

What's New

The process of change: How tough times can be good times

Humans today face an unprecedented challenge to change. It helps to have in mind a proven model for how human society adapts to new circumstances, and what role the individual plays in that process of change.

Here we present a hopeful model of social and cultural evolution, showing that tough times can also be good times. This model is an integration of theories about the processes of change in physical, biological, and cultural systems.

The pattern of change

Theorists who study the process of social change conclude that almost all change follows a basic pattern of disruption and response.

Disruption: Something perturbs the system, shifting it out of balance, for example; a new scientific discovery, a shift in the weather, a new technology, new information, etc. This disruption can take place suddenly, or it can be the result of slow, cumulative change.

Response: This disruption triggers a process in which the system responds and adapts to the change, going through a time of seeming chaos and disorder, but ultimately arriving at a new, more complex and more elegant reordering of the system.

This pattern of response to change can be graphed as an S-shaped curve showing the cumulative percentage of change over time.

5 types of responders

The late Dr. Everett Rogers, in his seminal work on the Diffusion of Innovations, refined our understanding of this process of response by identifying five categories of responders or adopters. Following is a description of the dominant characteristics of each of the five types, in their order of response:

Innovators: initiate the response

- Venturesome people, cosmopolitan, with broad experience
- Likely to be well traveled and world-wise
- Often have control of substantial financial resources, enabling them to take risks and survive inevitable failures
- Find a rash, daring and risky lifestyle attractive

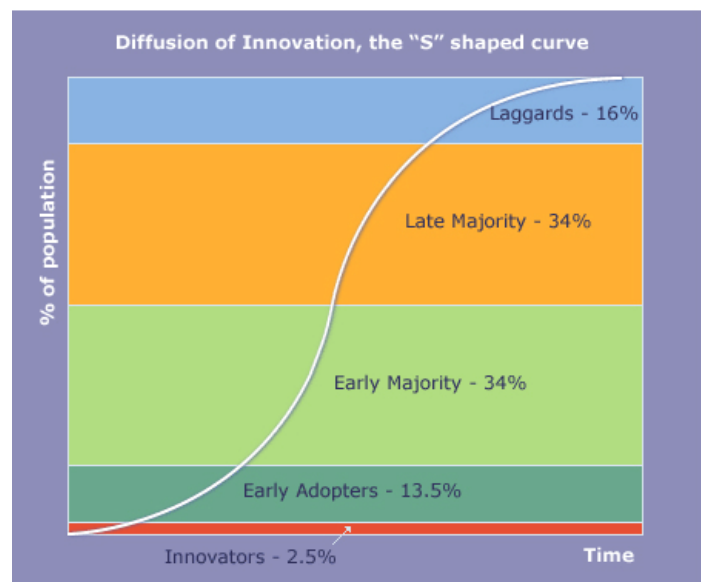
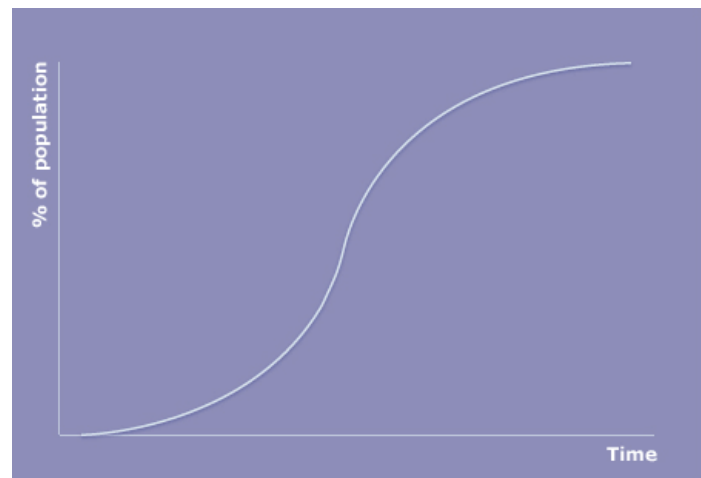
Early Adopters: modify and adopt the response

- Respected by peers
- Embody the successful, discrete use of new ideas
- Have the greatest degree of opinion leadership
- Relationships and influence tend to be local, based in and related to a smaller geographic or social system

Early Majority: cautious and sure

- "Be not the first by which the new is tried, nor the last to lay the old aside" represents the attitude of this group
- Deliberate
- Interact frequently with peers, but seldom hold positions of opinion leadership
- Represent approximately one third of the members of any social system

Late Majority: conservative



- Skeptical of new ideas and innovation
- Intolerant of uncertainty
- Motivated by peer pressure and economic necessity
- Also represent about one third of a social system

Laggards: the last to respond

- Conservative traditionalists
- Reference point is what worked in the past
- Aware of a new idea long before adopting it
- Must be absolutely sure that a new idea or innovation will not fail before they are willing to adopt it
- Frequently occupy precarious economic positions, forcing them to be extremely cautious in adopting innovations

The dynamics of change

As the shift in human social systems progresses, two fundamental dynamics can be expected:

- **Conservative elements of society will resist change.**

In periods of disruption, conservative elements of society will seek to preserve dominant existing views by fiercely resisting the emerging change. Many examples of such resistance exist, e.g., the woman's rights movement, the ending of slavery, the Copernican revolution, quantum mechanics, Darwinian evolution, global climate change, etc. Resistance can delay the inevitable shift, but will not prevent it once enough people have experienced its benefits.

- **Times will seem chaotic and random.**

This is a sign that the system is undergoing a transformation to a more elegant and sophisticated form. The polarization and conflict accompanying such a shift can be disquieting, confusing. Problems may seem to overpower solutions. That is because, in social systems, old ways of doing things, old paradigms and worldviews are becoming inadequate, and are no longer addressing current situations. The hopeful part rests in knowing that these are signs that something new and better is trying to emerge.

Helping a Global Mind Shift Emerge

The mission of Global MindShift is to help move broader, more inclusive ways of thinking up the "s" curve of adoption. To do this, it is essential for early responders to help ease the adoption process for others. The following three actions aid this adoption process:

Engage

First, potential adopters need to be able to entertain and engage aspects or dimensions of emergent thinking, thus Global MindShift provides a conversation space which facilitates people getting together to engage with and entertain new and broader perspectives. The "other" and the "different" can be considered a ally, indeed a necessity, in this process.

Apply

Second, adopters need to be able to see the utility of emergent thinking. This can be aided by applying these progressive ways of thinking to real world situations. That is why global mindshift provides a space for collaboration, for creating and carrying out projects that demonstrate the utility of this emergent thinking in a variety of fields or areas.

Demonstrate

Third, the meme-base provides a body of cultural "artifacts" which demonstrate in a tangible form, many aspects and dimensions of this emergent way of thinking. Taken together, these "memes" or "artifacts" constitute a powerful vision of an emergent human society and culture.

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