# HOW TO BUILD EFFECTIVE "LEARNING LOOPS"

Learning loops are a regular process of gathering and sharing performance information with people and empowering them to make the changes needed to improve performance. They are similar to feedback loops except they are deliberately designed to help an organization continuously learn and improve. Having an effective learning loop means giving people the right information at the right time – and sparking their creativity and innovation.

Learning loops depend on regularly sharing information about performance in a way that's easy for people to understand. How are we doing on customer satisfaction? Employee satisfaction? How about service reliability? Arming people with data that is reliable, easy to understand, and has sufficient background detail makes it easier for them to see where they need to make adjustments.
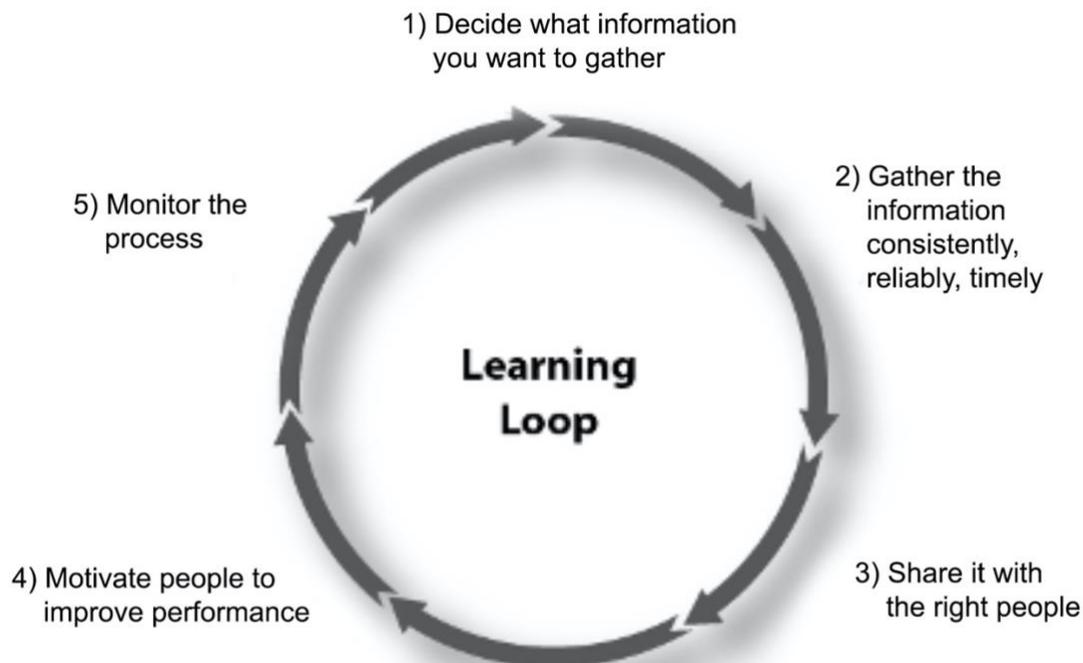
Learning loops need to be tailored to the level of the organization that will be using them. They can be designed for members of the senior leadership team – who may want to focus on long-term success measures. Or they can be designed for front-line supervisors – who may want to look at monthly or weekly response times and customer satisfaction scores.

Once the desired information is gathered, leaders need to convene people as soon as possible to discuss the data. It's not enough to email a report. People need to hear the information as a group, think through the implications, discuss options and share ideas. And then decisions need to be made about how to improve performance. That's how learning loops work.

Learning loops can be implemented anywhere in the organization to accelerate the pace of change. At CarMax, the chain of used-car superstores, the CEO holds regular sessions with employees and shares the latest performance information. Then he asks: "What can we learn from this? How can we improve our performance? What are we doing that is unnecessary or doesn't make sense?" He personally takes part in these brainstorming sessions and makes sure every idea is recorded and receives a response.

A Tibetan proverb says, "To be uncertain is uncomfortable. To be certain is foolish." A well-designed learning loop helps teams continuously learn and improve. It may be uncomfortable sometimes, but that focus on learning helps generate trust and build a high-performing organization.

Five Factors of Successful Learning Loops

FACTOR	QUESTIONS TO ASK
1. Decide what information you want to gather	▪ If our goal is continuous improvement in how we perform, what information would be most useful? ▪ How can we make sure the information is gathered consistently, reliably and timely?
2. Communicate the information in easy-to-understand ways	▪ Have we analyzed and reported the information so that everyone can grasp it easily? ▪ Are we communicating the information in a timely manner?
3. Engage people in discussing what the data shows	▪ Have we set up the appropriate forums for people to discuss the information? ▪ Are people empowered to talk about their perspectives – including areas that need to be improved? ▪ Is it okay for people to ask difficult questions?
4. Motivate people to improve performance	▪ Are managers championing the process? ▪ Are people motivated to suggest changes? ▪ Are challenges to making improvements being identified? ▪ Are changes getting implemented?
5. Monitor the process	▪ Is the "learning loop" occurring on a regular basis? ▪ Are we translating our learning into improved performance? ▪ Are we learning as fast as we could? What could we do to accelerate the learning?