

Speed to Learning: What It Means & an Example

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Speed to learning is the time it takes for a company to understand whether its customers are reacting positively or negatively to a product or its features. This particular concept is highly compatible with the Agile concept of iterative development. But you can also use speed to learning in program management / product development that is not Agile.

You can create and monitor a program management KPI using speed to learning.

Here is an example of such usage:

1. A software as a service company develops the basis of a product that it thinks consumers will want and use.
2. This initial version of the product offers three basic features — features A, B, and C. The company introduces the product to a group of test customers.
3. Within five days, the company finds that its test customers are not using feature C at all. Instead, the test group is asking why the company isn't offering a different feature -altogether — let's call it feature D.
4. Six days later, the company has developed and rolled out the new iteration of its product to the test group. This new version of the product offers features A, B, and D.
5. Over the next four days, the test customers do in fact use feature D. However, they say they would use D even more if it were altered slightly. Let's call this altered version D2.
6. Five days later, the company rolls out the product with features A, B, and D2.
7. Over the following three days, the test customers use and like all three features. But they are also asking for something more — let's call it feature E.

Over 23 days of development and consumer testing, the company learns three things about its test product: The test customers don't like feature C, but want feature D; they like feature D, but prefer feature D2; and, once they use D2, they also want feature E.

The example above articulates a typical narrative of iterative/Agile product development. This example also demonstrates how a company can build a speed-to-learning KPI.

Following is an example of a speed-to-learning KPI that one could generate from the product development experience above:

**Developing & Testing a Product over a Period of Time /
Gaining Significant Knowledge About That Product**

Over a period of 23 days, the company learns three important things about its product. If you plug these facts (i.e., numbers) into the following formula, you yield a speed-to-learning KPI of 7.67.

$$\text{Days of Development} / \text{Significant Learnings} = 23/3 = 7.67$$

In conclusion, this speed-to-learning KPI is a highly effective tool: It helps you track how well and quickly your company is learning about its products and the customer reaction to them.

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