Sponge.
Unforgettable learning

Visit us on stand **H40**

The L&D Strategy Equation.

Josh Cardoz
Chief Creative & Learning Officer – Sponge
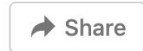
"Only 17% of L&D teams feel they have the right strategies in place to tackle the challenges they will face in the year ahead."

(Source: Elucidat)

Top 5 L&D focus areas for 2024

In a world awake to AI's impact, skill building is no longer simply a perk for employees — it's a priority for organizational success. So it's no surprise that aligning learning to business goals is L&D's top focus area for the second year in a row.

At the same time, a new priority demands attention. In a single year, **helping employees develop their careers** climbed from No. 9 on L&D's priority list to No. 4.

This year's research will take a deeper look at how career development drives business impact.

1. Aligning learning programs to business goals

2. Upskilling employees

3. Creating a culture of learning

4. Helping employees develop their careers   ···· **up from No.9 last year**

5. Improving employee retention

The "problem" with how we traditionally think about strategy.

It's too detached from the everyday.

It can be too abstract/intimidating.

We're constantly waiting for permission to be more strategic.
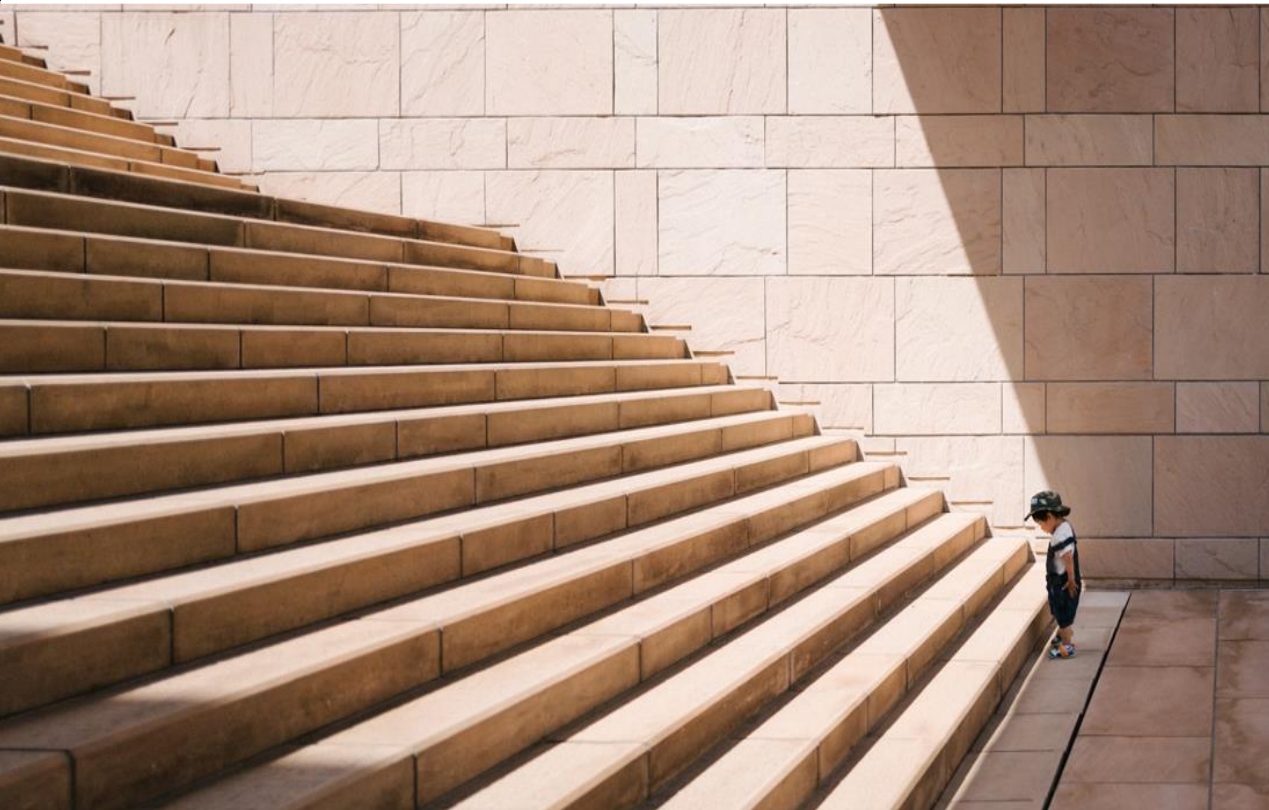
Sustaining momentum.

WE. ARE. BUSY!

L&D has a perennial "being strategic" challenge.

So, we need to rethink what it means to be strategic in the **reality** of our jobs and organisations.

Sponge.

Hi. I'm Josh.

Chief Creative & Learning Officer

Sponge.

Roles:

- Principal Learning Strategist
- Head of Digital Learning
- Faculty member
- Creative writer
- Instructional designer
- Producer

I'm on a
2400
day learning streak!

Helping organisations and their leaders transform how they *view* learning (as a catalyst for impact).

Industries:

- Tech
- Energy
- Pharmaceutical
- Professional Services
- Automotive Supply
- Banking
- Finance
- Food & Beverage
- Healthcare
- Hospitality
- Government
- Consumer Goods
- Packaging
- Mobility/Transportation
- Pharmaceuticals
- Publishing
- Sales Training
- Manufacturing
- Logistics
- Legal
- Insurance
- Telecommunications
- Household & Personal Care
- Aviation

Topics :

Onboarding ⟷ Sales & Marketing

Tech products ⟷ Tire physics

- Digital transformation
- Learner experience
- Content strategy
- Data strategy
- Culture of learning

L&D leaders can be highly strategic – it just needs to fit into the everyday reality.

What if being more strategic came down to our daily habits?

Daily (strategic) habits

= powerful results.
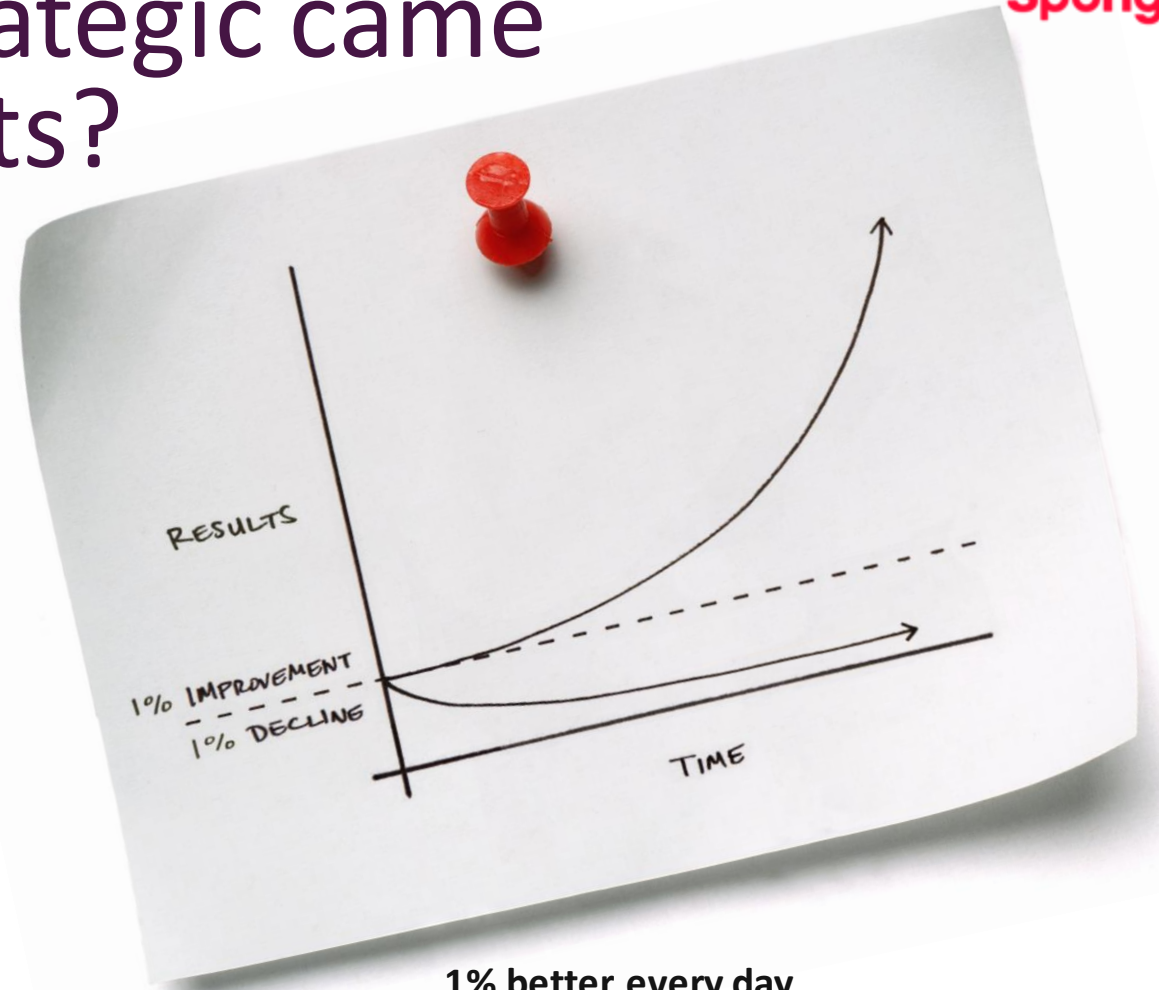
1% better every day

1% worse every day for one year. $0.99^{365} = 00.03$

1% better every day for one year. $1.01^{365} = 37.78$

Source: James Clear "Atomic Habits"

Sponge.

Let's make strategic thinking...

Simple.

Accessible.

Habitual.

25 min to leave you with...

- more confidence in thinking strategically

- a way to convert daily thinking into strategic framing. (and develop strategic hypotheses within the "space" of your output.)

- a simple framework you can use right now!

- (at least one quality dad joke)

You've been thinking strategically this whole time.

Sponge.

Where are we now?

Where do we want to go?

What are the things we know are working?

What are we unsure about?

What's our best 'bet' for success?

What's the best way of getting there?
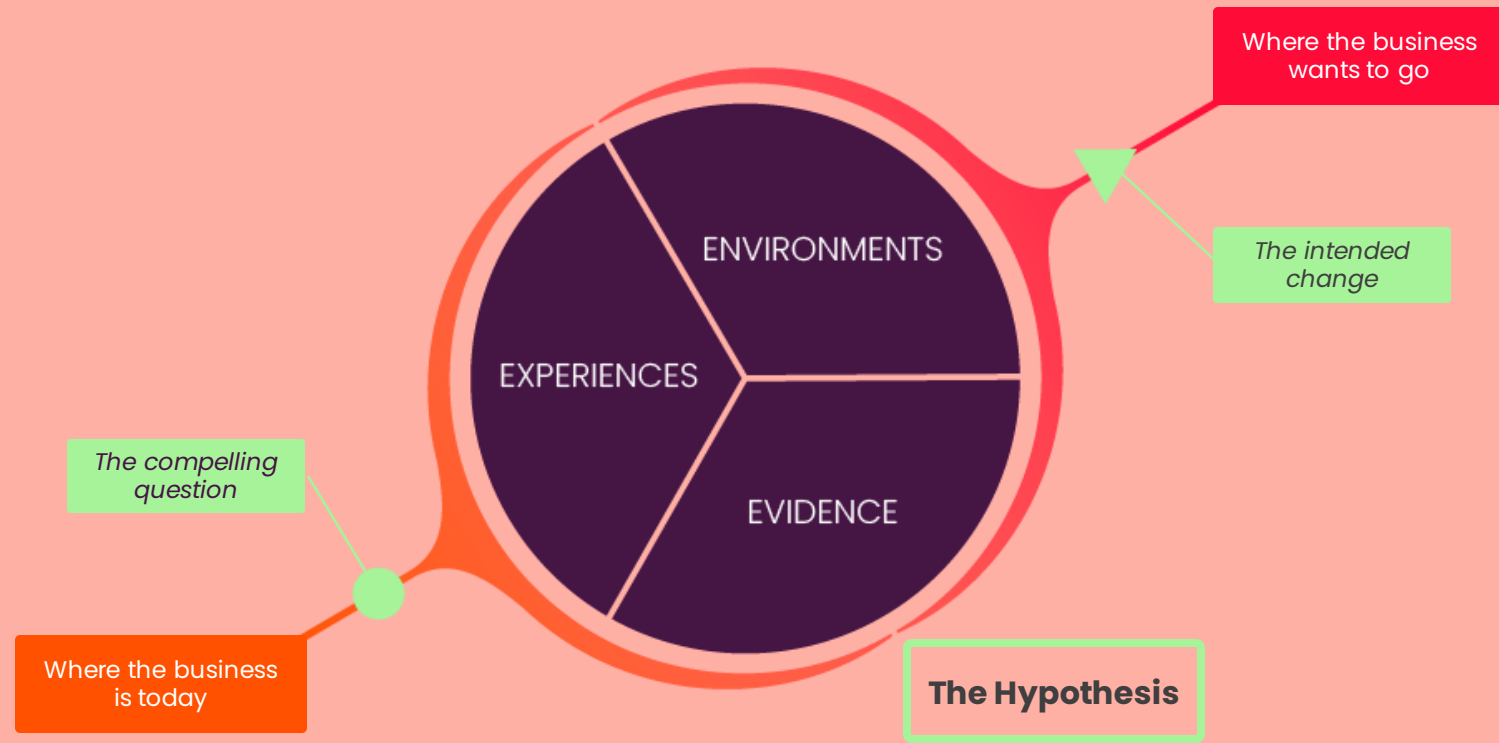
(And how do we know that?)

(And how can we learn more about it?)

How can we make stronger connections between what we do to the business?

What is the best hypothesis of things we need to do to add value to where we want to be?

What is "3E" Learning Strategy?

- A mental "napkin" exercise

- A calibration tool (optimizing)

- A diagnostic tool (pain points, opportunities)

- A reality check

- An ROI calculator

- A way to document and evidence your emergent strategic needs
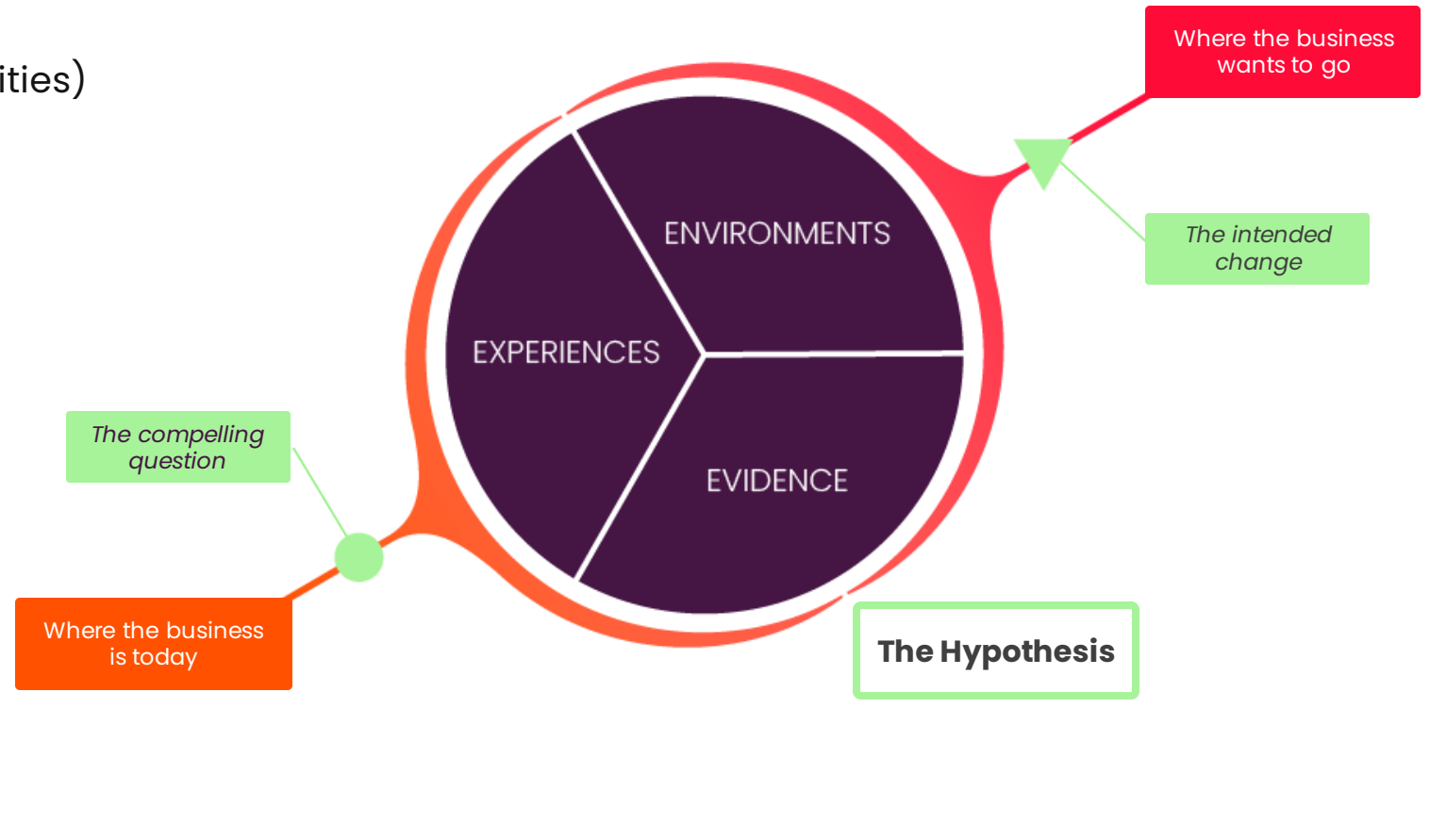
A flexible way to think strategically – when you don't have the time to.

Where the business wants to go

The intended change

ENVIRONMENTS

EXPERIENCES

EVIDENCE

The compelling question

Where the business is today

The Hypothesis

"3E" Learning Strategy.

Sponge.
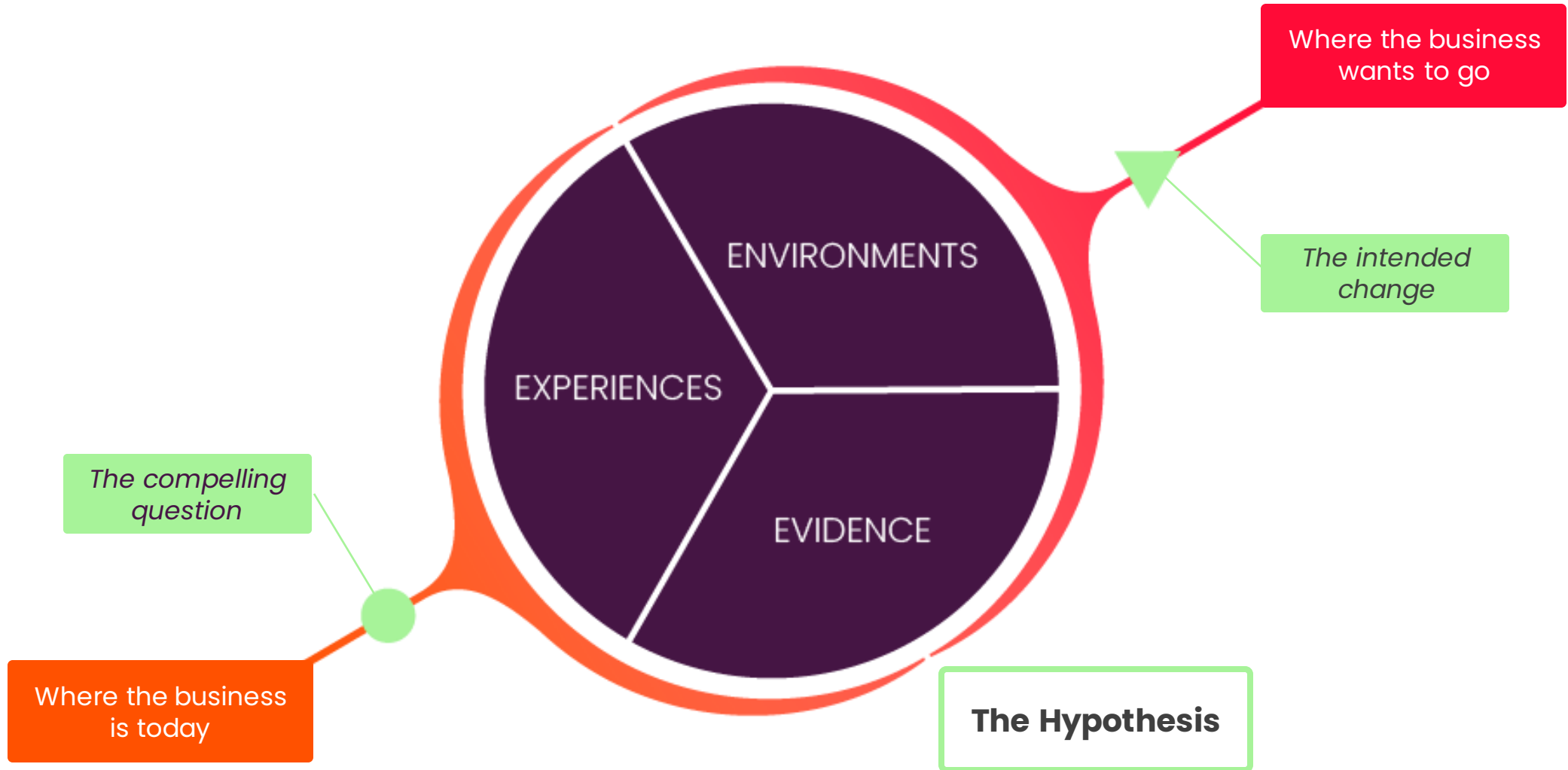
Where the business wants to go

The intended change

ENVIRONMENTS

EXPERIENCES

EVIDENCE

The compelling question

Where the business is today

The Hypothesis

14

Step 1:
Capture the big picture.

Step 2:
Draft the compelling question.

Step 3:
Craft your 3E hypothesis.

Step 4:
Analyse. Strategize. Iterate.

Sponge.

Step 1:
Capture the big picture.

Sponge.

Where the business wants to go

- Understand the story of your organization – where it is and where it's going

- Find priorities!

  - Shareholder reports, CEO town halls

  - Your most relevant stakeholders

- ("Priorities" = budget!)

- Tap into others' planning

Where the business is today

Why?

- This is often the part that is skipped!
- You can't get strategic until you start speaking the language of the business.
- Your internal network is the most critical part of unlocking strategic potential.
- The clearer the big picture, the easier it is to justify strategic spend.

Step 2:
Draft the compelling question.

- If you could distill the challenge in a single question, what would it be?

- If you were to write a case study, what was it that you set out to do?

- The question is the compass for the journey. It is what we will always come back to.

Why?

- To remind ourselves of the role of learning/training in the pursuit of organizational goals.
- Stuck? You're probably not asking the right question.
- We we need a "sellable" narrative.

Sponge.

EXPERIENCES

The compelling question

Where the business is today
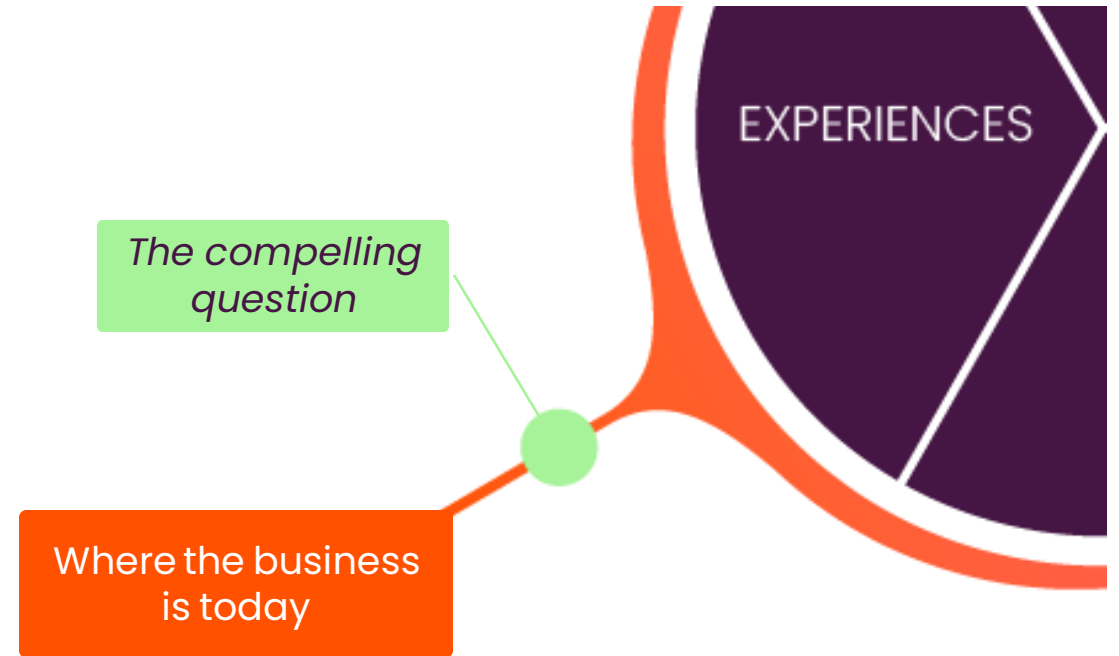
Ingredients of a great compelling question.

1. It reframes the challenge.

2. It uses the language of "How" (design thinking).

3. It is mapped to a business imperative.

4. It doesn't contain the words "training" or "learning."

5. It is *compelling*. (people are energized around solving it and it is an invitation for collaboration.)

Examples of compelling questions.

Sponge.

"How do we support our People Leaders to ensure all employees have a consistent experience – helping us become the best place to work in the industry?"

How do we enable rapid and successful integration of our employees into the world of R&D?

"How do we make our sustainability mission relatable, actionable, and aligned across our global teams?"

"How do we upskill our creators to increase profitability and reduce current drop off rates?"

"'How do we unlock the potential of our frontline workers to create brand ambassadors that elevate customer experience?"

Step 3:
Craft your 3E hypothesis.

What is the combination of things that is going to *meaningfully* add value to your compelling question?

EXPERIENCES

- Job aid
- Digital learning module
- Game
- Facilitated workshop
- Mentoring
- Comms campaign
- OTS course
- User-generated
- Shadowing
- Scavenger hunt

ENVIRONMENTS

- LMS/LXP
- Collaboration software
- Teams/Slack
- SharePoint
- Classroom
- Performance environment (retail store, manufacturing floor)
- Offsite

EVIDENCE

- Activity/ Engagement
- Likeability
- Self-reporting
- Skills pathway progression
- Manager observation
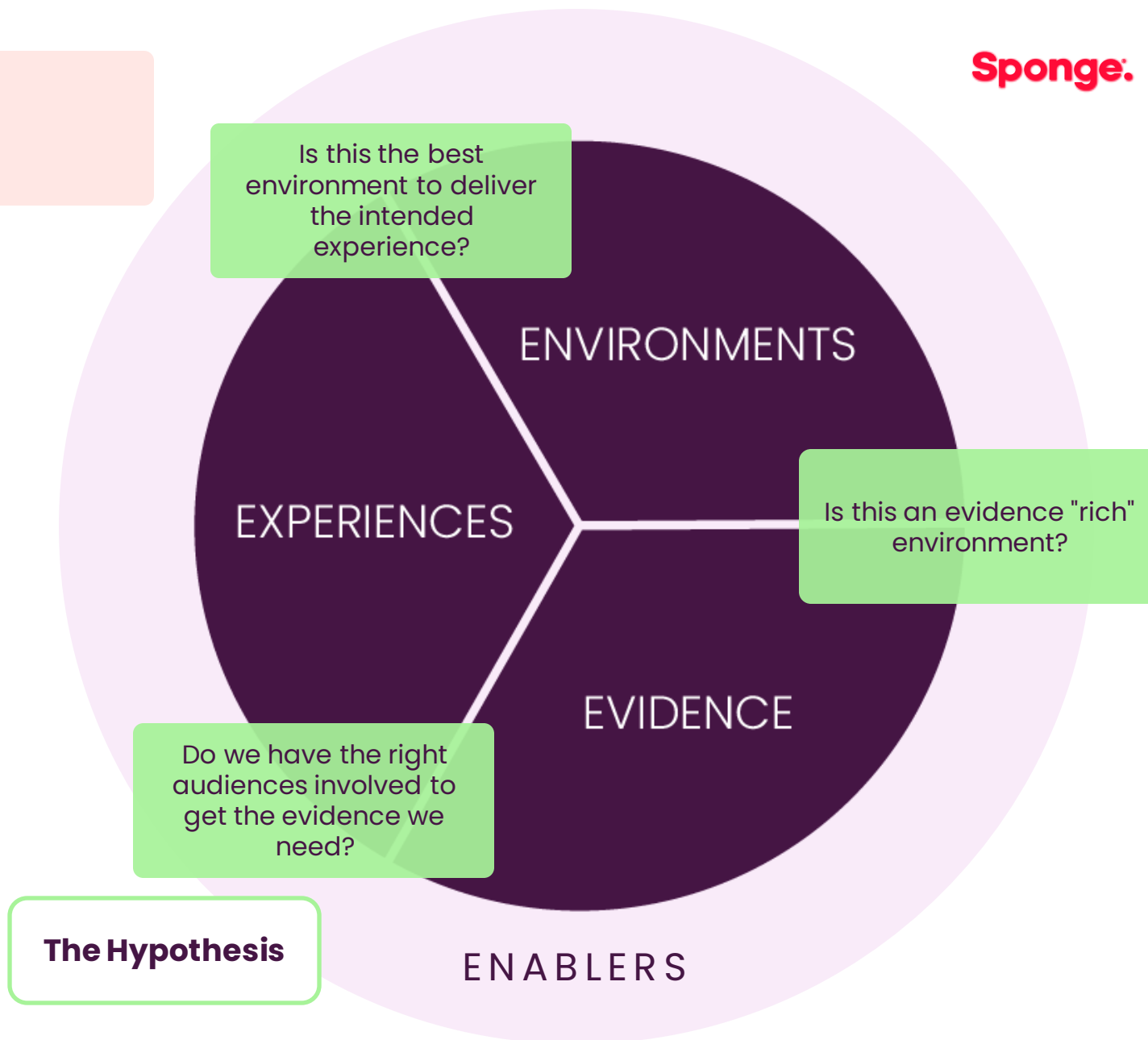- Individual performance
- Business performance
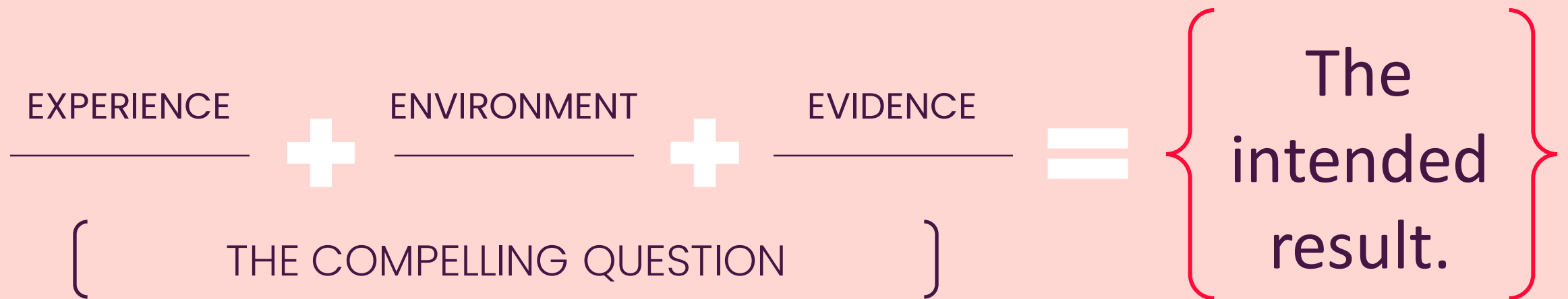
Step 3:
Craft your 3E hypothesis.

Sponge.

Why?

- This is a hypothesis!
- Language matters.
- Creates necessary separation.
- *Evidence* is the dealbreaker.

Is this the best environment to deliver the intended experience?

ENVIRONMENTS

Is this an evidence "rich" environment?

EXPERIENCES

EVIDENCE

Do we have the right audiences involved to get the evidence we need?

The Hypothesis

E N A B L E R S

The 3E Equation.

Sponge.

$$\frac{\text{EXPERIENCE}}{} + \frac{\text{ENVIRONMENT}}{} + \frac{\text{EVIDENCE}}{} = \left\{ \text{The intended result.} \right.$$

THE COMPELLING QUESTION

The 3E Equation.

Sponge.

$$\frac{COURSES}{\Big[\text{How do we build more engaging training?}\Big]} + \frac{LMS}{} + \frac{COMPLETION}{} = \left\{ \text{More completion... of engaging learning courses?} \right\}$$

Is this a strategy problem?
A design problem?
Technology problem?
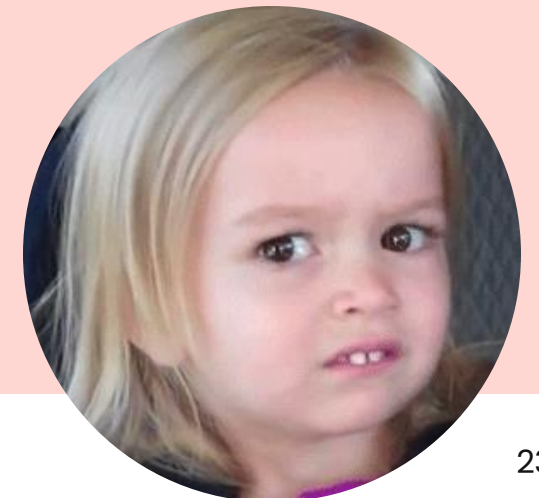
- Did we get the question right?
- Is this sufficient evidence to add value to our question?
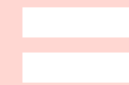- How sustainable is this formula? What can it realistically yield for us?

Example.

Sponge.

- "Brand campaign"
- In-person kick off
- Gamified "Customer for a day" blended XP
- Post-learning soft-skill course enrichment
- Manager exclusive training
- Cross-sell incentives

+

- Email
- Mobile app
- LXP
- Retail stores
- Rewards platform

+

- Pilot group
- A/B testing
- ESS results
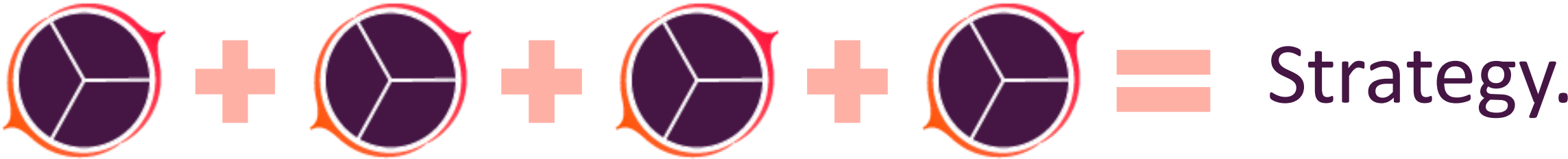- Part-time employee retention
- Organizational pride
- Sales results

=

x% improved confidence in product knowledge

x% improvement in organizational pride

x% lift in manager engagement.

How do we create better brand ambassadors to elevate our in-store experience and lift retail sales?
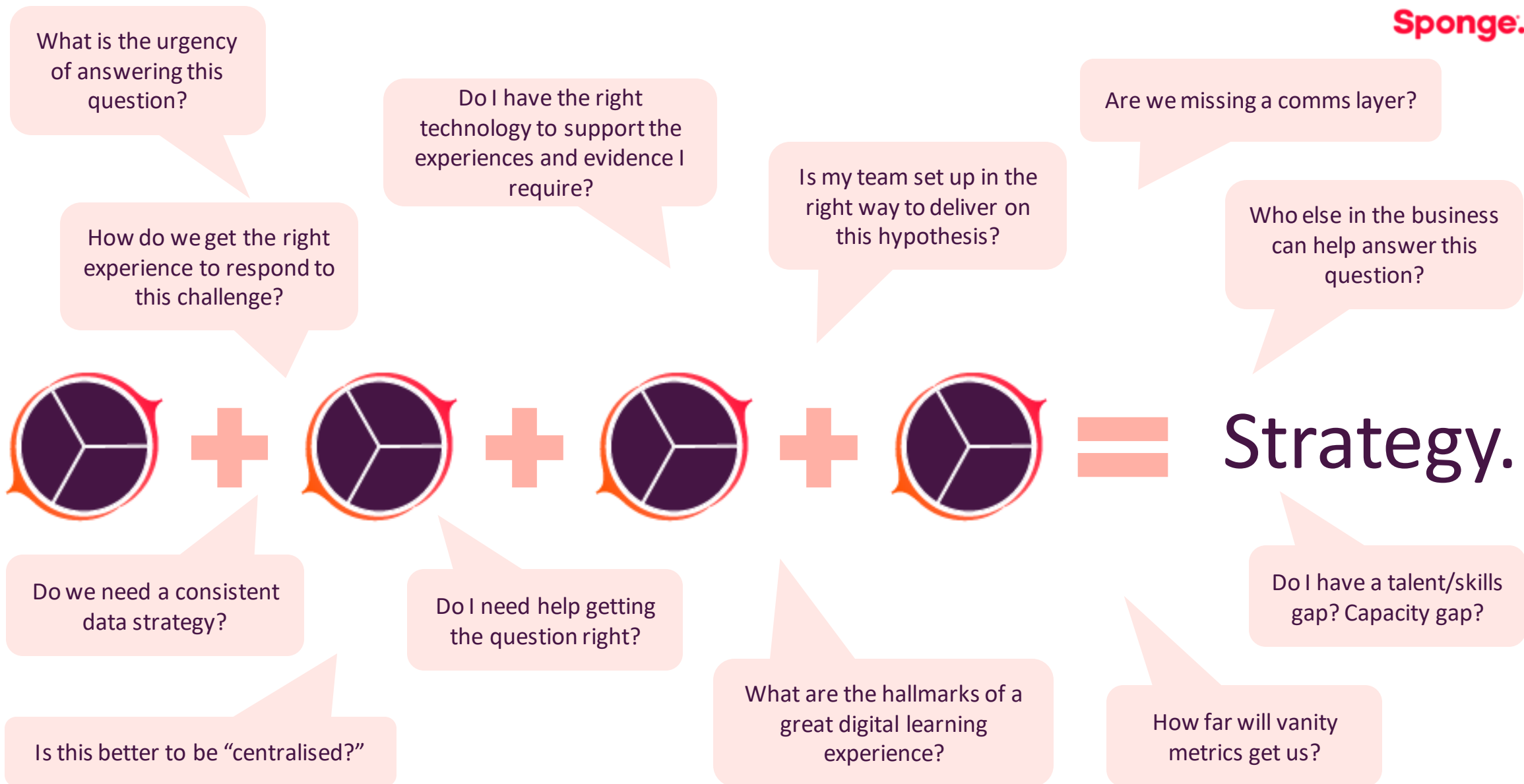
Why?

- The medium is the message.
- Highly shareable
- Others can see their role/opportunity in here.
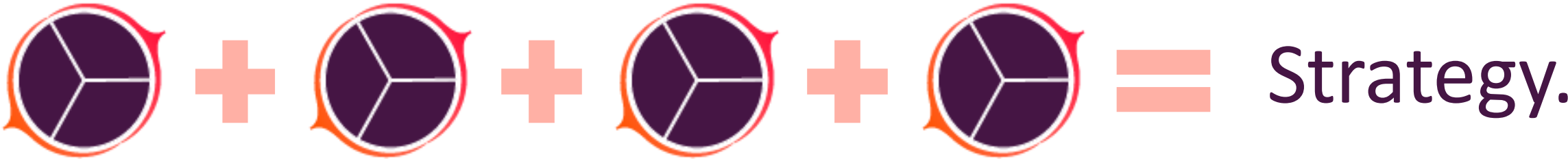
You are not the only person trying to impact this

Step 4:
Analyse. Strategize. Iterate.

 + + + = Strategy.

What is the urgency of answering this question?

Do I have the right technology to support the experiences and evidence I require?

Are we missing a comms layer?

How do we get the right experience to respond to this challenge?

Is my team set up in the right way to deliver on this hypothesis?

Who else in the business can help answer this question?

Do we need a consistent data strategy?

Do I need help getting the question right?

Do I have a talent/skills gap? Capacity gap?

Is this better to be "centralised?"

What are the hallmarks of a great digital learning experience?

How far will vanity metrics get us?

= Strategy.

◕ + ◕ + ◕ + ◕ = Strategy.

Sponge.

Step 1:
Capture the big picture.

Step 2:
Draft the compelling question.

Step 3:
Craft your 3E hypothesis.

Step 4:
Analyse. Strategize. Iterate.

ENVIRONMENTS

EXPERIENCES

EVIDENCE

Where the business wants to go

The intended change

The compelling question

Where the business is today
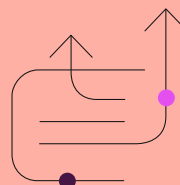
The Hypothesis

Takeaways.

1

Strategic habits build strategic momentum.
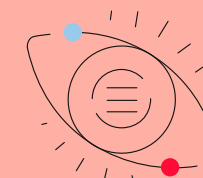
(and all you need is momentum.)

2

Invest in getting the question(s) right.

(Good strategy starts with asking the right questions.)

3

Be in constant negotiation of your 3Es.

(It's not there until it all snaps into place.)

![Sponge.]

Get in touch with me.

LinkedIn

Get in touch with us.

Sponge – Contact us

Join our upcoming webinar.

Learning Strategy for busy leaders: A pragmatic approach to being more strategic every day.

- The five strategic habits of effective learning leaders

- The "3E" learning strategy equation (detailed)

- Customer stories across industries

- How to activate strategic thinking into your organization quickly and effectively

Sponge.