

# FEEDBACK LOOPS



TOOL

## What is it?

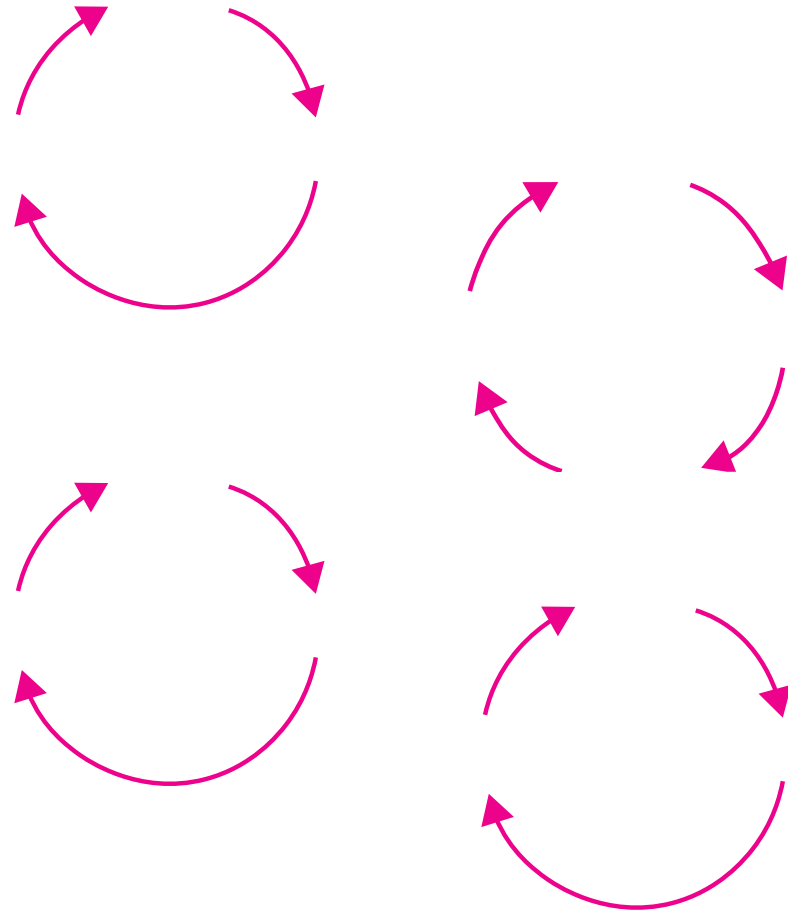
Feedback loops are a way to make sense of what is happening in your iceberg maps by looking for patterns. A key idea in working with systems is that durable and effective systems change is only possible if deeply embedded patterns can be made visible and then shifted. Identifying feedback loops can help with finding these patterns, and understanding how they are working to shape the system that you are trying to change.

## When is it used?

Feedback loops can be done first as a way to build a systems map. Solutions Lab practice tends to use them as a way to find, name, and make sense of what is happening in a map that has been made.

## How it works:

1. A legible, credible, well-bounded, and fulsome map (or maps) will be the source for this work. If you've used a systems mapping process that has generated lots of different maps, you may want to aggregate, discard, theme or use another technique to get to a manageable set of maps for your group size and the amount of time you have available.
2. The maps that you are using should be made on large-format - butcher paper is a good option. Post these to the wall, and gather in groups of 3-6 to work on your map(s).
3. Share the types of feedback loops - virtuous, vicious, stagnating, and stabilizing. Make sure that everyone has a sense of the differences between them, and provide a few examples.
4. If you can, work physically on the map - use yarn and tape or another tool that lets people find and connect different elements into feedback loops. Task the group to find a set number of feedback loops (~3-5 is good, depending on your timing). Constrain them with the instructions that a feedback loop can have no more than 5 elements, and that it needs to loop back on itself. Capture these loops on the map, and potentially also on separate sheets for ease of working with them later.
5. Once the groups have identified a series of feedback loops you can work with them in a few ways. They can share them with one another, you could prioritize them if needed. They will lead you into your creative question canvases and crystallizing on which areas of your complex problem space you think have the most promise to shifting systems, and thus to carry forward into prototyping.



Adapted from Omidyar Group, *Systems Practice Workbook*

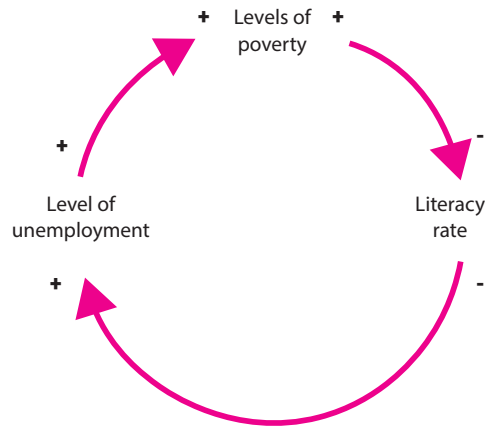




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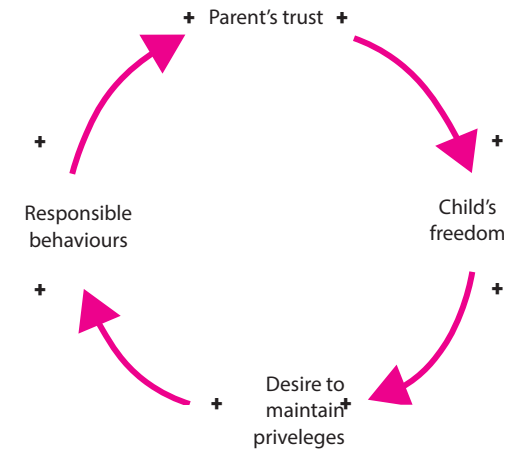
**Loop Type: Vicious.** *Things are getting worse and worse.*

When the literacy rate is low, qualifying for jobs becomes difficult which increases the level of unemployment. High unemployment leads to the number of households existing at or below the poverty level to increase. As poverty increases people are more likely to prioritize income-generating activity over education, which further decreases the literacy rate.



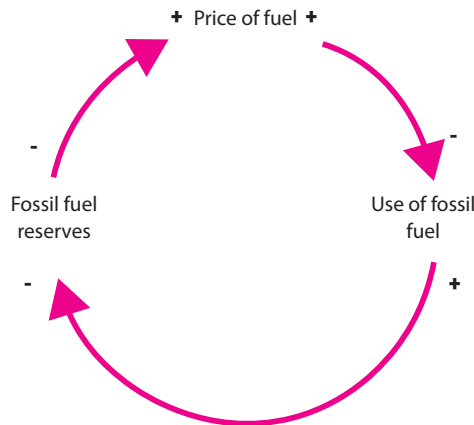
**Loop Type: Virtuous.** *Things are getting better and better.*

When a parent extends trust to a child, the child's freedoms are increased. As the child experiences the enjoyment of increased freedoms, their desire to maintain these extra privileges increases. As their desire to have privileges increases, their responsible behavior is also increased, which in turn increases the parent's trust in the child.



**Loop Type: Stabilizing.** *Keeping things from getting worse.*

As the use of fossil fuel increases, the reserves of fuels are depleted, which leads to an increase in commodity price (of fossil fuel), which then results in a decrease of fossil fuel use.



**Loop Type: Stagnating.** *Keeping things from getting better.*

When a student shows an improvement in the quality of their classroom behavior, the teacher's expectation of that child's behavior increases (now they know what the child is capable of!). As the teacher's expectations rise, the likelihood that the teacher will make the effort to engage and praise the child is diminished. When the child does not receive praise for their effort, their behavior deteriorates.

