights into planning for the year to come.
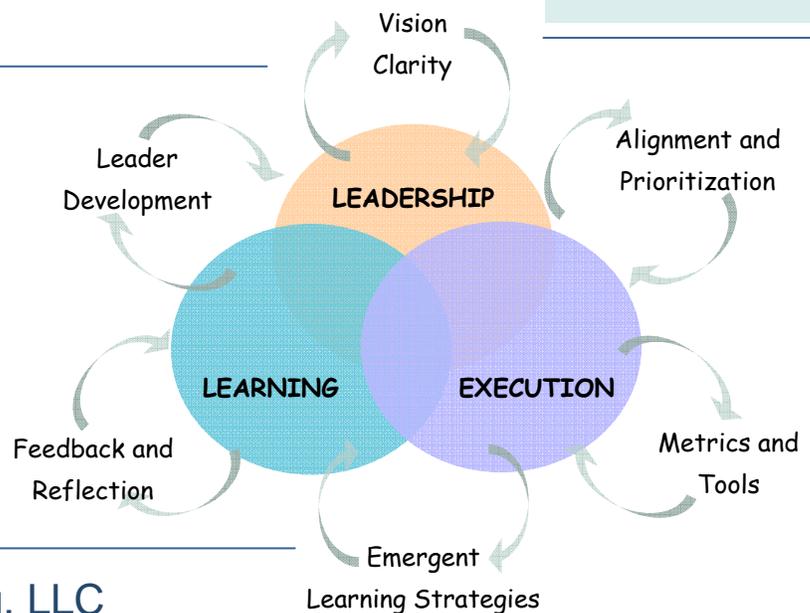
Sales management

A professional services firm uses EL Maps on a bi-weekly basis to track and learn from recent sales activity and plan to deliberately improve each new sales contact.

Technical knowledge sharing

A large technical organization uses EL Maps to structure large knowledge-sharing conferences so that "grandstanding" PowerPoint presentations give way to clearly stated hypotheses, reflective dialogue and careful thought about best practices and opportunities to transfer them.

> "The goal of every EL Map session is to get to a high-quality, testable hypothesis... along with a clear opportunity to test it out in a team's real work."
>
> — Marilyn Darling

Vision Clarity

Alignment and Prioritization

Leader Development

LEADERSHIP

LEARNING

EXECUTION

Feedback and Reflection

Metrics and Tools

Emergent Learning Strategies

Signet Research & Consulting, LLC

Signet Research & Consulting is a partnership of consultant/researchers dedicated to creating innovative solutions through building deep capacity to learn and adapt to dynamic and changing conditions. Signet conducts research and provides consulting services at the intersection of leadership, learning and execution, tightly linking theory and action to produce real results. Signet's consulting services range from helping leadership teams build line-of-sight from vision to execution, to supporting learning through execution using the tools and principles of Emergent Learning, to building future leaders through development programs that link to current projects and responsibilities.

Signet's products and services work at the intersection of leadership, learning and execution:

- Strategic Alignment Facilitation
- Needs assessment and project design
- EL Maps
- The Action Review Cycle (AARs)
- Executive and Team Coaching
- Training and Facilitation
- Research into Successful Practices

For more information on Signet's research and consulting services, please visit us on the web at

www.signetconsulting.com.