Rogers's Diffusion of Innovation theory

This group activity uses your own adoption of generative AI (but not just chatting, so you might not yet be an adopter) as our example or scenario. You'll work through phases together, locating yourself on the adoption curve, then mapping your experience onto Rogers's four core elements of diffusion, and you'll do this in discussion together.

Phase 1 asks you to a spot on the bell curve using your own honest reflection on genAI depth of use (not just "have you used ChatGPT?"). Phases 2–5 tackle one of Rogers's four elements.

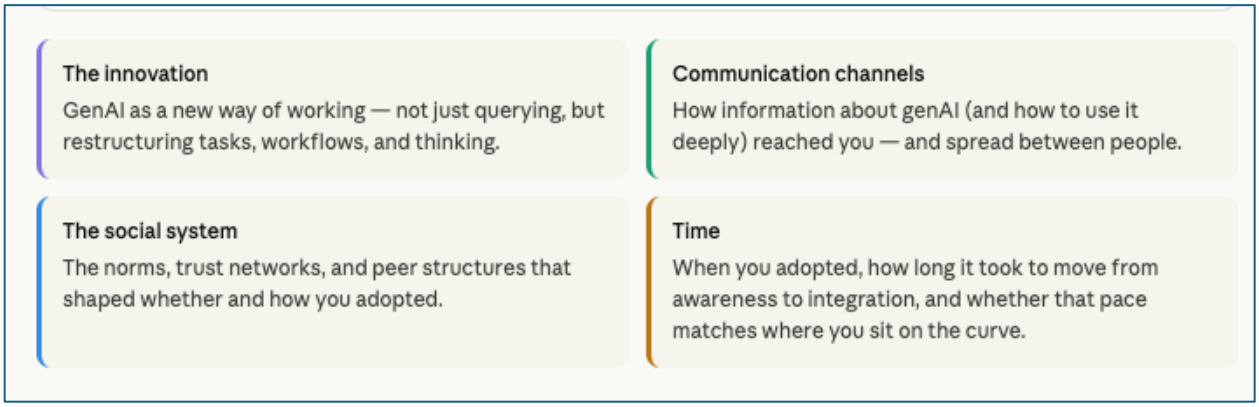
The innovation element (or phase) uses Rogers's five perceived attributes (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability) as individual sliders. Rate your own perceptions, then compare. Adoption is driven by perceived attributes, not objective ones.

The channel phase separates media from interpersonal channels, which can produce an "aha" moment. You might realize, for example, that you learned about genAI from news media but only trusted it after a peer showed you something real, tangible, beneficial.

The social system phase asks you to identify opinion leaders, which tends to surface some honest surprises about who people listened to versus who had formal authority.

The time phase includes Rogers's five-stage decision process (Knowledge → Persuasion → Decision → Implementation → Confirmation), which often reveals that who you might identify as the same adopter category are actually at very different stages.

From Claude:



1. The Innovation: Relative Advantage & Complexity

- How does GenAI provide a relative advantage over how you worked two years ago? Conversely, what is the 'complexity' or 'trialability' barrier that keeps you from using more advanced features (like data analysis or image generation)?
- Key Insight: For an innovation to diffuse, it must be perceived as better than what it supersedes.

2. The Communication Channels: Hype vs. Help

- Where did you first learn about advanced GenAI techniques? Was it through mass media (news/social) or interpersonal channels (a friend showing you a cool prompt/social)? Which was more influential in changing how you use it?
- Key Insight: Rogers argued that mass media creates knowledge, but interpersonal ties create persuasion to adopt.

3. The Social System: Classroom & Peer Norms

- What are the 'norms' of GenAI use at Berry? In your friend group? Is it seen as 'cheating,' 'smart productivity,' or 'laziness'? How do these social expectations influence whether you hide or share your AI use?
- Key Insight: Diffusion is heavily influenced by the structure and values of the social system.

4. Time: The Rate of Adoption

- How long did it take you to move from 'hearing about ChatGPT' to 'using genAI for a complex project'? Why do you think genAI is diffusing faster than previous innovations (like the smartphone or the internet)?
- Key Insight: This looks at the "Innovation-Decision Process,"the time elapsed between first knowledge and confirmation of use.

The Reality Check

What is one "Diffusion Barrier" you discovered? A lack of knowledge (Communication Channel), a lack of perceived value (The Innovation), a fear of social stigma (Social System)? Something else?