

Using Extension Educators to Facilitate Experiential Learning

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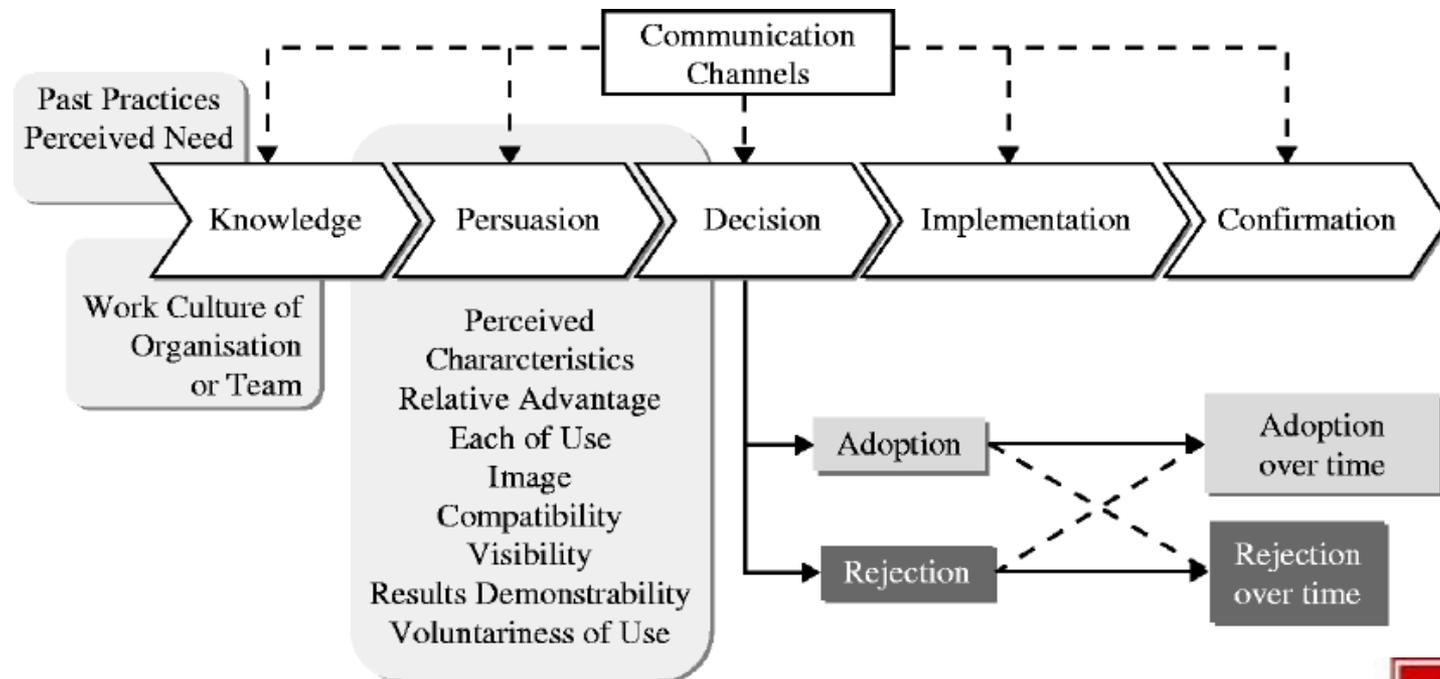


Background

- Agriculture, 4-H, and Learning Child Extension Educators agreed to collaborate with graduate students to provide authentic experiential learning.
- Students were enrolled in a Planned Change course using Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations to guide the process.
- A scaffold approach to course curriculum provided for class discussions and activities, extension educator meetings and assessments, and community action and outreach.



Rogers' Diffusions of Innovation Process



Source: Rogers (2003)



The Role of the Extension Educator



- Agriculture, 4-H, and Learning Child Extension Educators helped each team to identify a current problem or challenge in their local community.
- Using the Diffusions of Innovation as a guide, each team developed a comprehensive change plan for each educator based on conversations between student/educator:
 - The use of innovative technology to reach farmers by a newer extension educator
 - Local strategies used to help with 4-H communication and volunteer recruitment
 - Adoption and usage of an early parenting course in an urban area



The Change Plans

- The change plans were designed to be practical working documents that the Extension educators could use to guide and implement their desired change.
- The change plans focused on:
 - the need for the change
 - the target audience
 - the innovation-decision process
 - attributes of the change
 - rate of adoption, and
 - diffusion networks.



Approach to Change



- Each student in the course examined their personal approach to change, the use of change leadership in popular press, and developed a deeper understanding of change-related theories
- Some of the extension educators also read some of the popular press books and this facilitated discussion within the working teams
- Groups worked with the educator, but also within the community they were going to be impacting
 - Social Media Training for two county offices
 - Meetings with farmers at local restaurants in the mornings



An Example

- The initial meeting presented the following issues of concern:
 - Providing more opportunities for middle and high school students
 - A lack of literacy and understanding surrounding agriculture, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), and science literacy.
 - Redistricting occurring in the county schools that could impact programming and participation.
 - Changing the mentality of what 4-H programs were and how the message was distributed
 - Attracting new volunteers



The 4-H Change Plan



- The goals of our change plan are as follows:
 - _____ County Extension will use new forms of social media to communicate their message to a wider audience and will increase followership by 30%.
 - _____ County Extension will provide three articles about the merits of 4-H and in new ways to reach new segments of the community to be distributed through the school system, news outlets, and other media.
 - _____ County Extension will increase the number of community volunteers by fifteen people (10% growth) over the course of the next year.



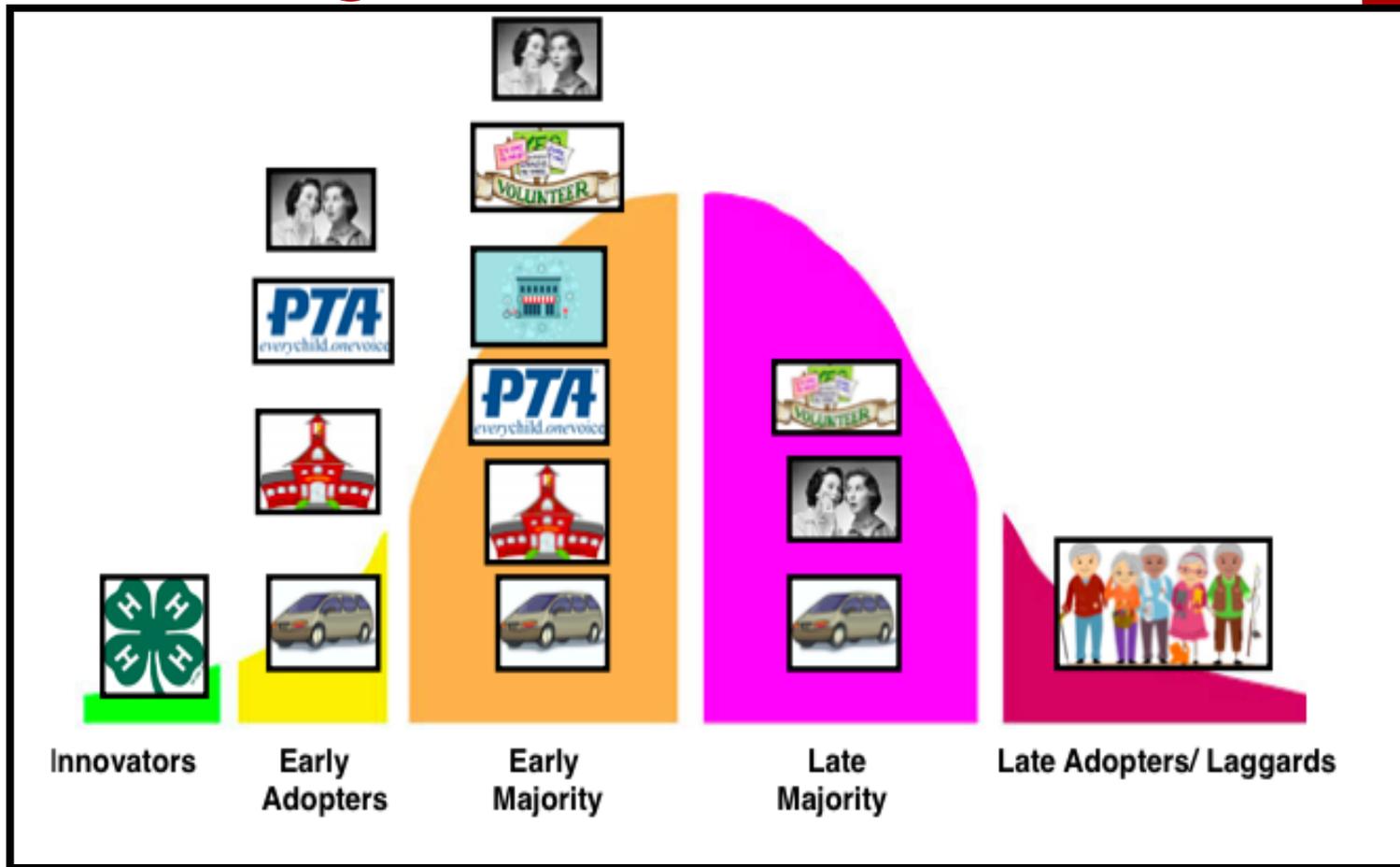
Attributes of Innovation

Should we do mentality/ volunteers?



- **Relative Advantage:** Changing the mentality about 4-H is about showing potential 4-H members and volunteers a more accurate depiction of what 4-H is. This new mentality will help people see the benefits of 4-H in comparison to other popular youth activities, such as sports, and see that it offers more than just being a rural ag club.
- **Compatibility:** This new mentality is compatible, because it shows how the benefits of 4-H match up with the benefits of sports, an activity that is popular for youth to participate in. By drawing the connection between sports and 4-H, parents should be able to see that 4-H aligns with the values they want to instill into their children.
- **Complexity:** This change will be complex, because it can be very difficult to change people's perceptions. The extension educator will have to work hard to make sure that the plan for change is working, by evaluating how families view 4-H as the change is being diffused.
- **Trial-ability:** This new mentality can be tried on a temporary basis. The extension educator can try using the new messaging materials for a while and see if there is any change in attendance of events. This change will require some time and resources from the extension educator, but we have contributed some resources to ease up on that burden.
- **Observability:** This change isn't very observable. It is difficult for people to view others' opinions on 4-H, unless they are specifically discussing it. To overcome this, the extension educator could hold an open house and invite current 4-H families to share about their experiences with other families who are interested in 4-H.

Rate of Adoption for 4-H Message



Plan for Action

- Our action plan for the change process includes the following attributes:
 - Provide communication resources to the staff in the extension office:
 - Provide social media training for the Extension office, including Twitter, Instagram, and helpful tips for posting across social media
 - Provide examples of a promotional newsletter article
 - An article written on the benefits of 4-H as compared with sports will be supplied
 - Member highlight article
 - Volunteer highlight article
 - Provide an example of a press release for MakerFest, but can also be used for other events in the future
 - Provide a graphic for MakerFest
 - Provide a plan for recruiting volunteers



The Approach

- Our approaches toward enacting change were theory-based and practical applications that involved a multitude of people
- Provided practical interviews, research, and evaluation of how the change process could work for the extension educator
- Several of the groups have followed up and worked with the programs since the end of the semester

