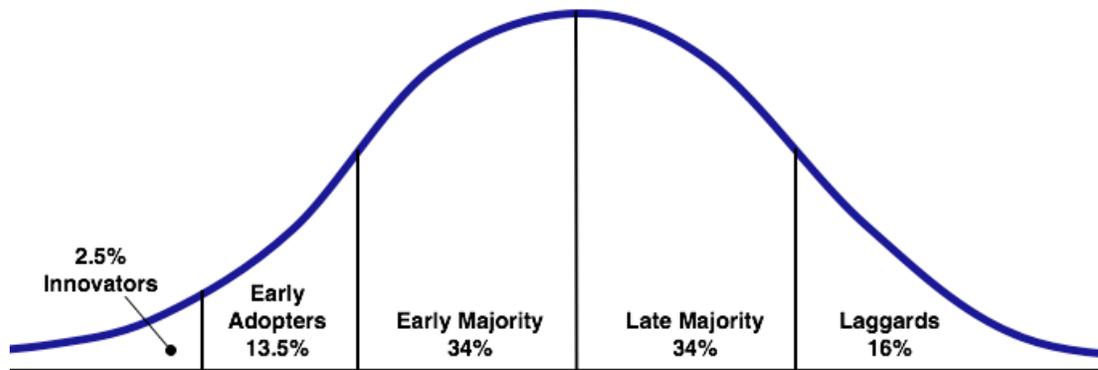


The Adoption of Change in a Community

As discussed in *Five steps to adopting an innovation*, individuals proceed through a multistep process as they decide whether to take up an innovation. The steps are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. Some individuals move faster through these steps. Some slower.



The graph above is a simplification of actual data that show the relative number of people adopting an idea as time goes by. It shows five types of people (and the relative fraction) that are often seen as a population adopts a new idea or innovation.

Innovators love new things. They race through each of the five steps, needing little besides outside contacts, which are usually extensive, and their own tacit information. Novelty is usually more important than usefulness. Their key attributes are awareness and interest.

Early adopters often move through awareness and interest almost as rapidly as innovators but their key attribute is evaluation – they realize the usefulness to the community of new ideas. They utilize a group of contacts inside and outside the community in order to inform themselves. The knowledge they gain during the evaluation stage permits them to move rapidly through trial and adoption. They are often the thought leaders in a community, acting as the unbiased, influential members of the community. Once they adopt an innovation, acceptance begins to occur quickly.

The early and late majority of the community are slower to adopt change. The steps that are most informed by leading voices in the community – evaluation, trial and adoption – are critical measures for the majority. In contrast to early adopters, the majority only begins to move through these last three stages when they are informed by critical community leaders. The early majority generally listens to early adopters (i.e. the thought leaders) while the late majority takes its cues from those who have already adopted an innovation. Only if everyone else is doing it will they move rapidly through evaluation, trial and adoption.

The laggards have the fewest contacts, either inside or outside the community, and are not easily convinced to adopt anything novel, even if everyone else has. Their insular outlook means that they traverse the 5 steps slower than any other group. In fact, they may never change, sticking with what has always worked in the past.

A key point of this process is that adoption of an innovation can only occur through the social network created by the members of a community. Purely outside influences will have little success.