

AN AGILITY LAB RESOURCE

Test + Learning Card Guidance

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OVERVIEW

“Don’t invest in experiments to solve problems or create opportunities. Invest in experiments to quickly, cheaply, and easily gain insight into solving problems and creating opportunities.”

- [Innovator’s Hypothesis](#)

Test and learning cards are a simple framework for building discipline around gathering data/evidence to invalidate (or validate) assumptions through short-term, lightweight experiments. This is what they look like:



Why use test and learning cards?

Learning happens at the intersection of what you thought would happen and what actually happened. We miss many learnings because we don't take the time upfront to write down what we actually think will happen. Having the discipline to simply write down what we expect to happen removes the possibility of "hindsight bias". Hindsight bias allows us to convince ourselves after an event that we accurately predicted what would happen before it happened.

By using test/learning cards we are able to gather evidence that usually drives insight about the best path forward. This enables teams to take a "data-driven" decision making approach, rather than going with what people "think" or "feel" is the best path forward.

TEST CARDS

We believe that...This is a hypothesis that will serve as a benchmark to test against. Focus on one or two aspects of the product/idea/way of working you are trying to gather evidence around—any more than that and the experiment becomes too frayed.

Example: We believe that...when given the choice between pistachio ice cream and mango sorbet, most people will choose mango.

To verify that we will...Keep it simple! The lighter the lift, the more likely you are to actually conduct the experiment. What test can you run in 3 days to 3 months? Anything longer than that should be broken down into smaller tests.

Example: To verify that we will...have each team member ask 5 people their preference using the following prompt: "I'm conducting a survey: if given the choice between pistachio ice cream and mango sorbet, which would you choose?"

And measure...How can you gather data about the hypothesis you are making? Both qualitative ("on a scale of 1-5 how helpful was Newsletter X?") and quantitative ("5 out of 7 participants actually clicked on the newsletter link") insights are useful. Be wary of [vanity metrics](#).

Example: *And measure...the percentage of people who answered pistachio ice cream compared to mango sorbet.*

We are right if... We are looking for patterns and signals, not proof. If you're right all the time then it means that you aren't creating meaningful insights, if you're wrong all the time it means you don't have enough empathy.

Example: *We are right if...most people say they would choose mango sorbet.*

Risks/Biases... This isn't included on the original test card (photo above), but we've found it helpful to state any risks you are taking, or assumptions you are making as you conduct this experiment. It's also helpful to note any [biases](#) you or your team might have that could skew your interpretation of the data.

Example: *Our team is overwhelmingly biased against pistachio ice cream which could be impacting our preference towards mango sorbet. There's also a risk that the people we ask are similarly-minded to our team and therefore not a true representation of the general population. A risk we are taking is asking people which flavor ice cream / sorbet people want without actually having any to offer, leaving them disappointed.*

Expiration Date: If you haven't been able to complete the experiment by a certain date, you should take that as evidence in and of itself. Give yourself enough time, within reason, to conduct the experiment, but keep it short enough that you're motivated to actually do it. **Start small to learn fast!**

Example: *Expiration date is...next Monday.*

LEARNING CARDS

You've conducted an experiment! Congratulations! Now it's time to synthesize your findings, and adjust your assumptions / path forward accordingly.

We believed... Restate your hypothesis to keep your original belief top of mind.

Example: We believed that...when given the choice between pistachio ice cream and mango sorbet, most people will choose mango.

We observed... Summarize the data/evidence you've gathered. Can be bullet points. Keep it objective—state the facts!

Example: We observed...

- 17 people chose pistachio ice cream (majority! - 57%)
- 13 people chose mango sorbet (43%)

From that we learned... How are you interpreting the data/evidence you've gathered? What new information has emerged? What new ideas are coming up? What patterns or synergies are you seeing that could relate to other areas of your work (note: we are operating in ecosystems, not siloes). Remember, learning happens in the space between what you expect to happen and what actually happens.

Example: From that we learned...that our hypothesis was incorrect! But only slightly: while more people preferred pistachio ice cream, it was still relatively close—57% choosing pistachio and 43% choosing mango sorbet. Wondering if the time of day had anything to do with the question (some people asked in the morning, while some asked in the afternoon) and if the answers would have been different if we had images or actual samples of the ice cream or sorbet.

Therefore, we will... What actions will we take based on the learnings we have gathered? This is the most powerful part of the learning card as it forces discipline. Fill this section out with your team (if relevant) and immediately create to-dos based on what you state here.

Example: Therefore, we will...conduct another experiment before deciding which ice cream to feature on our menu during opening week. This time we will have XX number of actual pistachio ice cream and mango sorbet samples for people to choose to eat (actions speak louder than words!).

Other learnings...As stated above, we are working in ecosystems, not siloes. It's highly likely that over the course of running this particular experiment, other, tangential insights emerged. Note them here.

Example: No one said neither or asked for a different kind of dessert... Therefore, we will also provide an option for folks to choose a non-ice cream/sorbet option.

You will have validated your assumption when you are able to accurately predict the outcome of your test. Until then, keep testing and learning!

Questions? Please reach out to our Agility Lab team members!

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