

DIFFUSION SIMULATION GAME

DEBRIEFING SUMMARY

Adoption Phases

In the various editions of his book on diffusion of innovations, Everett Rogers claims that individuals go through certain psychological phases in deciding whether or not to adopt an innovation. In the DSG, these stages are represented in the terms used in Rogers's first edition¹:

Awareness	becoming aware that a new product or practice exists.
Interest	developing a curiosity about how the new idea works and what its benefits may be.
Appraisal	mentally evaluating the pro's and con's of the innovation for one's own situation . . . how would it work for me?
Trial	trying out the new idea on a small scale.
Adoption	deciding to make continued use of the new product or practice.

Some experts advise change agents to pay particular attention to each client's progression through these phases. They even warn that the person should not be allowed to skip over any steps, or else his/her adoption (if it ever comes) will not be firmly based and might well be discontinued. So don't attempt to rush people through to a hasty decision; be a "facilitator" -- help them have a successful experience at each step along the way.

Adopter Types

Everett Rogers² suggests that people can be categorized according to how likely they are to be among the earlier or later adopters of a particular innovation. His categories:

INNOVATOR: venturesome and eager to try new ideas; a cosmopolite, a risk-taker; usually not integrated into the prevailing social structure -- seen as a maverick.

Represented in the game by: **G, L, P**

EARLY ADOPTER: a respected, knowledgeable leader within the social system; potential adopters consider him/her to be the "person to check with" before picking up on some new idea; unlike the rash Innovator, the Early Adopter is a successful and discreet user of innovations.

Represented in the game by: **F, M, X**

EARLY MAJORITY: a follower rather than a leader; deliberate in coming to an adoption decision; "not the last to set the old aside, nor the first by which the new is tried."

Represented in the game by: **H, O, Q, S, V, W**

LATE MAJORITY: skeptical and cautious about adopting a new idea; can be won over, but it takes the combined pressure of the majority of their peers to pull them across; typically has less education and lower social status than the earlier adopters.

Represented in the game by: **A, D, I, J, N, V**

LAGGARD: suspicious of new-fangled ideas and wrapped up in traditional values; oriented toward the past and highly local (rather than cosmopolitan) in outlook; usually low in influence and often somewhat isolated and alienated from the social mainstream.

Represented in the game by **E, K, R, T**

¹ Rogers, Everett M. (1962) *Diffusion of Innovations*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

² Rogers, Everett M. (1995) *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. New York: The Free Press, p. 22.

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OPINION LEADERS: In addition the spectrum of adopter types, some people in organizations have more influence than others. We are especially interested in those who exercise informal influence, not because of their formal position of authority but because of personal qualities, including social integration.

Represented in the game by **F, H, and M.**

GATEKEEPERS: Those who control access to information or critical resources.

Represented in the game by **A, B, and C.**

Diffusion Activities

TALK TO: a good, all-purpose device . . . face-to-face interactions can move a person along through just about any phase.

ASK HELP: for certain people -- the more eager adopters -- soliciting their assistance led to advancement at any phase; for others, it paid off only in the Awareness and Interest phases.

PILOT TEST: could be used to arouse Interest for all but the foot draggers . . . but payoffs are moderate.

SITE VISIT: another all-purpose activity; by visiting a program in action a person might have his interest stimulated as well as having an excellent opportunity to mentally Appraise how it might work out in his own classroom.

PRINT: rather weak, useful mainly for arousing Awareness.

PRESENTATION: useful for achieving small advances in Awareness and Interest; reaches a lot of people at one time.

DEMONSTRATION: a powerful tool, especially for those who already have some interest; if conducted by an influential teacher it can be just about the strongest persuader.

WORKSHOP (PROF): the professor, being an outsider, is viewed with some suspicion; the "ivory tower" image also lessens his credibility.

WORKSHOP (SELF): most useful for those in the Trial phase: those who are not ready to try the idea out will not benefit much from training in its methods.

MATERIALS WORKSHOP: research indicates that getting interested teachers involved in preparing materials related to an innovation is one of the most powerful tools for committing them to Trial and Adoption. In the game, it consistently gives a high payoff for those in the latter phases.

LOCAL MASS MEDIA: tends to attract the attention of the influential people, particularly the principal; good for Awareness and Interest only.

COMPULSION: looks tempting as a last resort, but should ordinarily be resisted; forcing people's compliance may lead to immediate short-range adoption, but this tends to drop away when the enforcement slacks off.

CONFRONTATION: a high-risk strategy; the odds are that no useful purpose will be served, but if you happen to get lucky, powerful forces come to your support and rapid advancement on all fronts occurs.