



These works by [Richard Gayle](#) are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).

The 5 Steps to Adopting an Innovation

Adopting an innovation requires a decision to be made, an action to be taken. As discussed previously, this suggests that data must become information leading in the creation of knowledge. What happens in a community is mirrored in an individual.

The pioneering work of Beal and Bohen identified a five-step process that individuals progress through as they make a decision to adopt an innovation. Each of these steps requires a conversion of tacit or explicit information, as detailed in *Tacit and Explicit Information*. This information either comes through external influences from outside the community or through influential members of the community.

Individuals progress through these steps at different rates, often resulting in their differentiation into separate groups defined by their rate of adoption. *The Adoption of Change in a Community* describes how these different rates of adoption affect the ability of an organization to make a decision and accept an innovation.

1. **Awareness.** The individual is simply aware the innovation exists. Details are lacking and it is a very passive stage. This awareness is usually driven by sources outside the community and tacit sources of information.
2. **Interest.** The individual wants more information. They begin to wonder if the innovation can help them. They may actively seek out new information, both explicit and tacit. Their quest is informed by sources both outside and inside the community.
3. **Evaluation.** The individual mentally examines the innovation using the information gathered, trying to determine whether it will really impact their work and how it will make their effort easier or better. This is a critical stage and the first one where the voices of the community (i.e. coworkers, friends or neighbors) are often the largest influence on an individual, rather than outside contacts.
4. **Trial.** The individual actually tests the innovation to see if reality matches expectations, usually with small-scale, experimental efforts. Often at this stage, any source of information that is determined to be helpful will be used, although close community ties are still the most important. Individuals are looking for specific help for their specific need.
5. **Adoption.** The individual likes the innovation and adopts it wholeheartedly. It is applied to all areas of relevant use and the individual often becomes a strong advocate for the innovation in the community. Community voices are very important at this stage.

The speed with which each individual passes through these 5 stages will vary depending on the particular innovation, its overall complexity, its costs, and just how disruptive it is to current workflows.

The source of information also makes a difference. While interconversion of both tacit and explicit information is important at each step, it is information from unbiased sources that makes the largest impact. For most people at most steps these sources consist mainly of local voices in the community. It is sometimes hardest for salesmen to engage the stages of interest and evaluation because of their perceived bias. People listen to community leaders.

So identifying those in a community that are viewed as the unbiased sources – the ‘opinion leaders (usually early adopters. See *The Adoption of Change in a Community*) – can be very helpful in moving an innovation through a community. The faster these trusted sources move through the five steps, the faster they will spur change in the entire group. They will be able to inform others in the community who are stuck at one of the five steps.