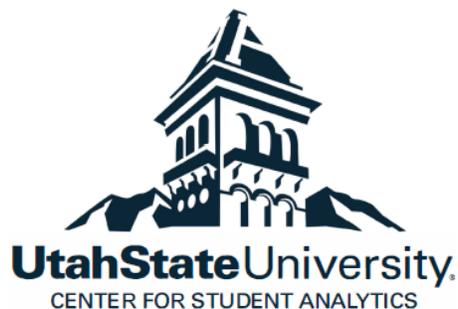


Fostering Analytics Adoption through Effective Leadership

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Fostering Analytics Adoption through Effective Leadership – Utah State University

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Introduction

The following pages articulate the philosophy of leadership and innovation that Academic and Instructional Services (AIS) at Utah State University relies on as USU implements effective and wide use of analytics by faculty and staff. At least part of the implementation is based on the work of Rogers (2010) and Kouzes and Posner (2006), as well as the mission statement of AIS itself:

*We believe everything we do is about **people**. Working together, we provide the highest level of **service** to each other, our students, and our clients. Our overarching goal is to provide an organization wherein individuals are **empowered** to be successful.*

The officers of AIS work in facilitating and helping roles in service to other university entities, especially those units that serve students. Our values include accountability, integrity, teamwork, self-motivation, efficiency, innovation, effective communication, expertise, and vision. We used these values in leadership roles to spread adoption of innovation across campus.

Early Stages of Analytics Implementation

The first step to leading effective analytics adoption is reviewing existing research and practice in the field. Literature related to successful implementation of analytics in higher education highlights the importance of changing institutional *culture*, rather than just implementing tools (Arnold et al., 2014). This view acknowledges the importance of having a cultural framework for generating awareness and acceptance of the newly available tools, to achieve both institutional capacity for analytics as well as competencies related to the use of data. Implementing a cultural framework of innovation requires what Arnold et al. refer to as “strategic thinking and leadership [that facilitate] intra- and cross-campus communication, problem solving, and strategic planning” (p. 4). At USU, we initially relied on the strategic planning of an implementation committee comprised of a broad base of institutional officers who demonstrated aptitude and interest in facilitating analytics innovation across campus.

At the core of analytics deployment is the realization that new technologies are rarely adopted rapidly, but instead move through stages of acceptance, which are shaped by cultural, social, and organizational factors. Early in the process, these stages are shaped by the beliefs and actions of the earliest adopters, who have a vision for the success of the innovations and who champion the cause. This group of individuals has been called many things—*Innovators* by Rogers (2010)—but perhaps no title is as descriptive as one coined by Melissa Vito at the University of Arizona: the “coalition of the willing” (2017). The work of this coalition, early in the process, is critical to wide adoption of innovation.

But there are other groups, too, and their work is just as important to the long game of analytics innovation. These groups can be broken down in the several categories of *innovation-readiness*,

a model first proposed by Rogers (2010), illustrated in Figure 1. Following the Innovators (coalition of willing), the four other groups include Early Adopters (champions), the Early Majority, the Late Majority, and a final group that Rogers (2010) refers to as Laggards, but which we'd like to refer to as Final Adopters.

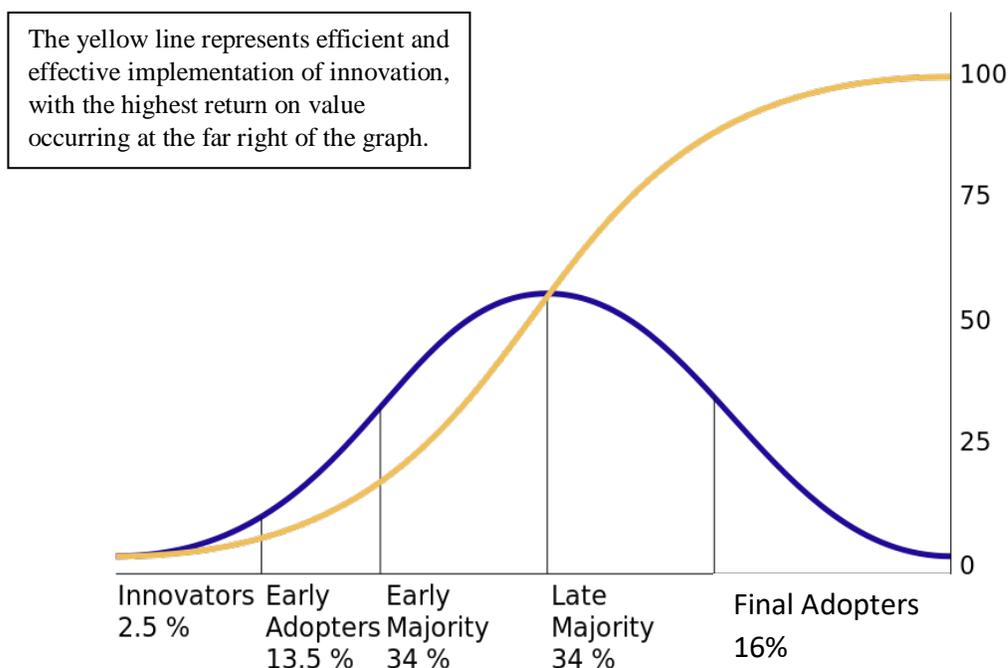


Figure 1. Diffusions of Innovations (adapted) – First proposed by Everett Rogers in 1962, this theory of innovation-adoption argues that improving organizations requires ongoing communication with several groups over extended periods of time. The communication results in incremental cultural shifts that support wider use of new technologies and a higher return on value.

The fact that innovation must roll out in time and take root slowly and through a sociocultural process is captured in the work of Stenius (2017), who explained that:

...The long-term success of organizational change lies not in the efforts nor power of will of a singular change agent; rather, it is driven by the attitudes and behaviour of the individual members of the organization, often denominated as *change recipients*. This perspective suggests that an organization is essentially an extension of its individual members; consequently, organizations can only act and change through these members. Hence, the implementation of lasting change initiatives requires the successful and persistent alteration of individual behaviour. (p. 9)

This perspective values the reality that human beings are meaningfully complex and must be treated carefully, especially if organizational health is to be maintained. Initiatives that are spread through unresourced mandates, fear, coercion, or otherwise insensitive or forceful management styles are doomed to fail and/or create untenable collateral damage. While resistance has always

existed in response to calls for innovation, institutional leaders need not feel like wide-adoption of innovation is an unrealistic goal to work towards. Indeed, Rogers (2010) model of innovation diffusion frames the problem of innovation-adoption in manageable portions that can be addressed over time.

As a note of interest, rather than simply referring to the last group as Final Adopters, I suggest a term that demonstrates that this group of individuals can often be quite active and united in *resisting* innovation, preferring the tried and true practices to which they have become accustomed. In a play on words that contrasts these individuals to the “coalition of the willing,” this group might be appropriately called the “*status quo*-alition”—those who much prefer things to remain just as they are. They have not captured the spirit of a sentiment first shared by Oren Harari: “The electric light did not come from the continuous improvement of candles.”

The Leadership Challenge

In conceptualizing how each of these five groups might be engaged and *included* in an effort to increase adoption and improved institutional effectiveness, the work of Kouzes and Posner (2006) seems apropos. Since 1983, Kouzes and Posner have collected over 75,000 written responses from successful industry leaders (and those that surround them) that answer the question: “What do you do as a leader when you’re performing at your personal best?” The results of this research revealed what Kouzes and Posner call “The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.” Each of these five practices can be as crucial elements that can help those leading an initiative to reward, motivated, and appropriately resource innovation adopters at every stage of readiness.

1. **Model the Way** – This practice is enacted when those who are doing the work of an organization have a clear, desirable example of the work expected of them and can tie that example to meaningful, desirable outcomes.
2. **Inspire a Shared Vision** – This practice involves not only sharing one’s own vision, but working to build and synthesize a vision that works for everyone. Often, this vision is designed and articulated by administrators who directly oversee the work that the innovation informs.
3. **Challenge the Process** – This practice is an opportunity for leadership to break down existing barriers to well-being that hinder the work of those adopting the innovation in question.
4. **Enable Others to Act** – This practice involves the work of facilitation and making sure that successful outcomes are a team effort and not just the product of those working at the core of the initiative. Often, people can do their best work when they are properly resourced and then trusted to carry forward with the shared vision.
5. **Encourage the Heart** – This practice involves making sure that people feel appreciated, receive appropriate and timely recognition for success, and are contacted during difficult times when their morale may prevent them from being fully willing to adopt the innovation being offered.

Since Kouzes and Posner (2006) were discussing leadership in general, it takes an additional step to directly apply these principles to the process of innovation—to analytics and to leadership in higher education. By focusing on each of the five categories of innovation-readiness, this model of leadership can help define how each group can be empowered to increase adoption and uptake of innovation.

Patient, Responsive Leadership in Engaging Different Groups

Table 1 (page 5) represents the needs of each of the five groups of innovation-readiness, considering their needs at each level of the five practice of exemplary leadership. The table is not meant to be comprehensive or exhaustive, but is meant to offer at least a few examples of how adopters at every stage of readiness can be effectively engaged, rewarded, and empowered in the analytics initiative.

By relying on this research-based philosophy of empowerment and reflective leadership, AIS hopes to allow the analytics initiative to grow and develop over time and in a manner consistent with the professional capacities of the institutional officers. As institutional readiness increases, adoption will naturally spread as innovation continues to provide meaningful returns on investment. Ensuring that all groups of adoption readiness are included in the planning and staging of the initiative means that no group need feel left out, brushed aside, or bullied into adoption. Additionally, opening the initiative to constructive and critical feedback at all stages of development can help to ensure that analytics adoption occurs in a considered, measured fashion, rather than haphazardly. More specifically, this approach is meant to honor existing professional competencies, while simultaneously taking advantage of innovation opportunities that have always been so integral to organizational health.

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<i>Needs Matrix</i>	Innovators	Early Adopters	Early Majority	Late Majority	Final Adopters
Model the Way	Need early information and opportunities to communicate and collaborate often	Need to receive early training and be involved in rollout planning meetings	Need examples to follow and expectations from leadership about performance	Need proof that the innovation is not threatening and can be successfully adopted	Need overwhelming proof that the innovation is a new standard of performance
Inspire a Shared Vision	Need an understanding of the core philosophies of the innovation initiative, so they can share this message with others	Need to feel safe in “trying something,” as innovation always begins with experimentation and some failure	Need proactive outreach provided by champion Early Adopters who are willing to share their best ideas; need a shared language of success	Need solutions to existing problems, rather than solutions to problems they are not yet ready to address; need to adopt by choice, not compulsion	Need to be listened to as they protect traditions and practices that do make sense and that have value
Challenge the Process	Need to identify existing problems and barriers to a successful launch of new innovation	Need to feel facilitated in assessing the initiative and providing formal and informal feedback	Need to feel that leadership is protecting their interests and fighting their battles; need proof of early successes	Need clear examples of the rewards of innovation and of the limitations of previous practice	Need an opportunity to scrutinize and share their criticisms with leadership
Enable Others to Act	Need to identify and reward Early Adopters who are willing to be examples to others	Need opportunities to share best-practices with Early and Late Majority	Need clear boundaries for reasonable incorporation of innovation into existing practice	Need general training to start that gets more specific through iterative communication	Need leadership training opportunities to capture the spirit of innovation
Encourage the Heart	Need to share in successes and acknowledge others’ contribution	Need to be rewarded for early successes and contributions	Need interpersonal interaction with and support from champions	Need to be reassured consistently following their adoption of innovation	Need to be listened to early and often

Table 1. Needs Matrix – Each group of innovation-adopters has unique needs and strengths as they interact with emerging trends and initiatives. While some individuals are more predisposed to accepting change early, others need time, examples, freedom, and safety to make a change.