

Defusing Fear of Innovations: Diffusing Change in the Church

Rev. Edward D. Seely, Th.M., Ph.D.

Level III Objectives for Teaching and Using the Research on Diffusion of Innovations in the Church

By the end of this course, each student will meet with the professor of record and demonstrate at least one, or if time permits all four, of the following cognitive competencies:

1. By the end of this course, each student will verbally explain to the professor at least one way he or she will use the diffusion research to facilitate an innovation he or she would like to implement in the work to which the Lord calls him or her.
2. By the end of this course, each student will verbally list in order all five stages in the innovation-decision process, and cite at least one aspect of each stage, including all five in the persuasion stage, that he or she will include in facilitating the adoption of the innovation mentioned in objective #1.
3. By the end of this course, each student will verbally list in order all five adopter categories in the innovation-decision process, identify and explain the continuum along which the people in a social system (e.g., in the church) position themselves, cite the percentage and least one characteristic of the people in each category, and explain at least one way how he or she will use this information to facilitate the adoption of the innovation mentioned in objective #1.
4. By the end of this course, each student will explain at least one other application of the diffusion research to his or her work, e.g., citing at least three ways the research can help him or her, and those he or she teaches, to function more effectively as witnesses for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, indeed for our triune God.

Level III Objectives for Teaching and Using the Research on Diffusion of Innovations in the Church

Pertaining to the affective and behavioral competencies:

1. Affective Objectives exist, but will not be distributed to the class in order to not manipulate or constrain the students' genuine affect.
2. Behavioral Objective: By the end of this course, each student will verbally explain to the professor, or include in the course paper, at least one way he or she is already using, has begun planning to, or will, use the diffusion research to facilitate the adoption of an innovation he or she would like to implement in the work to which the Lord is calling him or her.

- I. The first step in defusing fear of change and facilitating change in the church is discerning the challenges.

Further information on the following slides is in the Edward D. Seely (EDS) essay, “Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church,” access for which is below in the “Resources” section. The research findings in this presentation apply also to a school.

I. The first step in defusing fear of change and facilitating change in the church is discerning the challenges.

A. Change is inevitable but not always positive or desired. Two common factors often produce undesirable changes.

1. Unsupervised change, e.g., when leaders fail to manage their areas of responsibility as carefully as they should.
2. Mismanaged change, e.g., when mistakes are made in planning and implementation of innovations.
 - Both errors produce negative effects, such as unnecessary and counterproductive discord in the church and even division and separation. (Contrast, e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:25.)

- I. The first step in defusing fear of change and facilitating change in the church is discerning the challenges.
 - B. Change is a constant for believers in Christ: progressive sanctification is a life-long process.
 - C. Human beings generally resist change (“I’m doing very well the way I am, thank you!”).
 - D. A major part of the church leader’s call is to be a change agent.
 - E. We can defuse fear of change by understanding, carefully initiating, guiding, and implementing the innovation-decision process, which has been discovered by diffusion research, a part of the field of communication, in cross-cultural social science throughout the world.

I. The first step in defusing fear of change and facilitating change in the church is discerning the challenges. Before Proceeding: Some Key Definitions

F. We should have a clear understanding of the term, “Innovation.” E. M. Rogers, outstanding leader in the field of diffusion research, defines an innovation as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. It matters little, so far as human behavior is concerned, whether or not an idea is objectively new as measured by the lapse of time since its first use or discovery. The perceived newness of the idea for the individual determines his or her reaction to it. If the idea seems new to the individual, it is an innovation.” (Fourth Edition, p. 11, see below, “Resources.”)

- The word “perceived” is very important. A particular idea, service, person (especially leader), product, program, policy, or process, actually could have been in existence for a long time, but if someone has not as yet heard about it, it has the key characteristics of an innovation and he or she relates accordingly. So church and school leaders must take this reality into account as they plan and seek to implement their new plans successfully.

- I. The first step in defusing fear of change and facilitating change in the church is discerning the challenges. Before Proceeding: Some Key Definitions
- G. We should also have a clear understanding of the term, “social system.” A social system is “defined as a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal. The members or units of a social system may be individuals, informal groups, organizations, and/or subsystems.” (E. M. Rogers, Fourth Edition, p. 23) A church congregation and a church denomination are social systems. (Confirmed in a phone conversation with and letter from E. M. Rogers). A school is also a social system.
- H. What do we mean by the term “diffusion?” Diffusion is “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas.” (E. M. Rogers, Fourth Edition, p. 5) It is the spreading through the social system of the innovation.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating corporate and individual decision-making.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate** and **individual** decision-making.

- As church leaders it will be helpful for us to glimpse highlights of the findings of the studies in diffusion research, first with respect to the **corporate** dimension, where the initial plans for change take place,
- then with respect to the **individual** dimension concerning important elements which must be taken into account for the most effective outcomes to be realized.
- On the corporate as well as the individual plane, the innovation process consists of a series of stages which progress in a necessary and predictable pattern. *Later stages cannot be undertaken effectively prior to the accomplishment of prerequisite stages.*

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

A. Ask yourself eight essential questions.

1. How am I perceived by the people in my church or school?
2. Whose needs will this innovation primarily meet?
3. Do I have the social capital to facilitate this change?
4. Am I perceived as one who listens carefully?
5. Is the change I want to implement consistent with God's Word and will? Specifically, is it moral and ethical, and will it help extend and nurture God's kingdom?
6. Is there a more opportune time for this innovation?
7. Is this change I'm considering supported by the facts?
8. Will this innovation uproot and destroy a need-meeting tradition?

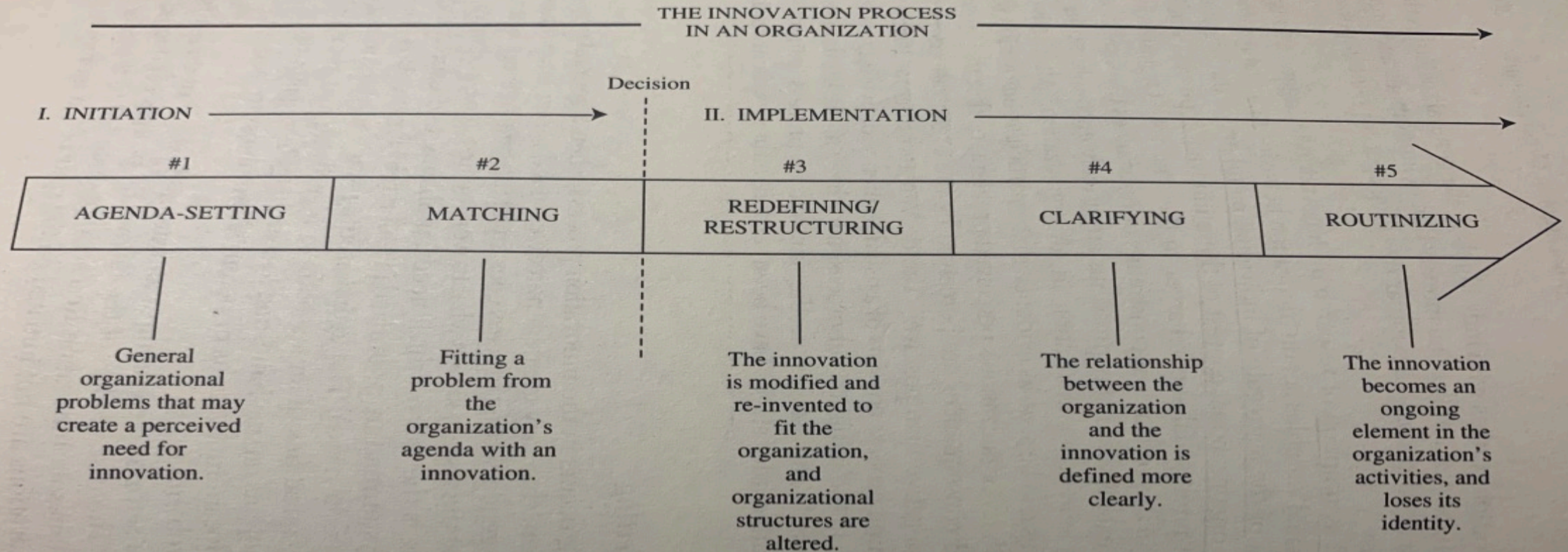
II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

B. **Corporate** (e.g., church) innovation decisions are made in five stages over time.

1. **Agenda-setting:** Identify a need and an innovation that will meet that need.
2. **Matching:** Relate the need to the innovation to determine feasibility and effectiveness. When the need and the innovation match, leaders decide to implement. Implementation involves the following three stages.
3. **Redefining and/or restructuring:** Quickly make any modifications needed.
4. **Clarifying:** Explain how the innovation benefits the organization.
5. **Routinizing:** Recognize incorporation of the change but continue to affirm its benefits, especially while significant opposition exists.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating corporate and individual decision-making.

Figure 10-2. Five Stages in the Innovation Process in an Organization



The innovation process in an organization consists of two broad activities: (1) *initiation*, defined as all of the information gathering, conceptualizing, and planning for the adoption of an innovation, leading up to the decision to adopt, and (2) *implementation*, all of the events, actions, and decisions involved in putting an innovation into use. The decision to adopt (shown as a vertical dotted line in the figure above) divides initiation, composed of the agenda-setting and matching stages, from implementation, composed of the three stages of redefining/restructuring, clarifying, and routinizing.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. Individuals' innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context and simultaneously with the last three corporate implementation stages.

1. The context includes prior conditions that influence each individual's mindset.
 - a. **Previous practice** involves experience and the associated degree of comfort with present functioning without the innovation, including the thought, "Things are just fine the way they are now."
 - b. **Felt needs and problems** provide a possible incentive to consider something new that will meet those needs and overcome the problems.
 - c. **Psychological characteristics**, such as spiritual and personality strength that is not dependent upon peer opinion and facilitates innovativeness; the degree to which individuals are inclined to try something new, positively affects consideration of adopting an innovation.
 - e. **Social characteristics**, including the degree of cosmopolitaness, effect the willingness to implement an innovation.
 - f. **Norms of the social system** involve the values, aims, standards, determinative principles of what constitutes right and wrong action, as well as other generally agreed-upon parameters of the community to which the individual members adhere or face ostracism upon failure to comply.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context.

2. The five stages occur in a predictable succession.

- a. **Knowledge:** Potential adopters in a social system become aware of an innovation.
- b. **Persuasion:** Individuals become inclined to adopt or reject an innovation on the basis of several factors related to their prior conditions (e.g., felt needs) and the characteristics of those in the social system with whom they closely relate (e.g., degree of cosmopolitaness).
- c. **Decision:** To help members conclude they'll adopt an innovation, assure them that it will be implemented on a trial basis and discontinued if it doesn't work out as expected.
- d. **Implementation:** As the change is made, carefully monitor how it is functioning and being received. Search out feedback and make any necessary modifications in the change itself and/or the plan to initiate the innovation.
- e. **Confirmation:** Continue to emphasize, especially by specifically pointing out, the benefits of the innovation as long as any question remains in people's minds. VERY IMPORTANT

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context.

2. The five stages occur in a predictable succession.

- a. **Knowledge:** Potential adopters in a social system become aware of an innovation. As they think about adopting the innovation, they recall the information, comprehend the messages, and develop the knowledge and/or skill needed for effective adoption of the innovation.
 - At this stage, mass media channels are more effective in communicating the information.
- b. **Persuasion:** Individuals become inclined to adopt an innovation on the basis of several factors related to their prior conditions (e.g., felt needs) and the characteristics of those in the social system with whom they closely relate (e.g., degree of cosmopolitaness). This stage involves the potential adopter coming to like the innovation, discussing the new behavior with others, accepting the message received about the innovation, forming a positive image of both the message and the innovation, and receiving support for adopting the innovative behavior from the system.
 - At this stage, interpersonal communication channels, especially trusted opinion leaders and like-minded friends, are typically more effective in facilitating persuasion to adopt the innovation.

(Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of innovations*, Fourth Edition, pp. 189, 190)

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context.

2. The five stages occur in a predictable succession.

- c. **Decision:** To help members conclude they'll adopt an innovation, assure them that it will be implemented on a trial basis and discontinued if it doesn't work out as expected. At this stage, potential adopters intend to search out additional information about the innovation, and then they intend to try the innovation.
- d. **Implementation:** At this stage, adopters acquire additional information about the new thing they've agreed to use, begin using it on a regular basis, and continue to use it. As the change is made, carefully monitor how it is functioning and being received. Search out objective and truthful feedback and soon make any necessary modifications in the change itself and/or the plan to initiate the innovation.
- e. **Confirmation:** This stage involves the adopter recognizing the benefits of the innovation, integrating it into his or her ongoing routine, and promoting it to others. Continue to emphasize, especially by specifically pointing out, the benefits of the innovation as long as any question remains in people's minds. **VERY IMPORTANT**

(Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of innovations*, Fourth Edition, p. 190)

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context. This process parallels other models of stages in the innovation-decision process, e.g., changing addictive behavior.

Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process (Everett M. Rogers, et al.)

1. Knowledge State
 - a. A person becomes aware of an innovation.
 - b. He or she recalls the information,
 - c. comprehends the messages,
 - d. and develops the knowledge and/or skill needed for effective adoption of the innovation.

James O. Prochaska's Five-Stage Model of Changing Addictive Behavior

1. Precontemplation Stage
 - a. A person becomes aware of a problem.
 - b. He or she begins to think about overcoming it.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context. This process parallels other models of stages in the innovation-decision process, e.g., changing addictive behavior.

Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process (Everett M. Rogers, et al.)

2. Persuasion Stage

- a. The potential adopter comes to like the innovation,
- b. discusses the new behavior with others, especially opinion leaders and like-minded friends,
- c. accepts the message received about the innovation,
- d. forms a positive image of both the message and the innovation,
- e. and receives support for adopting the innovative behavior from the social system.

James O. Prochaska's Five-Stage Model of Changing Addictive Behavior

2. Contemplation Stage

- a. Individual seriously thinks about overcoming the problem.
- b. He or she has not yet made a commitment to take action to overcome the problem.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context. This process parallels other models of stages in the innovation-decision process, e.g., changing addictive behavior.

Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process (Everett M. Rogers, et al.)

3. Decision Stage

- a. The potential adopter searches out additional information about the innovation,
- b. and then he or she intends to try the innovation.

James O. Prochaska's Five-Stage Model of Changing Addictive Behavior

3. Preparation Stage

- a. The person intends to take action in the near future,
- b. but he or she does not yet do so.

II. Effectively initiate change through key questions and facilitating **corporate and individual** decision-making.

C. **Individuals'** innovation decisions occur over time in a five-stage process in their context. This process parallels other models of stages in the innovation-decision process, e.g., changing addictive behavior.

Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process (Everett M. Rogers, et al.)

4. Implementation Stage
 - a. Adopters acquire additional information about the new thing they've agreed to use,
 - b. begin using it on a regular basis,
 - c. and continue to use it.
5. Confirmation Stage
 - a. Adopters recognize the benefits of the innovation,
 - b. integrate it into their ongoing routine,
 - c. and promote it to others.

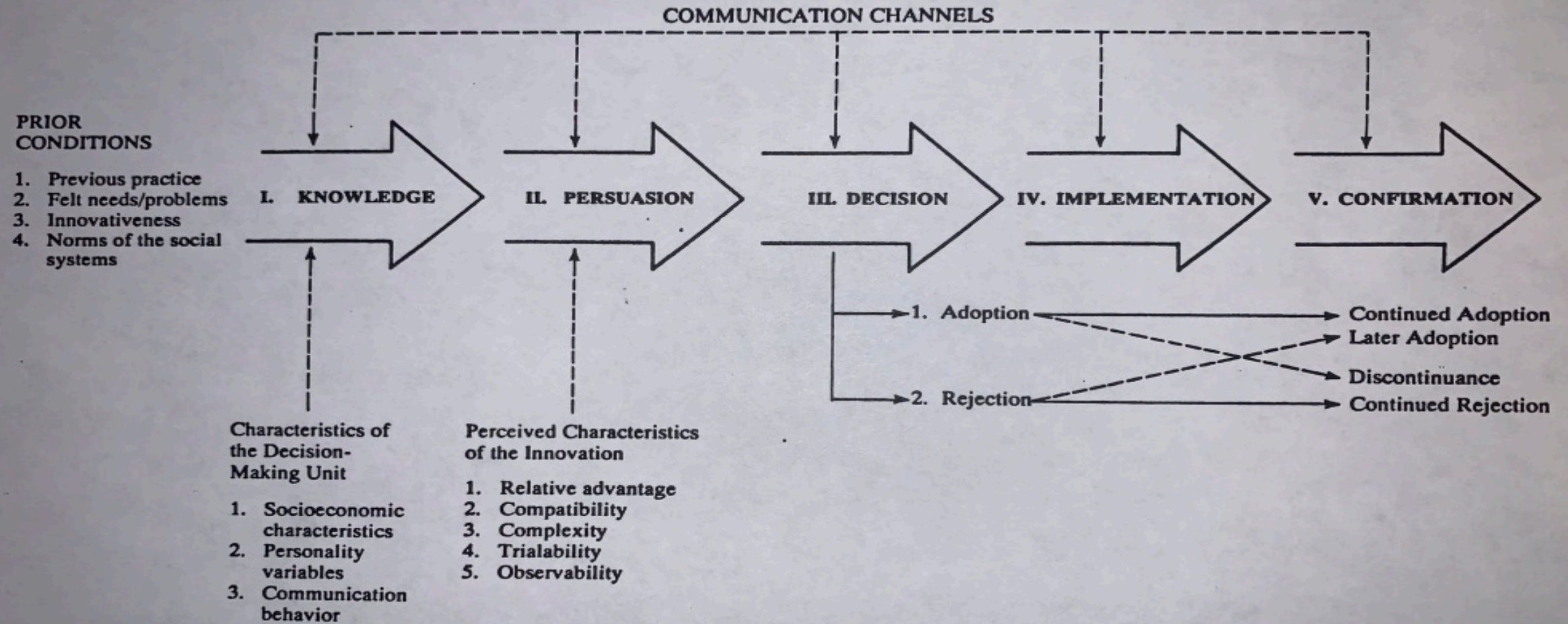
James O. Prochaska's Five-Stage Model of Changing Addictive Behavior

4. Action Stage
 - The person changes his or her behavior or the environment in order to overcome the problem.
5. Maintenance Stage
 - The person consolidates and continues his or her behavior change.

(Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of innovations*, Fourth Edition, pp. 189-190)

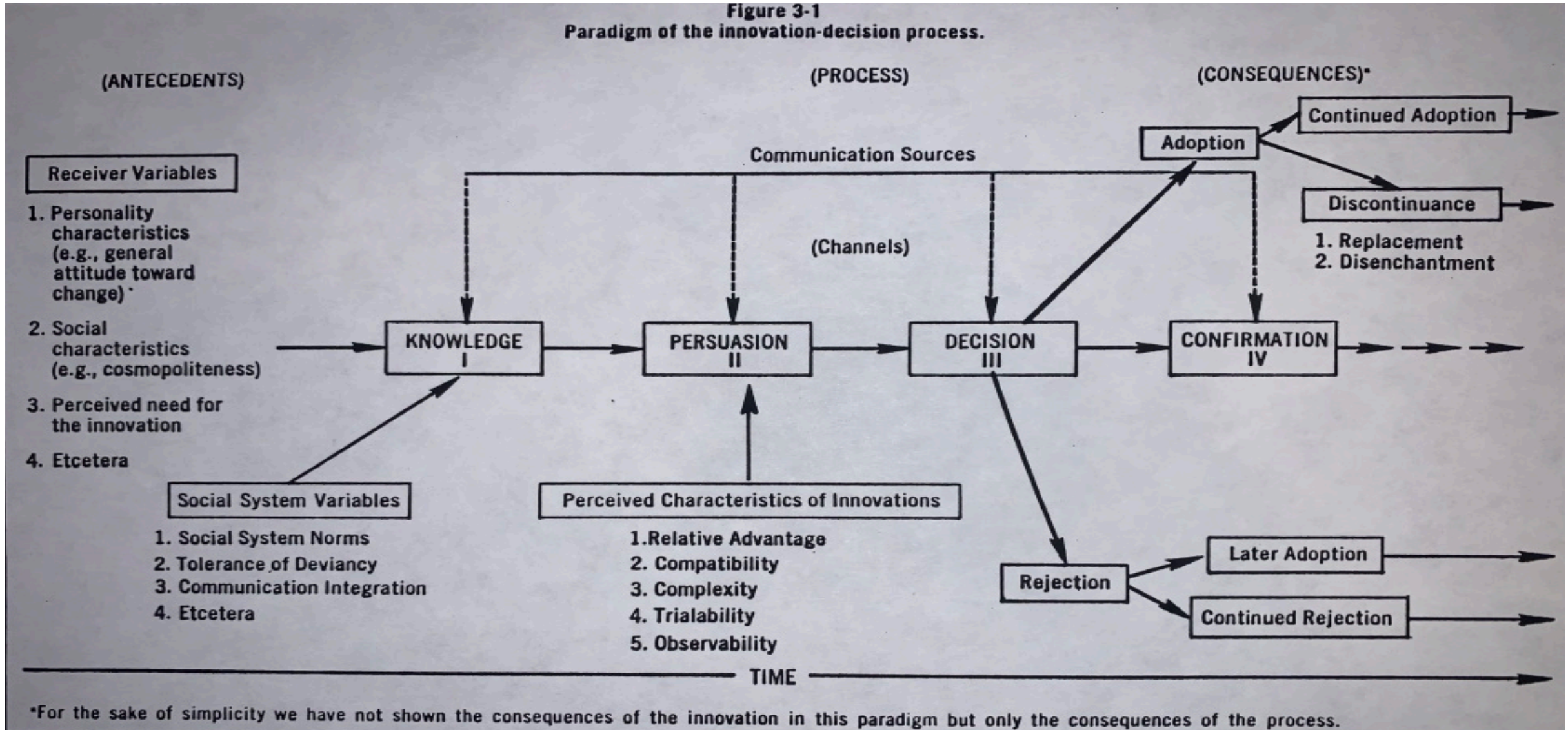
Stages in an Individual's Innovation-Decision Process

Figure 5-1. A Model of Stages in the Innovation-Decision Process



The *innovation-decision process* is the process through which an individual (or other decision-making unit) passes from first knowledge of an innovation, to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision.

Close-up of Stages in an Individual's Innovation-Decision Process, Implementation Stage Implied



III. Carefully implementing the change,
defuses fear and facilitates acceptance of
the change.

III. Carefully implementing the change, defuses fear and facilitates acceptance of the change.

- A. Begin implementing with God. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)
- B. Four attributes of innovations effectively defuse fear and facilitate change; the fifth, complexity, hinders acceptance.
 - 1. **Relative advantage:** Show clearly how the change will be better than what is now in place, *according to what the people value.* (+)
 - 2. **Compatibility:** Assure people that the proposed change is congruent with their felt needs, values, and previous understandings. (+)
 - 3. **Trialability:** Present the proposed change as an opportunity that can be discontinued, if desired, at any time. Assure people that “We can always go back to what we were doing before.” (+)
 - 4. **Observability:** The easier it is for people to see the results of an innovation, the more likely they will adopt it. Is it being done anywhere else, especially in a congregation with their values? (+)
 - 5. **Complexity:** The more difficult to understand and use an innovation, the less likely people will adopt it. Leaders should keep explanations simple and concise. (-)

III. Carefully implementing the change, defuses fear and facilitates acceptance of the change.

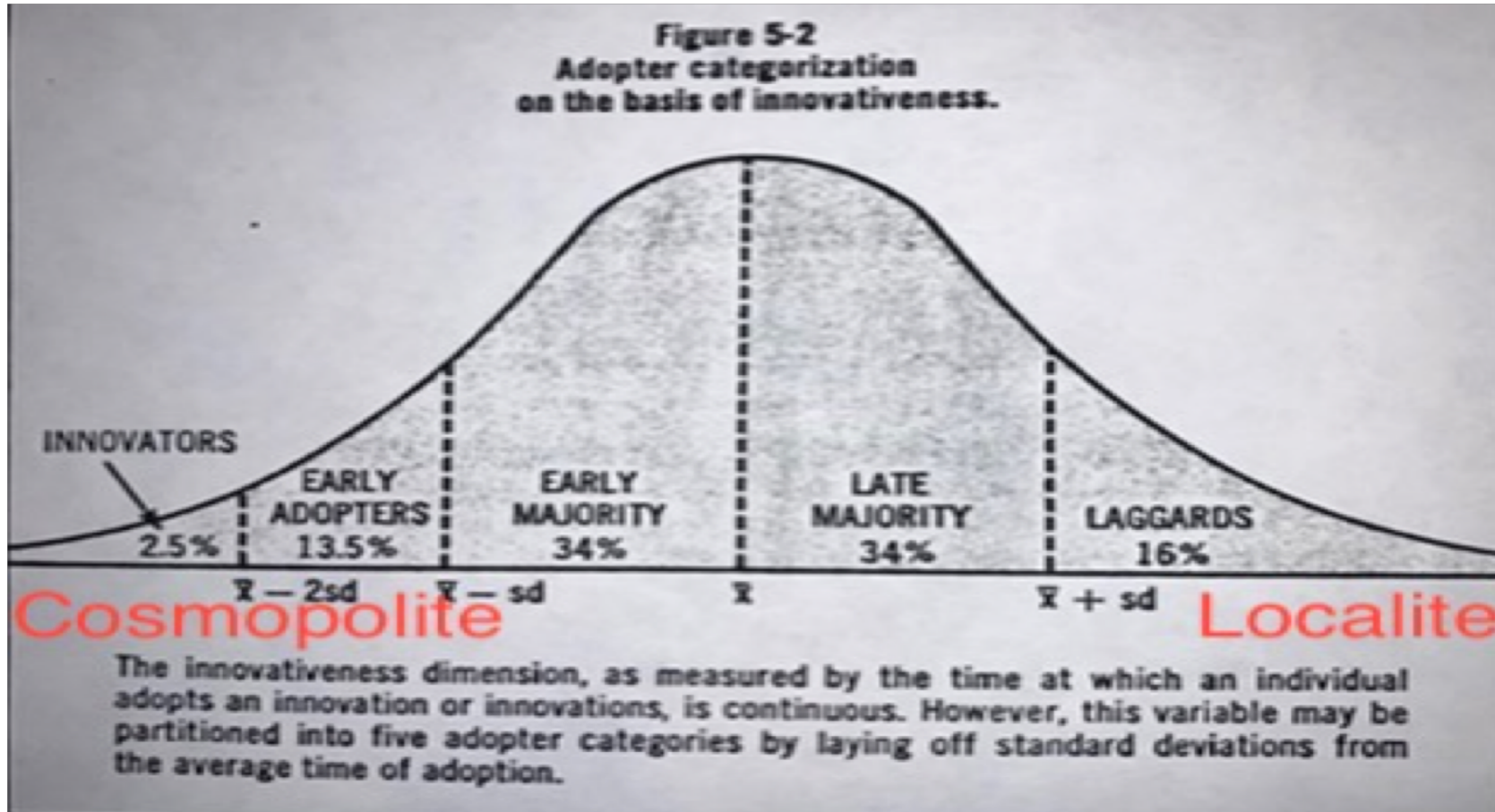
C. Carefully employ opinion leaders.

D. Demonstrate *homophily*, the degree to which the people see their leaders as similar to themselves, regarding, e.g., values, interests, and social characteristics. VERY IMPORTANT. Homophily is widely used elsewhere in society, e.g., in Hollywood's desire to appeal to Chinese viewers, Hong Kong martial arts actor, Donnie Yen and Chinese actor and director, Jiang Wen were hired to work in the "Star Wars" movie, "Rogue One." (Louise Watt, "Record-breaking 'Star Wars' movie opens in China," AP, 1/10/2016)

E. Understand the five different types of people in a social system, including where they are found on a continuum between cosmopolites and localites, and use this information in relating to them according to their orientations and expectations.

1. Innovators (2.5%)
2. Early Adopters (13.5%)
3. Early Majority (34%)
4. Late Majority (34%)
5. Laggards (16%)

Adopter Categories by Time of Innovation Adoption



- III. Carefully implementing the change, defuses fear and facilitates acceptance of the change.
- F. Establish credibility by walking the talk in Christlikeness, speaking the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15)
- G. Outlast the opposition by committing to a long-term ministry in that church and loving the people, including opponents. (Matthew 5:44).
- H. Monitor consequences to modify or eliminate any unexpected outcomes that are not desired.

IV. Implications and Applications

IV. Implications and Applications

- A. The church belongs to Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. (Matthew 20:28)
- B. We, who have been called to be leaders in the body of Christ, need to have, and set as a high priority, that same servant-leader mentality and behavior of our Lord Jesus Christ, which facilitate the diffusion of innovations, in addition to servanthood's many other values in the obedience of God's Word and will. (Matthew 20:24-28)

IV. Implications and Applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the light of diffusion research, what representatives do you want on your team, and from what adopter categories? Don't leave out the "laggards," who may better be referred to as later adopters or final adopters, who have much to offer in the diffusion process.
2. Think of something new that you would like to do in the church you are serving or would like to serve. How will the above findings from diffusion research help you implement your innovation?
3. What is the first step you'll take to try to facilitate your innovation's adoption?

IV. Implications and Applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the light of diffusion research what representatives do you want on your team, and from what adopter categories? Don't leave out the "laggards," who may better be referred to as later adopters or final adopters, who have much to offer in the diffusion process.
2. Think of something new that you would like to do in the church you are serving or would like to serve. How will the above findings from diffusion research help you implement your innovation?
3. What is the first step you'll take to try to facilitate your innovation's adoption? (Find and talk with opinion leader[s].)

IV. Implications and Applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Whether you as some have the gift of evangelism (Ephesians 4:11) and may be intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as all of us, who don't have the gift of evangelism but, whom Christ has called to be his witnesses (1 Peter 3:15), what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea? Hints and suggestions:

IV. Implications and Applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Whether you have the gift of evangelism and are intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as all of us whom Christ has called to be his witnesses, what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea? Hints and suggestions:
 - a. Regarding Relative Advantage:
 - 1) Read 1 John 4:8 and James 1:17. Does anything come to mind? (You can point out that because God's essence is love, and because he does not change [as many religions teach and many people believe], you don't have to worry that someday God will "have it in for you" and give you a bad day.)
 - 2) Read Hebrews 9:27. Does anything come to mind? (Especially if you are witnessing to a Hindu, Buddhist, or someone else from a religion that believes in reincarnation?)

IV. Implications and applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Whether you have the gift of evangelism and are intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as all of us whom Christ has called to be his witnesses, what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea? Suggestions:

b. Regarding Compatibility:

- 1) What comes to mind if you are witnessing to a nonbeliever who regards science? You can inform him or her that properly interpreted, the Bible and careful scientific research are compatible: General Revelation points to, illustrates, and explains some aspects of Special Revelation (e.g., astrophysics and Romans 1:19-20). God does not contradict himself.
- 2) What else comes to mind? How about Deuteronomy 6:4? If you are witnessing to a Muslim, you can say that you, too, believe in one God, and then you can add that it is reasonable to believe that an entity can have three distinct elements that all comprise one essence or substance (e.g., the sun with its ball of fire, the light, and the heat) all constantly present as is the triune God, who is Father, only begotten Son Christ Jesus, and Holy Spirit, three in one. For more, see the Christian Theology page on EDS Websites in the Resources section.

IV. Implications and applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Whether you have the gift of evangelism and are intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as all of us whom Christ has called to be his witnesses, what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea? Hints and suggestions:
 - c. Regarding Observability: What comes to mind? How about modeling? Living a Christ-like life? Let them see Jesus in our lives. Paul: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1)
 - d. Regarding Trailability: What comes to mind? How about inviting nonbelievers to read the Bible (offer to give them a copy); to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; to attend church? “Try it; you’ll like it!”

IV. Implications and applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Whether you have the gift of evangelism and are intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as all of us whom Christ has called to be his witnesses, what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea? Hints and suggestions:
 - e. Regarding Complexity: Read or recite John 3:16 and Romans 10:9. What comes to mind? The basic message of the Bible, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is so simple that everyone can understand it and be blessed by it; it is not complex. At the same time, as people give more and more thought to the teaching of God's Word, everyone, including the most serious thinkers and scholars, can see the great profundity of God's Word; yet everyone can understand what he or she needs to know for salvation and for being in God's eternal service and presence with joy.

IV. Implications and applications

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

4. Whether you have the gift of evangelism and are intending to serve on the mission field, or whether you are as all of us whom Christ has called to be his witnesses, what insights from diffusion research will help you communicate the Gospel of Christ Jesus more effectively to those for whom this is perceived as a new idea? Hints and suggestions:
 - f. What other applications of diffusion research come to mind? For one: Once you successfully implement an innovation, what very important step should you next take? (Confirmation, Reinforcement) How will you do it with your innovation? Pertaining to evangelism and witness, remember the confirmation stage and the importance of personal follow-up and affirmation of the benefits, for now and eternity, of faith and maturing in Jesus Christ and membership in His body, the church.

Resources

- Rogers, Everett M. *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1995) Including Slides 13 (p. 392), 22 (p. 163)
- _____ and F. Floyd Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations: A Cross-Cultural Approach*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1971) Including Slides 23 (p. 102), 27 (p. 182)
- Seely, Edward D., “Christian Education Goals and Objectives, With a Focus on Level III Objectives: How to Be Sure that Your Students are Understanding and Doing What You Have Taught Them,” PPT on the Christian Education page of the Websites listed below.
- _____, “Curriculum Development and Lesson Planning: For Teachers & for Teachers of Teachers,” on the Christian Education page of the Websites listed below.
- _____, “Defusing Fear of Innovations: Facilitating Change in the Church” on the Church Leadership and Administration page of EDS’s two Websites, www.fromacorntoak12.com or www.edwardseely.com and <https://seelyedward.academia.edu/>.
- _____, *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century*, Duane H. Elmer and Lois McKinney (eds.), Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996, pp. 223-229 and the international journal, *REC FOCUS*, Vol. 3, No. 3, September 2003, pp. 40-61.