

## **Healthy Cultural Change Dynamics**

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As an innovator working for change in established organizations I have learned some valuable lessons that I would like to share with you. First, let me clarify some terminology and then I will share some lessons that you may find helpful as you work for change in established organizations.

Sociologists who study change dynamics have identified five general types of people and their general percentage in established organizations. They include: innovators (3-5%), early adapters (15-17%), mid-adapters (50-60%), late adapters (15-20%), and non-adapters (5-10%). With this in mind, let's look at the lessons that I have learned about healthy cultural change dynamics.

**Healthy organizations must make room for innovators and early adapters.** Innovators and early adapters are like the eyes and feet of a body – alone they are pretty useless, but connected to the rest of the body in their proper position, they can be very helpful for the bodies' sight (vision) and movement (new models).

**Innovators tend to function in the area of vision (“in part”) while early adapters tend to sense vision and be willing to pilot new ideas and programs.** Innovators tend to see God's preferred future before others do while early adapters tend to have an intuitive sense of the future. Innovators tend to be idea people while early adapters tend to be action people. When an early adapter hears a vision that is consistent with his/her intuitive sense, he/she may be willing to pilot the vision on a small, manageable scale.

**Mid-adapters tend to function in the practical and present.** Mid-adapters tend to be careful about trying something new. They tend to want to have the details worked out before adopting something new especially if it has the possibility of effecting a lot of people or budget.

**There tend to be three types of mid-adapters: early, mid, and late.** An early mid-adapter tends to be more willing to take a risk on a new idea than the other two types of mid-adapters. They have some of the intuitive orientation of the early adapter but the caution of the mid-adapter. They tend to be the first of the mid-adapters to recognize the value of a new idea and/or program and can be very helpful in persuading the other types of mid-adapters to give the idea and/or program a chance.

**Mid-adapters tend to function in the area of what works and are willing to integrate working models into the organizational culture.** Mid-adapters need to see that a new idea and/or program works before they are willing to try it themselves or give permission for it to become integrated into the culture. They are the primary gate keepers of change.

**An organizational culture can not change substantially unless the mid-adapters embrace the change and accelerate its integration into the culture.** They tend to resist change until they are convinced that it is beneficial and that it will work. Once they embrace the change it tends to be accelerated into the culture through official communications and/or programs.

**Innovators communicate and work best with early adapters.** Innovators tend to be future oriented in their perspective and communication while early adapters tend to be future/present in perspective and communication. Perspective and communication tend to function easier and more effectively when there are common orientations (C1). Perspective and communication tend to be difficult and less effective when there are no common orientations (C3).

C1 - communication between people with similar perspectives (i.e. those who have a future orientation; those who have a present orientation; those who have a past orientation).

C2 – communication between people with slightly different perspectives (i.e. those who have future orientations with those who have present orientations; those who have present orientations with those who have future or past orientations; those who have past orientations with those who have present orientations).

C3 – communication between people with very different perspectives (i.e. those who have future orientations with those who have past orientations).

**Early adapters are better at communicating for innovators to mid-adapters.** Early adapters tend to be better able to communicate the vision and/or ideas of innovators to mid-adapters because they have experience with the vision and/or idea through pilots and they have the present orientation in common with the mid-adapters.

**Creative tension is produced by the pulling of new wineskin culture against the more stable old wineskin culture.** As the new ideas and/or pilots are introduced into the culture they may challenge some of the values and/or functions of the status-quo. This may create a tension that can challenge mid-adapters to consider new ways of thinking, new ways of doing things, and new types of leaders.

**Cultural change toward new and more effective ways of functioning as an organization can emerge out of this creative tension.** The tension created by the pulling of new wineskin ideas and/or programs can cause a cultural shift that can help the organization to be better prepared for effectiveness in functioning in the wider emerging culture, in making room for emerging leaders, and in the transition of leadership from one generation to the next.