Reflections

The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

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society for **SoL**
organizational learning

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COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE HAS BECOME A CATCH PHRASE FOR social processes – such as collaboration – and cooperation that allow us to realize possibilities that would otherwise remain latent. In this issue, contributors to *Reflections* offer cases studies, research, and new methods that help us name what we know from experience, therefore improving our conscious practice in bringing out the best in each other.

How do you bring great minds together around complex challenges? SoL members Marilyn Darling and Charles Parry offer a method in our first feature "Growing Knowledge Together: Using Emergent Learning and EL Maps for Better Results." The authors have previously developed and reported on AARs (After-Action Reviews), particularly for use in non-military settings. Their experience led them to recognize that a method was needed to help groups consciously capture learning that occurred over multiple events. Emergent Learning (EL) maps offer a simple yet powerful approach to recognize patterns and come up with more systemic solutions through capturing data or results, framing hypotheses, and articulating next steps. The "map" can then be modified following the next round of action and reflection. Judy Rodgers comments.

It is hard enough to capture collective intelligence even when we think we share a common purpose. David Pauker ups the ante in "Conflict Alchemy: A Practical Paradigm for Conflict Solutions." We can say with some certainty that the emotions stimulated by conflict do not tend to produce a high degree of collective intelligence. Pauker uses a real case to illustrate a practical method in contrast to our instinctive "fight or flight" response. Since conflict is at its essence emotional and relational, the method focuses on "containment" – creating a space for all emotions and viewpoints to be held so that new possibilities can emerge.

In our third feature article, "Learning Together for Good Decision Making," SoL elder Arie de Geus challenges us to equate organizational learning with decision-making. He focuses in particular on how we mobilize all those needed for a successful result, particularly in non-routine circumstances when new solutions are needed for new situations. A more holistic definition of decision-making begins with recognizing that we're in a new situation. It continues through idea generation, analysis, choice, and implementation. How do we get better at decision making and learning? By creating low-risk environments to experiment together. De Geus uses examples to illustrate that if we develop the habits of inquisitiveness and creativity (or playfulness) and use them to respond to a challenge that has no consequences, we are more likely to call on them in real situations that normally provoke fear and result in mediocre decisions.

More organizations seem to be exploring how cohorts of new leaders can be developed rather than thinking in terms of individual high potential leaders. In this issue's contribution to the Emerging Knowledge Forum, SoL members Jim Myracle and Diane Oettinger describe a particular method using the World Café process. "Developing High Potential Leaders with Strategy Cafes" documents in detail a process for gathering cohorts of managers to discuss their organization's future, and to work together on a few well-defined projects with likely strategic impact. Participants become familiar with an important process, produce results for their organizations not likely to be achieved through other initiatives, and create a new web of intelligence within their enterprises.

In this issue's book excerpt from *Leadership Agility*, authors Bill Joiner and Steve Josephs offer a developmental view of leadership for collective intelligence in a world of change and complexity. The findings of their extensive research complement those previously reported elsewhere with a useful refinement. As you might expect, those individuals, teams, and organizations that continue to be successful in tumultuous circumstances are good at taking cues from their environment, and in working effectively with other stakeholders. In addition, the authors highlight "creative" agility as critical to success. This ability to bring (or stimulate) fresh thinking in a life or death situation is the high leverage version of making lemonade when life gives you lemons. Their "Five Levels of Leadership Agility" should prompt an interesting conversation among readers about how leaders' behavior is interdependent with the field in which they are acting.

In addition, we've included brief summaries of the following recently published articles and books. Please see Recommended Reading at the close of this issue for the full list.

"Collaborating for Systemic Change" by Peter M. Senge, Benyamin B. Lichtenstein, Katrin Kaeufer, Hilary Bradbury, John S. Carroll in the *Sloan Management Review,* Winter 2007, pp. 44-53 (Reprint # 48211)

"In Praise of the Incomplete Leader" by Deborah Ancona, Thomas W. Malone, Wanda J. Orlikowski, Peter M. Senge in the *Harvard Business Review*, February 2007 (Reprint R0702E)

Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges by C. Otto Scharmer (SoL, 2007)

Inside Out: Stories and Method for Generating Collective Will to Create the Future We Want by Tracy Huston (SoL, 2007)

A Leader's Guide to Reflective Practice by Judy Brown (Trafford Publishing, 2006)

The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems, 2nd Edition by Peggy Holman, Tom Devane, Steven Cady (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007)

Leadership is Global: Co-creating a Humane and Sustainable World, edited by Walter Link, Thais Corral and Mark Gerzon, including contributions from SoL members Adam Kahane and Alain Gauthier. (The Global Leadership Network, 2006)

The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics by Riane Eisler (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, April 2007)

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Growing Knowledge Together:
Using Emergent Learning and
EL Maps for Better Results

Marilyn Darling and Charles Parry

Marilyn Darling

Charles Parry

W e were working with a senior executive many years ago who was keen to turn his large staff organization into a learning organization. We often sat in on his team meetings. Whenever he could, he would invite a leader from another part of the company to come and present a talk to his team about how they had become a learning organization. The presentations were impressive. Each leader had chosen a different path and created innovative ways to foster a learning culture. When each speaker completed his or her PowerPoint presentation, it was met with a round of applause and compliments from every-one in attendance. The presenter would stride out a few inches taller.

What invariably followed was a series of carefully worded comments directed at the executive. They were generally positive, but at the same time they included a subtle observa-tion about how different that organization was, or about the barriers his staff organization faced that the other organization did not. These comments, by the way, were all accurate – each organization was in fact quite different. One was a greenfield manufacturing plant; our executive's organization was a staff function. Another was a small team in Europe; our executive's team lived at the corporate headquarters in the U.S.

What became abundantly clear to us was not that our executive's team had nothing to learn from these presenters, nor that they could not become a learning organization. Rather, the way that we go about sharing knowledge is flawed. The speakers came with prepared PowerPoint presentations they had spoken to many times before. There was no easy way to know in advance what was important to our executive's team, and there was no structure for holding a useful exchange of ideas about what it would take for this staff organization to learn from their example. The kind of interaction this team needed to have was more col-laborative: "What prompted you to take this on? Did you stumble along the way? How did you pick yourselves up and keep going? Let us tell you what we've tried and maybe you can help us think about why it hasn't stuck so far."

That set of meetings was the genesis of emergent learning and EL Maps.[1] Our executive could have been seeking any big change: to make his organization lean, green, innovative, a center of excellence, etc. The more we explored how people tackle complex challenges and goals together, the more we realized that there was a big missing piece: How do we learn when the textbook can't be written fast enough? What does it honestly take to learn from our own work? From the successes and failures of our peers? How do we notice a lesson ready to be learned and make sure that we actually learn it? We coined the term "emergent learn-ing" to describe this process, and conceived EL Maps as a way to create both the space and the structure to allow two or more teams to have a more collaborative learning conversation;

the metric being that each team could actually do something based on what they learned and reasonably expect to produce a better result.

In this article, we will look at a series of situations like this one where teams need to learn about complex challenges from and with each other. We will look at what we typically do – like these PowerPoint-laden sessions – that makes it difficult to actually learn, and talk about how EL Maps offer a way to grow knowledge together.

Triggers for Learning Conversations

Whether we work in the public, private or nonprofit sector, we all encounter circumstances that call for bringing people together and trying to learn our way through an important challenge or a wildly new situation. In a constantly changing environment, closed-door planning by a few people is not enough to ensure success. Some of the most common triggers include:

- Preparing a broad response to a crisis or emergency
- Preparing for a major discontinuity on the horizon
- Learning across teams, organizations or communities tackling similar challenges
- Seeking fundamental solutions to an intractable problem
- Creating a cultural transformation

Emergency Response

How can we ensure that everyone is prepared to respond effectively and in concert to a major crisis situation?

Natural disaster and political turmoil are on everyone's radar screen today. Any situation that calls for so many people to act relatively immediately and independently reveals the community's level of readiness to respond.

So it came to be that Hurricane Katrina offered such vivid lessons about the importance of preparing for disaster and coordinating response among a complex web of organizations and individuals. But how do those lessons actually get "learned" such that next time will be different? The challenge is that neither the nature nor the timing of the next crisis can be predicted. Katrina prompted an across-the-board increase in emergency preparedness activities, including many large "what if" scenarios and planning events.

Major Discontinuities on the Horizon

What will it take to ensure that we continue to succeed in the face of a major external change? How can we use this change to help us gain momentum rather than lose it?

Any organization facing a major and complex discontinuity may call for collective learning: major demographic shifts; the need to merge two organizations after an acquisition; the anticipated entrance of a powerful new competitor; new legislation like the introduction of Sarbanes-Oxley. Web 2.0 could turn the way we do our work literally upside down.

What will it take to preserve the wisdom of a generation and reinforce critical social networks? How will a whole new generation of workers approach their work differently?

The impending wave of baby boomer retirements is a case in point. It is prompting much hand-wringing as important knowledge about how to do the work prepares to walk out the door. Well-established networks are threatened with disintegration. Complicating this picture is the fact that the next generation, wanting to make its own mark, may not see the wisdom of their elders as especially relevant . . . until a situation arises and a critical question can't be answered.

Tackling Similar Challenges

How can we learn from each other so that we raise the level of our performance across all regions? What will it take to achieve a challenging new goal in different cultures and circumstances?

Corporations aim to manage performance against key metrics (profit, quality, safety, customer satisfaction) across manufacturing plants, regions or business units. Government contractors manage many large and expensive programs simultaneously. Large nonprofits aim to serve their mission in a wide range of regions and communities. Any of these organizations may face wide and frustratingly unexplainable variations in performance across regions, operating units, programs, projects, sectors or communities and seek to understand why.

Our executive who aimed to create a learning organization is a variation on this situation. The traditional "capture and replicate best practices" model pits the star performers against the "problem children." The executive was sending the implicit message that his team was not as good as the best practice learning organizations he invited in to speak. It's natural that his team would seek to protect their sense of themselves by looking for ways in which they were different from the other organization. The tragedy is that, used well, difference can be a powerful source of learning. (More on that later…)

Solving an Intractable Problem

What would it take to make a fundamental shift in the dynamics underlying this problem?

Occasionally a leader comes along who refuses to believe that a longstanding, complex problem is unsolvable. This is the essence of work in the nonprofit sector, which often brings

people together to try to learn together from each others' experience. They might be tackling anything from fresh drinking water in Africa to rural poverty in America; to huge social issues like AIDS or hunger. In the private sector, a visionary leader may decide to take on pernicious structural issues that are driving down quality or creating a rift between a company and its customers.

These leaders could start by bringing in an expert to shape the solution. But what if the experience of many hands, hearts and minds doing the work could first come together and think through what they have learned so far and what their real burning questions are? Waiting to bring in an expert until after this conversation happens would raise the quality of the request and the quality of the idea exchange between people doing the work and the expert they collectively hired to help them.

Creating a Cultural Transformation

What will it take to fundamentally change the culture and work habits of our organization?

Nearly every organization is in some phase of creating a cultural change – promoting diversity, adopting environmentally-friendly policies, cultivating innovation or lean thinking. Traditional change management programs start at the top and cascade down. Practitioners have learned a lot about how to manage resistance to change. But what if the real problem is that people don't like to be told to implement something they had no part in creating, don't think will work, and will take them away from important work priorities? Forward-looking organizational leaders often bring together a broad group of stakeholders to launch an effort or reinvigorate a flagging change program.

. . . .

All of these situations have in common that there are no easy or permanently "right" solutions. They require many people to take *thoughtful* action independently. Replicating one solution won't work in a diverse set of cultures. Closed-door planning won't lead to the kind of thoughtful action called for. Like our executive's meetings, these large gatherings can easily become overburdened with PowerPoint presentations of success stories or expert solutions.

Getting everyone to the table who will have their hands, hearts, and minds on these kinds of problems and getting their thinking into the "bones" of the solution produces at least three major benefits: 1) it generates more robust solutions that take into account a range of situations; 2) it creates more ownership for the solution rather than imposing it; and 3) it sets the stage for learning and adaptation at every level of implementation.

This kind of collective learning is especially challenging. The circumstances that call for it are typically complicated and dynamic. The complexity of learning collectively from experience – growing knowledge – increases as more people or organizations are involved in the learning process. Without a structure to promote dialogue, advocacy can disable listening. Lastly, it can seem daunting to build effective feedback loops into implementation.

EL Maps

EL Maps were once described by a user as a "blank canvas" on which learning can take place. Each map starts with a "Framing Question" to focus the conversation. An EL Map is built around a simple timeline [see Figure 1]: everything to the left of center refers to the past

and everything to the right of center refers to the future; everything below the line refers to facts and concrete events, while everything above the line refers to our thinking about those events. The vertical line gives equal weight to past and future, which helps groups avoid getting stuck in painful "post-mortem" analyses of the past. The horizontal line evokes a distinction between the world of experience and our thinking about it, which helps groups develop their skills in balancing inquiry and advocacy.[2]
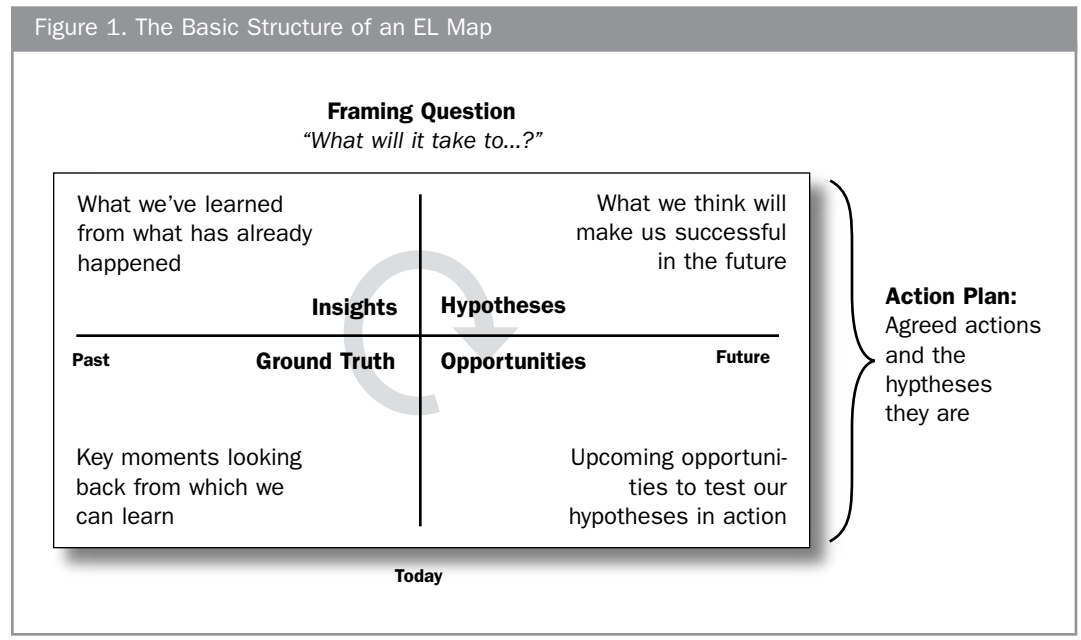
This creates a map with four quadrants. To read clockwise from the lower right quadrant:

1) A group starts by having in mind one or more concrete events that are going to happen in the near future related to their framing question;
2) They look back at similar events that have happened in the past;
3) They reflect on insights gained from those events about what caused past results;
4) They formulate hypotheses (a shared theory of success) about what will make the events coming up successful;
5) Finally, they match hypotheses with upcoming events to create more robust and testable action plans.

The same process can be used to circle back around as today's opportunities turn into tomorrow's ground truth.

A community seeking to improve its ability to respond to emergencies could bring together first responders, hospitals, local governments and neighborhood organizers to look back at several past emergency response situations – their own and others – to see if there are commonalities or differences that would point to better ways to prepare for and respond to future emergencies.

An organizational leader seeking to create a fundamental cultural change could bring together a cross-section of the organization to reflect on what has happened (successful and not) in past change efforts, or to look over the history of the corporation for defining moments when the culture has shifted and reflect on what they can learn from those moments.

Figure 1. The Basic Structure of an EL Map

Framing Question
"What will it take to...?"

What we've learned from what has already happened	What we think will make us successful in the future
Insights	**Hypotheses**
Past **Ground Truth**	**Opportunities** **Future**
Key moments looking back from which we can learn	Upcoming opportunities to test our hypotheses in action

Action Plan: Agreed actions and the hyptheses they are
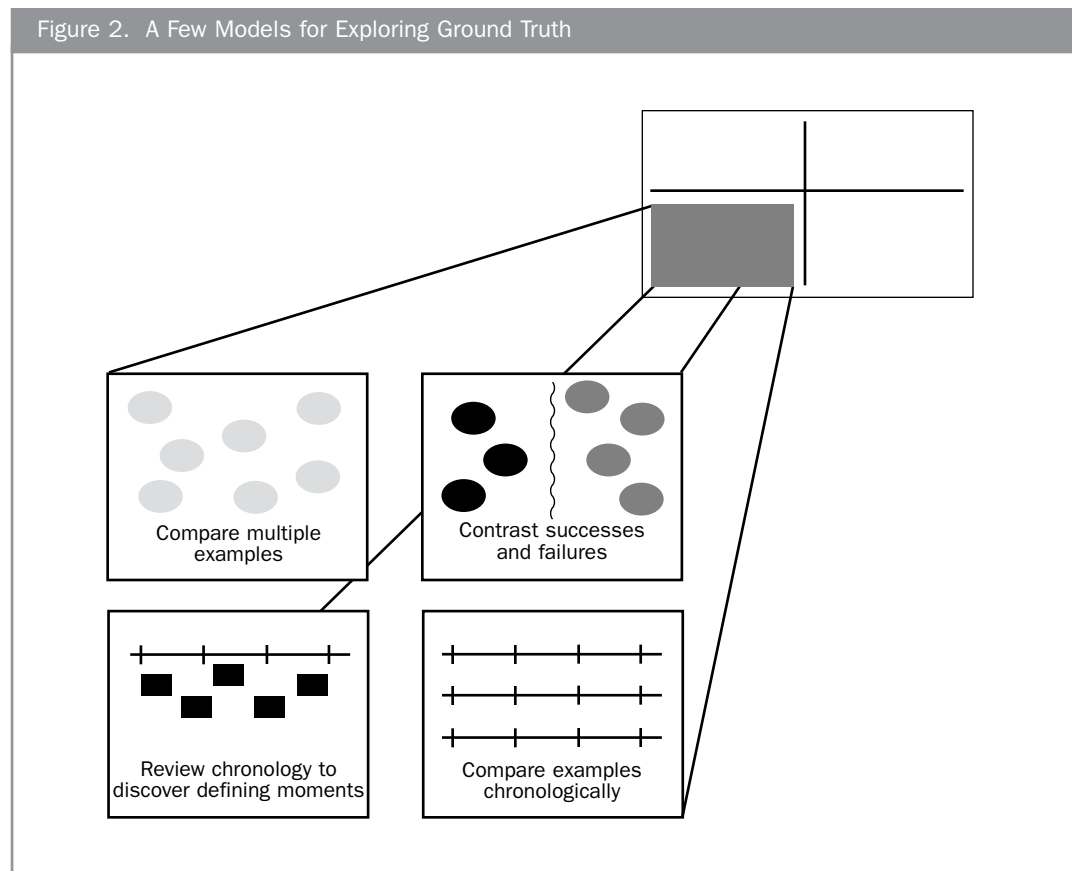
Today

An operational leader wishing to preserve the knowledge of a retiring generation might identify a mission-critical scenario and bring a cross-generational group together to have a conversation about their experiences in similar situations in the past. This structured conversation would surface important questions and fuel knowledge sharing around what will matter most to future success.

Finally, our executive's team could invite a few peers who were involved in creating the best practice learning organizations to tell the story of how and why they started along this path and engage in a dialogue about what bumps they experienced and what the executive's team might anticipate if they commit to a similar effort.[3]

A Blank Canvas

EL Maps are a blank canvas in the sense that groups can craft the conversation in any one quadrant, or even the sequence of working through a map, to fit the situation. The "Ground Truth" can be organized for reflection in a number of ways. For example, some maps compare a cluster of examples to search for similarities and differences. Other maps look at one or a handful of examples along a chronological timeline to seek out defining moments that contributed to their ultimate result. [See Figure 2.] There are likewise many ways to generate insights. Tools like the Five Whys or Causal Loop diagrams, or approaches like World Café, can all be used within the Insight quadrant of an EL Map.

Figure 2. A Few Models for Exploring Ground Truth

Compare multiple examples

Contrast successes and failures

Review chronology to discover defining moments

Compare examples chronologically

A few more examples illustrate the versatility of EL Maps:

- They have been used by a global company to compare regional Supply Chain Management implementations, in order to tease out the most important lessons to apply to future implementations in other regions.
- They have been used by a large county to convene the mayors, schools, hospitals, community activists and other stakeholders from three cities within the county to think about what it would take to create a county-wide health initiative, using everyone's collective past experience as a guide to think through what works and what doesn't to create sustainable change in their community.
- They have been used as an application exercise as part of a leadership development program to help participants select and consciously test out principles from the program in real work between sessions and bring insights back to the next session.

One EL Map session was called for by an information systems team that was dead tired of six-year projects where every decision demanded total consensus among all key stakeholders. They took a chance and did one project on their own without asking for permission. What normally took six years took only six months. They asked for an EL Map session essentially to create a case for why they should switch to the new model.
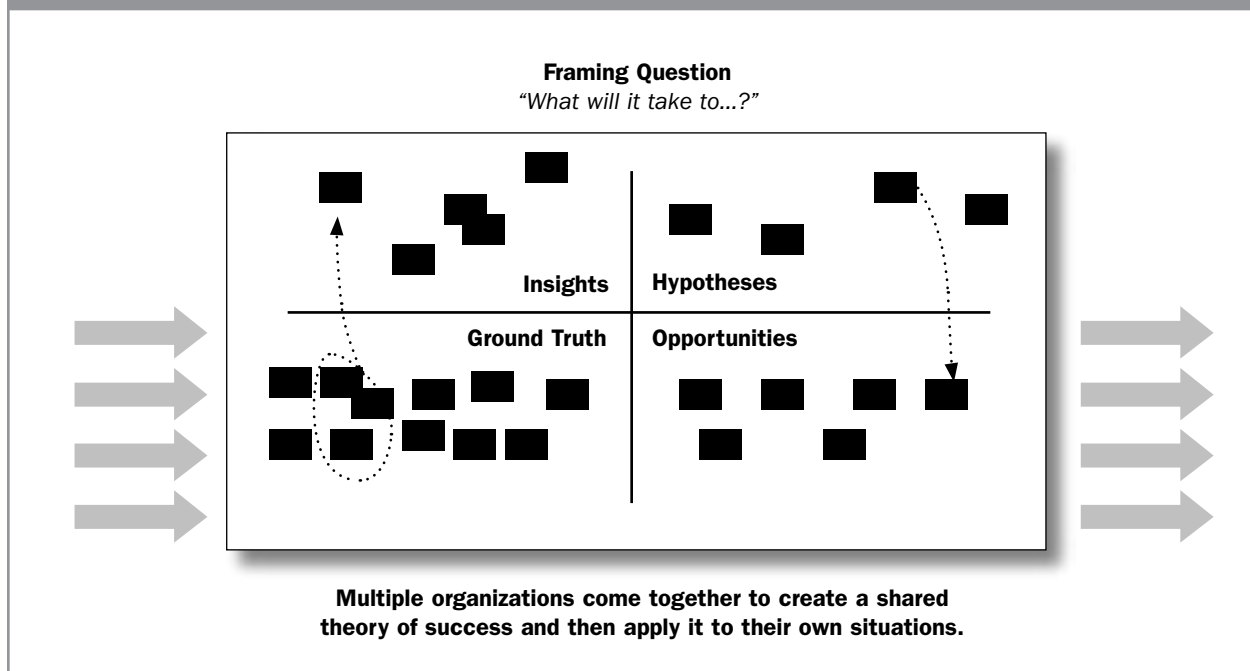
First, the team reflected on their original outcomes and measures of success for two projects. Using a chronological timeline, they compared the six-month project with a recently completed six-year project by laying them out in the Ground Truth quadrant and comparing what had happened, phase by phase. While the six month project was obviously shorter and less expensive, what they discovered was that neither project had produced the kind of outcome – in terms of user acceptance – they aimed for. While the long project had arrived too late to be of great value, the six-month project had no buy-in from its customers. Further reflection led them to the insight that there were times when consensus was important, and times when it was a wasted extra step. Rather than creating a rationale for throwing out the traditional consensus model in favor of a "just do it and apologize later" model, they came away with a more adaptive theory of success, a renewed commitment to clarify outcomes in advance, and a plan to track their results more rigorously in future projects.

Think Globally, Act Locally

EL Maps make it possible for a group of organizations or communities to come together to share thinking, while still independently owning the decision about which actions to take. [See Figure 3.] This distinguishes the process from the manufacturing mindset common a few years ago that an organization could identify one best practice and replicate it, without regard to local ownership and differences in local environments. Because each participating group will create its own action plan, there is less pressure to come to a consensus about the one "right" solution or hypothesis that everyone is going to implement. This frees up the group to stay with the inquiry and not shift into advocating for favored solutions.

It also frees them up to explore difference. In rapidly changing environments, our common tendency is to explain away unusual situations or unexpected outcomes rather than learn from them. EL Maps facilitate comparison across different situations to seek out what is the same and what is different, in order to produce a theory of success that can withstand different situations and cultures. In fact any story that is substantially different, either because the

Figure 3. Using Framing Questions

Framing Question
"What will it take to…?"

Insights | **Hypotheses**

Ground Truth | **Opportunities**

**Multiple organizations come together to create a shared
theory of success and then apply it to their own situations.**

situation was unusual or the results were different, becomes a valuable resource to test out the prevailing wisdom to see if it holds up in this unusual situation or if it needs to be refined.

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) recently convened a collection of nine foundations, large and small, local and global in scope, to ask the question, "What does it take to sustain seasoned nonprofit leaders?" Hard-working and typically under-funded, these leaders often became involved in this work because of their passion for a cause. But as executive directors of their organizations, the time they have to devote to their cause is squeezed by administrative responsibilities. Years of work in this arena can cause severe burnout.

The stories the foundations shared involved a number of different kinds of programs to support nonprofit leaders (sabbaticals, fellowships, leadership development), but because they all came to address the same framing question, lessons could be drawn from different kinds of programs being provided in very different situations. As one participant observed, "Initially I only wanted to talk with people doing sabbatical programs. As it turned out, I learned most from the person who has no sabbatical program." No one program was held out as the best practice, even though some foundations had modeled their own program on others in the room. Everyone had something to share and everyone had something to learn.

Localness is a core principle of emergent learning[4]. The people who should participate in an EL Map session are the people doing the work; the Framing Question should be one they themselves care about, not what an external convener cares about. For instance, if GEO had convened the same group of foundations but had asked them "*How can GEO more effectively support your work?*" this would violate the localness principle. The only participants who would walk away with a hypothesis to test would be the conveners.

A Journey, Not a Single Event

As the project team aiming to adopt a six-month "apologize later" approach to project management learned, in a complex situation, the first solution a group of people comes to is probably incomplete. Unlike traditional planning processes, EL Maps are designed to help everyone keep in mind that the ideas they walk out with are *hypotheses* that need to be tested and refined. And unlike traditional knowledge management practices that capture the story of a big success or failure and disseminate the "lessons learned," in emergent learning, the lesson is not *learned* until a team goes out and tries out its thinking and actually improves its results.

Unlike the traditional "capture and disseminate" model, therefore, the first and best customer for an EL Map is the team itself. If they can come back and report a significant improvement, then a real lesson may be ready to be disseminated. If not, the team can refine its hypothesis based on new data and try again. The payoff to the team is not only improved results, but validation that taking the time to build learning into implementation is worth the effort.

Thought of in this way, an EL Map is not an event but a punctuation point in a paragraph. It sets the stage for learning experiments around big challenges. The Framing Question is not just in service of a single meeting. It reflects a learning priority that will continue; something the team or community needs to focus on over time.

As we described triggers for collective learning efforts, we started each one with a framing question. To keep the learning conversation positive, action-oriented and forward-focused (versus retrospective, analytical and fault-finding), a framing question starts with "*What would it take to…?*" or "*How can we…?*" *Effective framing questions are simple and avoid assuming a solution.* "*What will it take to succeed in creating this desired change?*" is a more powerful question than "*How can we get buy-in for XYZ change model?*" More powerful yet: "*What will it take to create our desired change in such a way as to guarantee that things will not return to the way they were?*"

Sharing Lessons *Learned*

Once a lesson *has* been learned, EL Maps offer a good transitional device for sharing emerging knowledge. The very structure of the map offers a script for telling the learning story. In essence:

- The situation and challenge we faced was: [describe what led to the need to learn together]
- Therefore, the Framing Question we asked was:
- What we have learned so far is: [describe key insights from successes and failures]
- Based on this, our current hypothesis about what it will take to succeed is:
- Opportunities to apply and further test this hypothesis are: [describe situations to which this might apply[5]]
- Our own plan to continue to test this hypothesis includes: [describe the team's action plan based on its own upcoming opportunities]

Thinking back to our executive who wanted to create a learning organization, the presentations his team heard focused on the final result of a single success—the artifact that was

Unburdening Local Learning

In Emergent Learning, the first customer for what is being learned should be the people having the conversation. If they become convinced that taking time to gather and apply what they are learning actually improves their results, they will insist on doing it. But the process must be fit for purpose—it cannot be burdened by unnecessary restrictions or expectations. We err when we insist on waiting for something that delays the process: availability of an external facilitator, more data, 100% participation. We err when we insist that each learning conversation be captured for dissemination. We don't argue that these are not good things to strive for, but that getting the learning habit embedded in a group's work process is a higher priority.

Therefore, we urge readers to use EL Maps for their highest and best purpose: to bring together people to launch a learning effort, to break through a stubborn challenge, or periodically to track what a whole community is learning in its own work. It should be paired with local learning practices [see Figure 4]. Our favorite method for local learning is the Before and After Action Review.[8]

As Figure 4 illustrates, the local team's learning cycle is the heart – literally the heartbeat – of a learning culture. It should not burdened with having to serve the institution by 1) focusing on questions beyond their own scope of responsibility; or 2) being asked to stop and capture and disseminate lessons for the benefit of others. Yet the lessons learned that a team produces can feed into, and be fed by, the institution's larger learning and knowledge processes.

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The EL Map is a trademarked tool of Signet Research & Consulting, LLC. Readers are encouraged to experiment with EL Maps, provided that Signet's trademark is acknowledged by adding a note on each map that says: "EL Maps are used by permission of Signet Research & Consulting, LLC. *www.signetconsulting.com*."
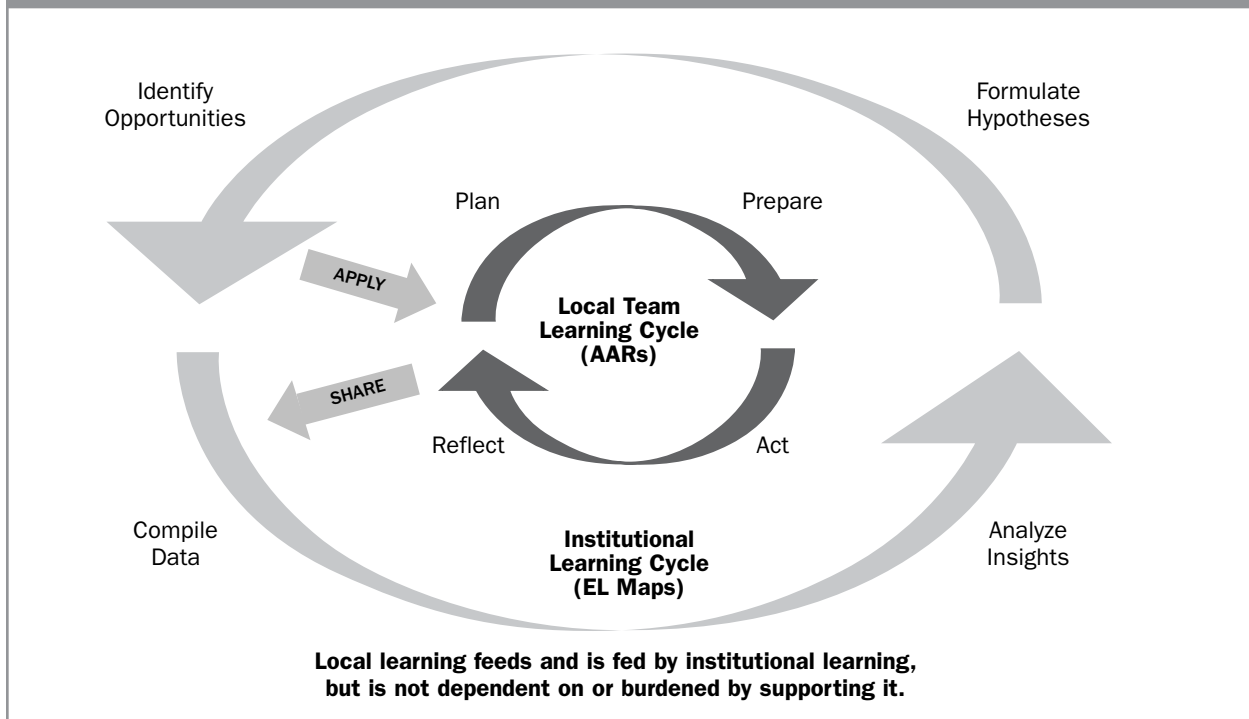
created in a particular situation. The implicit message is that this is a complete and replicable solution. In a complex environment, it is not. The difference between this kind of story and an emergent learning story is that the latter is the story of the journey, not just the result. It also compares multiple situations, rather than talking about one big success.

Note also that an emergent learning story offers the opportunity to acknowledge "failure" by talking about what we learned from it that will make us more successful in the future. It demonstrates what one of our colleagues refers to as "the humility of the craftsman before the task."[6] We believe that sharing this kind of learning-from-mistakes story is one of the key actions a leader can take to begin to shift the culture toward a true learning culture.

Keeping learning in the forefront is, indeed, a leadership act. No one meeting will produce a sustainable capacity to create the future we envision. A parade of PowerPoint presentations or a library of "lessons learned" will not transform our executive's organization into a learning organization. "In a fast-changing environment, the capacity to learn lessons is more valuable than any individual lesson learned."[7] EL Maps provide a forum to bring great minds together around complex challenges. They create ownership for shared solutions, and set the stage for learning through implementation.

But it is this sustained focus on learning around important Framing Questions that ultimately creates a learning culture. At its essence, emergent learning is the scientific method paired with good organizational learning practices. As Arie de Geus, author of *The Living Company*, commented, "EL Maps are more than a tool. They are a blueprint for how living systems learn, and reflect recent research findings in neurobiology and cognitive science."

Figure 4. Local and Institutional Learning Cycles

Identify Opportunities

Formulate Hypotheses

Plan

Prepare

APPLY

Local Team Learning Cycle (AARs)

SHARE

Reflect

Act

Compile Data

Institutional Learning Cycle (EL Maps)

Analyze Insights

Local learning feeds and is fed by institutional learning, but is not dependent on or burdened by supporting it.

Adapted from Larry Karasevich, ExxonMobil Corporation

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marilyn Darling founded Signet in 1989. Over the last ten years, she has partnered with Charles Parry to conduct research on the learning and leadership practices of highly effective organizations, translating their findings into the principles and tools of Emergent Learning and EL Maps™. Marilyn is a founding member of SoL.

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Endnotes

1   This does not mean that the convener's question is not worth asking. The convener's staff could ask for feedback from its members and use this as the ground truth data for its own EL Map. But when facing a complex challenge with lots of moving parts, creating nested framing questions and holding a series of smaller EL Map sessions keeps everyone engaged in learning about what matters most to them. It reinforces personal accountability and sets the stage for learning and adaptation at every level. [See sidebar: "Unburdening local learning."]

2   Readers who are familiar with the Ladder of Inference can use an EL Map to reinforce this idea.

3   For readers familiar with the Peer Assist process, this is essentially a Peer Assist using an EL Map to guide the interaction.

4   Darling and Parry, "Emergent Learning: Taking 'Learning from Experience' to a New Level," The Systems Thinker, May 1999.

5   Three natural audiences might be: 1) groups facing a similar challenge; 2) groups who have experienced a similar "failed" result; and 3) groups about to step into a similar kind of event or situation.

6   Stephen Danckert, reported by Darling and Parry in "From Post-Mortem to Living Practice: An in-depth study of the evolution of the After Action Review."

7   Darling, Parry and Moore, "Learning in the Thick of It," Harvard Business Review, July-August 2005.

8   Ibid

Thanks to David Flanigan for contributing to this article.

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