

ASSESSING THE SPREAD OF GOOD IDEAS

It is difficult to evaluate the progress and success of work programmes aimed at spreading good practice, innovations or the outcomes of improvement projects, from one part of the organisation to another.

One useful method of monitoring progress and finding ways to leverage change is to separate out three key steps in the adoption process:

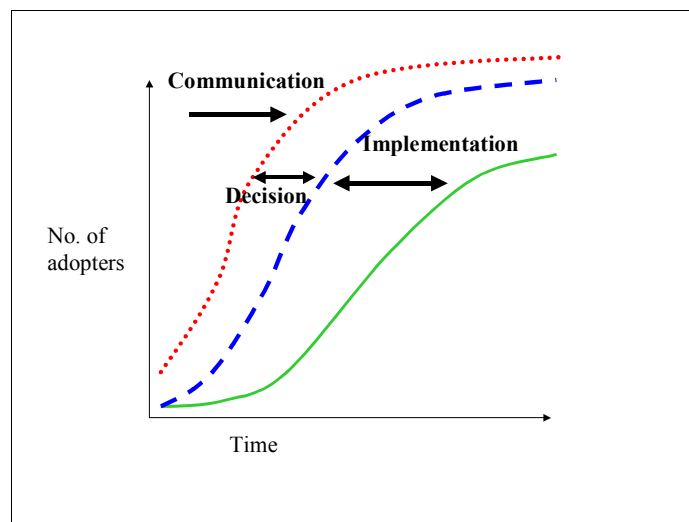
- (1) **Communication;** what is the awareness level of the adopters. Do they know about the innovation? How much do they know?
- (1) **Decision Making;** when did the adopters make the decision to implement the new ideas?
- (1) **Implementation;** has the new practice been implemented? To what extent?

The 'S-curve' shows how the cumulative number of adopters increases over time.

At first the communication efforts help potential adopters become aware of the new ideas. The next step is for them to make the decision whether to adopt or not. A useful point of leverage for change is to find ways to support this decision making process.

The final step is the implementation of the new ideas. This can take a while longer than the initial step of gaining awareness.

Spread plans need to take these timing differences into account.



Communication is key to the adoption process. Any programme of spread needs to focus on a multi-method strategy of increasing potential adopters' awareness of the benefits and details of the proposed new ideas and practices. The message and the way in which it is delivered will have an impact on the attitude an adopter has about the new practice and this will impact the decision making process.

Where the adopters are relatively autonomous and can make their own decisions, implementation can happen quite quickly. In organisations where the decisions are made by a central management team, it can take much longer to actually achieve implementation.

Questions for measurement **to understand and monitor the progress of spread**

Communication

- Against a baseline, who is now more aware than they were before the communications programme started?
- Are some groups and professions gaining awareness quicker than others? Does this matter?
- Do the opinion leaders know about the new practices? Are their views positive?
- Which of the communications methods (e.g. video, seminar, article) had the most impact in terms of raising awareness?
- Is awareness dropping off or increasing over time?
- Which part of the message or which method seems to have the least impact or create resistance to change?
- What does the pattern of awareness look like? What can we learn from this?

Decision Making

- Who needs to make the decision for the new ideas and practices to be adopted?
- Who has made the decision to adopt the new ideas and to change their practice?
- What is the threshold for someone to decide to make a change? What can be done to help the adopter over this barrier?
- Has the decision been made to adopt all the new ideas, or just part of the system being spread? And why?
- What is their reason for making the decision?
- When did they make the decision?
- What or who influenced their decision making?
- What is stopping a decision being made?
- Which opinion leaders influence the target group of adopters?
- What does the pattern of decision making look like? What can we learn from this?

Implementation

- Has the new practice been implemented?
- Are the results and benefits similar to those achieved by the pilot projects?
- Have all the parts of the new practice been implemented, or just bits of it? And why?
- Do the adopters feel they made the right decision? What are the implications of this?
- What messages, and in what way, are the new adopters sharing their experiences with others?
- What influenced the implementation that was not part of the formal communication and project activities?
- To what extent was the innovation adapted by the adopters? What might this mean for future plans for spread and communication?

If you have any comments about this bulletin, any experiences you would like to share on this topic, then please email Sarah Fraser on sfraser881@aol.com