The Adoption-Diffusion Process

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After an issue has been identified, priorities established, situation defined, target audience is identified and described, intended outcomes and objectives, the program is designed it is time to move to the implementation phase Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services Program Development Model.

[Picture of model]

When thinking about the implementation phase of the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service Program Development Model it is necessary to have an understanding of the Adoption-Diffusion Process (Rogers, 2003). The diffusion of innovation framework assists Extension educators in understanding how new ideas and technologies are understood and adopted in a community (Rogers, 2003). The framework is used for program planning, has been empirically tested, and has been subjected to rigorous review from various perspectives since its inception in the 1950s (Yates, 2001). Throughout the years, it has remained instrumental to Extension educators and continues to be useful in countless other fields, including medicine, telecommunications, information technology, and social marketing (Rogers, 2003).

Specifically, the adoption-diffusion model was originally developed to explain the educational processes that led agriculture producers to accept new idea. Rogers (1995) defines diffusion as, “the processes by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. Diffusion is a special type of communication concerned with the spread of messages that are new ideas.”

According to Seever and Graham (2012) an innovation as an idea or practice that is perceived to be new to the clientele, where the clientele go through a process to adopt or disregard an innovation. Based on Rogers (2003) adoption process, Seever and Graham (2012) explain how Extension educators can use the framework. Check out the following information below.

Figure 1 illustrates the adoption process steps:
Figure 1. Steps of the adoption process.

Awareness of a new idea occurs when the communication is first being acquired and processed by clientele (Seever & Graham, 2012). Trial and adoption are steps that may occur later as understanding and commitment increases (Seever & Graham, 2012). As an example, an Extension educator may utilize several educational delivery methods (workshops, news releases, e-newsletters, and short courses) to create awareness of an innovation, for example, a new corn variety that requires less water and is more pest resistant (Seever & Graham, 2012). Once the corn producers become aware of the new corn variety, sufficient interest may be generated to acquire additional information and knowledge (Seever & Graham, 2012). Supplied with this new information, producers begin to evaluate the risks and benefits of appraising the new corn variety (Seever & Graham, 2012). Ultimately, a decision is made to try it or not (Seever & Graham, 2012). If the trial is considered to be successful, there is a increased chance that the idea will be adopted (Seever & Graham, 2012). Over the course of time, change in the form of increased profitability will be achieved (Seever & Graham, 2012). During each step of the process, it is the Extension educator’s role to provide knowledge and resources to encourage adoption of the new corn variety (Seever & Graham, 2012).

One of the elements of the adoption process is that it occurs over time (Rogers, 2003). Many times there will be a lengthy lapse between the introduction of a new idea and its adoption on a widespread basis (Seever & Graham, 2012). Extension’s function or success is often measured by the extent to which this time lapse is reduced or the rate of adoption is increased (Seever & Graham, 2012).

A number of factors influence the rate of adoption, including the characteristics of the innovation and the traits of the target audience (Seever & Graham, 2012). Five characteristics of an innovation, as perceived by the target audience, greatly influence the rate of adoption. The five characteristics are relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability. Rogers (1995, p 15-16) defines these characteristics in Figure 2 as follows:
Figure 2. Everett Rogers adoption-diffusion principles (Rogers, 2003).

Adoption of new technologies, best practices, and individual behavior changes can usually be traced to one or more of these five factors.

*Think through these factors when trying to convince clients to consider a behavior, best practice or new technology.*

Remember that these factors are not absolutes; rather they are perceptions developed by your clients of the innovation. So, if you can successfully increase or improve clients’ perceptions of an innovation’s relative advantage, compatibility, observability, and trialability, while decreasing their perceptions of an innovation’s complexity you will increase the rate of adoption of that innovation by your target audience.

All individual in a target audience do not adopt an innovation or idea at the same time (Seever & Graham, 2012). Clientele can generally be divided into “adopter categories” based on how quickly they adopt innovations or ideas (Figure 3). Initially only a small percentage of clientele would adopt the innovation and it is often the early adopters who are most influential in persuading others to adopt it.
will adopt an innovation or idea, then a larger percentage will adopt and finally the remainder will accept the innovation (Seever & Graham, 2012).

![Figure 3 Innovativeness and adopter categories (Rogers, 2003).](image)

The distribution of adopter categories can influence the rate of adoption of an innovation (Seever & Graham, 2012). The five adopter categories below (Figure 4) are classified by degree of innovativeness, or how quickly an individual will adopt new innovations or ideas (Seever & Graham, 2012).
Each adopter category possesses unique characteristics and requires different strategies to influence desired adoption innovations or ideas. It is critical that the Extension educator recognize individuals in each of these adopter categories to achieve successful adoption of innovations or ideas (Seever & Graham, 2012).

The diffusion process, built on the concept of change, embraces the Extension philosophy of helping to improve the quality of life by extending knowledge. Extension educators assume the responsibility for diffusing an innovation or idea and influencing its adoption (Seever & Graham, 2012). Havelock (1973) suggests that there are four roles an Extension educator can assume to influence adoption decisions. Those roles are as follows (Havelock, 1973).

1. **Catalyst** - pressures the system to begin working on problems and issues.
2. Solution giver- provides specific ideas for change.
4. Resource linker- brings together human, economic, and intellectual resources.

References


