

Change is the Price of Growth: how fast or slow is a matter of choice – part II

This is the second in a series of articles designed to address how administrators can influence the rate of adoption for new programs and services as well as how to manage the rate of internal change within their organization. In the first article readers were introduced to a framework that outlined the basic option categories that are used to influence the rate of adoption and/or manage the rate of internal change. This article continues the discussion by outlining how to use compatibility and simplicity to manage the rate of adoption. The third and final article in the series will develop examples for how to use divisibility and visibility.

Abstract

“In times of change, learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”
-Eric Hoffer

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In the first article of this series, readers were introduced to a framework for managing the rate of adoption for new products and services. Given that lifelong learning implies a continuous process of change, the framework can and does prove to be extremely useful tool for administrators. Interested readers may also wish to again refer to the first article for a comprehensive description of the elements of model and for practical examples for how to use relative advantage.

Practical Illustrations

As in the case with relative advantage, there are any number of unique competitive advantages, or combination of actions, that can be developed for simplicity and compatibility. The following examples are intended to illustrate how an organization can speed the adoption process. If a reader wishes to slow the diffusion process they simply need to create ideas that are contrary to speeding the rate of adoption. For example, minimize the relative advantage of the new product or erect some other barrier to rapid adoption such as making the product very complex.

Influencing the Rate of External Adoption (Simplicity)

Simplicity is a recommendation that educators need to be frequently reminded of. By virtue of their education and aptitude educators are prone to violating this rule. If it can be made more complicated, educators will find a way to do it. Undoubtedly many readers will already be familiar with the K.I.S. (keep it simple) principle. And those who that are familiar with the effectiveness of this basic rule understand that you need to keep things “very simple.” **The**

simpler things are the more rapid will be the speed of adoption.

Product:

Minimize or “package” new product benefits

Whenever possible, highlight one core benefit (or a limited set of closely related benefits) and then add features as the market becomes more familiar with the product. Always begin with simple illustrations of the product and then work towards more complicated applications.

Price:

Avoid complicated terms and conditions.

When it comes to long relationship building, make your price easy to understand!

Make payment as secure and easy as possible. Automatic checking withdrawal, credit cards, Paypal, time payments, online shopping basket features as common examples.

Place:

Easy access – locate facilities near students, at well known locations.

Easy to locate. Online mapping technology is certainly facilitating this aspect of speeding adoption. Recommendations for parking are also useful.

Promotion:

Keep your message simple and focused. Pictures/illustrations are more memorable than words. Will your unique selling proposition capture someone’s attention in the first 6 seconds of seeing your promotional material? Unless your audience is already highly involved in your product offering, make generous use of white space in your promotional material.

Influencing the Rate of Internal Change (Simplicity)

Product:

Keep the staff and faculty focused on the core feature/function of your new program(s).

Often staff/faculty will try to micro manage the process of change resulting in an organization getting mired down in the minutia.

Initially minimize the number of options or alternatives that are available. Not only will the diffusion rate be higher (shorter learning and overall decision-making time) but quality tends to be higher as well.

Price:

Allow the organization time to learn the new behavior without penalty for initial failures.

If extensive learning is involved (as is often the case when dealing with change) focus first on the core competencies needed to accomplish the desired change. Focus on those skills easiest to learn to facilitate early success.

Place:

Provide easy access for locations to learn new skills or even consider bringing the material to the staff and faculty (e.g. online). Make needed information easy to identify and locate within the organization.

Promotion:

Chunk information whenever possible.

Research suggests that people cannot remember or process much more than 7 ± 2 bits of discrete information at any given time. When the discrete information becomes associated with each other, it becomes what it known as a chunk of information. Develop a given theme for your informational literature and then bundle your information with the theme. If it can be said with fewer words ... do so!

Influencing the Rate of External Adoption (Compatibility)

Compatibility refers to the degree to which any element of your marketing mix (4 P's) is compatible with the attitudes, opinions and culture of your target audience. It is always the responsibility of the marketer to "speak the language" of the intended audience. Speaking the language, within this context, refers to an acceptable product design, placement pricing and promotion of the product/service within the market. **The more compatible things are the more rapid will be the speed of adoption.**

Compatibility can, in my opinion, be one of the most difficult areas to develop creative applications for speeding adoption or for facilitating change management. Like relative advantage, you must begin by trying to understand the issue from your customer's perspective. Compatibility, however, further imposes the burden of aligning the core benefit of your product or the purpose for the change along with all of the other values and attitudes of your audience. In a group context this can be an even more daunting challenge. Nevertheless, the rewards for the proper application of this approach are equally great.

Product:

Class/program material should be oriented so that it uses examples that "fit" the needs of attitudes of your target audience. For example, illustrations in class could have a conservative or liberal spin. Another example is where class materials are slanted with either a local or more global perspective. The use of humor also has its place but then only within its proper context. Some educators will argue that you must always take a balanced perspective and I would not argue against this goal. However, such a balanced approach will slow the adoption process. It is better to use "up front" values matching and then work into a more balanced perspective. The latter approach also minimizes the effects of selective perception.

Understand and adapt each class/program to meet the expectations of the target audience.

For example, in a recent seminar I conducted the owners of the firm were very sensitive to the meeting ending exactly on time. Evidently a previous speaker had violated this expectation causing great difficulty for the owners later in the day. Simply ending on time was deemed a significant factor of success. A similar example is deciding on the frequency and duration of breaks.

Price:

No payments or interest until ... some future point in time. Deferring payment is often of interest to consumers. Rapidly growing companies are also often “cash poor.” Making bank loans (a viable financing alternative) available to students, irrespective of their credit rating, can be as easy as securing the loans with the tuition dollars. As a general rule, people have a greater tendency to payoff bank loans than to pay off other forms of consumer debt.

Change a membership fee (or offer as a benefit for donating to your organization) for which you then offer discounts on classes and services during the year. The goal is to isolate those features of price that the consumer is least sensitive to and then present the price of the product or service within this context. For example, first cost versus recurring costs, timing of payment(s), interest rates, method or medium of payment, quality perceptions, etc.

Place:

Situate your class in an environment that is perceived to be extremely safe, especially for the elderly or other risk sensitive audiences. Closely match the perceived quality of the environment with the intended quality of the course.

Promotion:

The editorial content of the promotional material and immediate environment in which the information is presented should match the attitudes and values of the audience, e.g. *avant gard* versus traditional formats. Focus on key opinion leaders within the target audience and then encourage word-of-mouth communications.

Influencing the Rate of Internal Change (Compatibility)

Product:

Focus on developing a familiar process that can be used whenever making changes. The process therefore becomes more of a focus for your faculty and staff as opposed to the changes that being considered. As the process becomes more familiar, changes resulting from the process tend to be more readily adopted.

Position change in light of some underlying shared core value. For example, a college recently implemented a new form of non-tenure track faculty positions on their campus. The change was viewed in many quarters of the faculty as potentially threatening or eroding academic freedom. The position was eventually adopted due in part due to the proponents focusing attention on the positive impact the position would have on the quality of student education and the growing trend in the academe to use these types of positions (hence calling upon “collective wisdom” as reason for change).

Price:

Everything we do has a cost associated with it, even if it is just an opportunity cost. Some costs, however, are easier to tolerate even as some rewards will have a greater impact, even if the dollar value is exactly the same between the various alternatives. The key is to identify cost factors (effective price) and eliminate or minimize the costs.

One of my favorite stories is of a salesperson (let's call him Jim) that worked largely on commission down in Dallas, Texas. His sales manager (we'll call him Bob) was completely unable to motivate Jim beyond a very modest level of income. Bob's experience, however, suggested that Jim could be making twice as much in commissions and accordingly selling that much more product. Jim could not be fired or reassigned for a variety of organizational constraints. Tenure, of course, is the ultimate safe refuge for faculty who believe "I don't have to if I don't want to."

One evening Bob joined Jim and his family for dinner at their home. In doing so, Bob learned that Jim was a devout Baptist. Jim was raised to believe that it is important to keep your priorities straight and that making lots of money was not one of the most important things in life. As a consequence, Jim made a reasonable living (from his perspective) and then spent a considerable amount of his time volunteering at church helping to raise money for missionary work. In other words, the cost of working harder to sell more was too great since on the surface it seemed to violate Jim's principles concerning living a balanced life. Bob now had the key he needed to modify Jim's behavior. Bob showed Jim that if he worked hard at his job (effective stewardship of the gifts God had given him) he could double his income and if Jim deemed it appropriate he could give the extra money to the church. One year later Jim had quadrupled his previous income. When I asked Bob if Jim was giving all of the extra income to his church, Bob's answer was that he didn't know and didn't really care. The point was that until Bob was able to eliminate or minimize Jim's cost for engaging in a change of behavior, Jim was unwilling or incapable of change.

Parking is a perennial problem at most schools. Carpooling programs tend to be much more successful when the organization makes the process of finding someone to carpool with much easier (e.g. online matching services).

Place:

When and where change is introduced is almost as important as the change itself. It is, for example, much easier to make changes during slow periods as opposed to when things are very busy. If the change is going to be extensive, then it is often advantageous to give people additional time to prepare for the anticipated change. Momentum, however, is also important and you do not want to give needless time that will encourage unnecessary or unproductive reflection on the need for the change.

Some people feel more comfortable trying new things alone while others like to work in groups. Find out how your staff and/or faculty prefer to deal with change and then provide them with the appropriate environment to do so.

Promotion:

The method of communication should be appropriate to the audience that is being targeted and the message being delivered. Some people prefer to have issues related to change discussed with them on an individual basis. Others prefer group dialogue while others yet like to have the information written down where they can process the information at their convenience. If the change is important, it is worth the additional effort to make sure that it is announced in an effective manner.

The message content should be appropriate to the level of familiarity and degree of involvement of your targeted audience. Involvement in this case refers to the degree to which your audience feels involved with the change as opposed to how you (as the change agent) feel that others should or should not feel about the proposed change.

Summary

It is never too late to become what you might have been (George Eliot). The purpose of this article is to illustrate how simplicity and compatibility can be used to manage the rate of adoption and the speed of internal change. Simplicity, as previously noted, is one of those areas that educators need to pay particular close attention to given their predilection for creating complexity. Compatibility is also very important but as previously noted can be a challenging area within which to develop specific strategies and tactics. In the next article 6 examples of how to use divisibility and visibility will be presented.