

IECMHC Cog 3: Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Diffusion of Innovation Theory refers to how and when individuals adopt new ideas. This theory guides us in considering two things: (1) how to segment our market so we reach out to those who may be more intrigued about new ideas and willing to try them, and (2) where our audience looks for new ideas and thus who can influence or persuade them to take up a new idea. For any given market, there are those who are more easily convinced to try something new. Think about the introduction of the iPhone and how it journeyed through the various audiences described below. You can apply this theory to IECMHC by thinking about where your intended audience may fall on the curve and who they look to for evidence, examples, and experience that IECMHC can work for their state, community or tribe.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory categorizes members of a given group into five types of idea adoption: innovators, adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

◆ Innovators

This group of individuals sets the trends – they are pioneers. They may be researchers, thought leaders in ECE or home visiting, or successful early implementers with impressive results. Early adopters may look to innovators for new ideas and see how these new ideas play out.

◆ Early Adopters

This group often looks to innovators to determine whether adopting a new idea or system is worthwhile. The early adopters are often the "betatest" group. Sure, the innovators may have great ideas, but will the ideas really work? Enticed by the appeal of what the innovators have brought to light, early adopters take the challenge up and create their own experiential body of evidence.

◆ Early Majority

This group holds back a bit longer when a new idea or action is presented, waiting to see whether it has worked for the early adopters. Have all the obstacles or hurdles been overcome through the trials and errors of the early adopters? What can they learn from the early adopters that will make their path easier? Have the early adopters been successful? Is there clear evidence that the idea has merit and will result in benefits for this group?

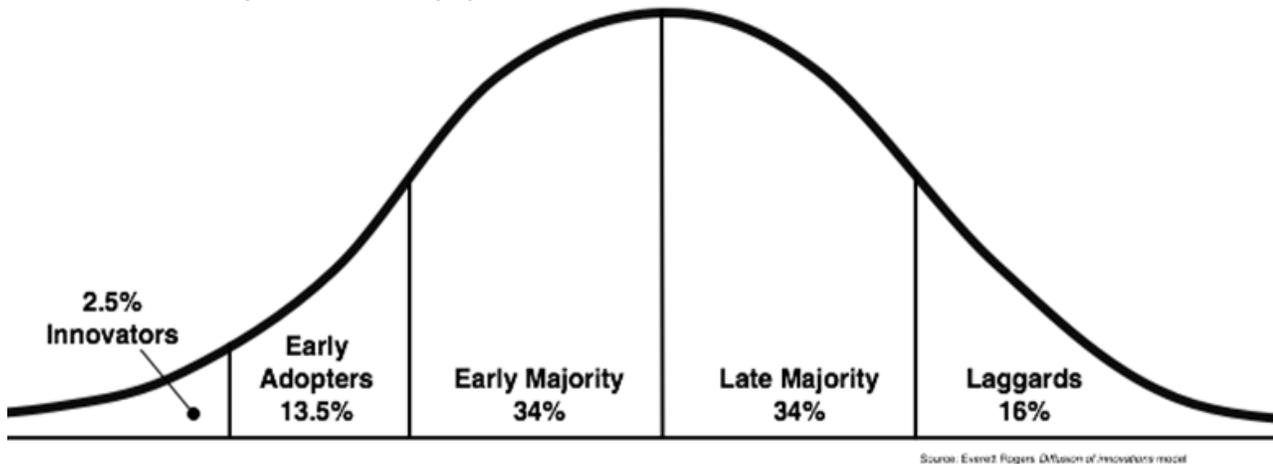
◆ Late Majority

The late majority will wait to see whether the idea has taken hold in the early majority – they need more convincing and will look to the early majority to show them that the idea is worthy. Once they deem the idea worthy, they don't want to be left out. If the early majority has clearly accepted and is adopting IECMHC, they will be on board.

◆ Laggards

This group may or may never take action. They will probably have the most resistance to an idea or action either because of disinterest or because of long held and entrenched beliefs.

The Roger's Adoption/Innovation Curve below offers a graphic representation of the percentage each of these audiences represents in the population.



Source: Everett M. Rogers, Diffusion of Innovations, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1963), p.247.

Where would you begin your outreach efforts? You certainly would NOT begin with the laggards, unless you want to spend a lot of resources with very little to show for your efforts. In other words, appeal to the audience that is most prepared to succeed. Success breeds success. You may want to identify those individuals or agencies that you would think of as early adopters and use the examples and experience of the innovators to convince them to take on the idea.

Through the lens of these five categories, you can identify those within your intended audience who are most willing to embrace behavior change and who they will turn to for advice, guidance, or experiential modeling. Then, you can better tailor your communications outreach in the service of your project's goals.