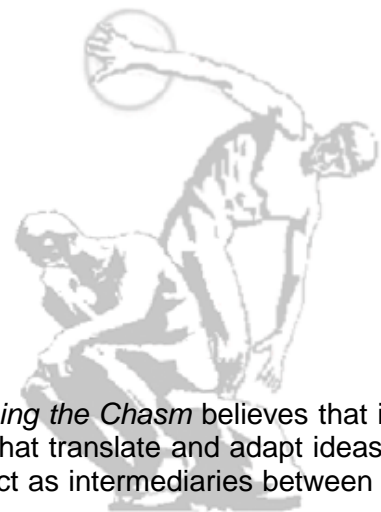
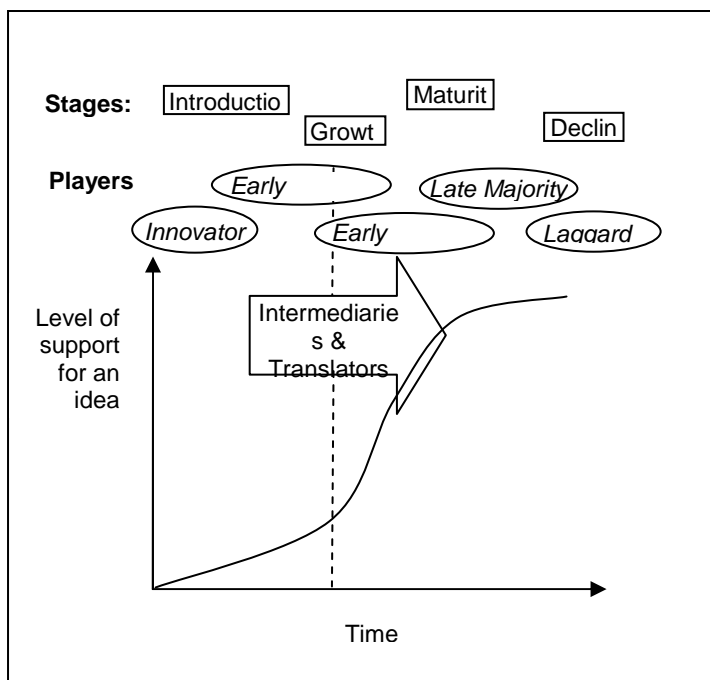


Mapping the Product Life Cycle (Diffusion of Innovation Theory)

To understand the role of the change agent leaders (the Mavens, Connectors and Sales-people) in the process we can draw further insight from what sociologists call Diffusion Theory. Much of the thinking in this was based on understanding how agricultural technological innovations diffused through rural communities (see Everett Rogers (1995) *Diffusion of Innovations*, New York Free Press). The Innovators and Early Adopters are part of the visionaries, the minority, who will experiment and take up an innovation or latch onto a new idea. Usually they are highly entrepreneurial, want large scale change, are prepared to take risks and work within small, flexible business units. The Early Majority, on the other hand, are more risk adverse and may be constrained within large scale complex systems. They want improvement but are pragmatists and will tend towards incremental change. The Late Majority are the sceptical mass who wait to see what other big players have done before taking something on. Finally, the Laggards adopt.

This model of innovation diffusion translates closely to the Product life cycle (see figure below). During the Introduction phase take up is invariably slow; the eccentric Innovators and Early Adopters may act quickly but are only a small part of society. The level of support will often rise to a third of the population before the idea gains significant support among the Early Majority. Once this happens, the number of converts rises exponentially and Growth occurs as it sweeps through the Late Majority until saturation point in the audience or market is approached – Maturity – and take-up slows, with the adoption by the Laggards. Finally, and importantly, Decline almost always occurs, unless the product or ideas is substantially re-invented and re-presented. Ideas and products only have a limited time-span. The rise and fall of products has serious implications for strategy and product mix. These stages, and the products that occupy each stages, are further explored in the Boston box tool.

The product life cycle and role of key people in adoption and spread



Gladwell, building on the work of Geoffrey Moore (1991) in *Crossing the Chasm* believes that it is the connectors, mavens and sales-people (his 'Law of the Few') that translate and adapt ideas so that the more conservative majority can understand them. They act as intermediaries between the new ideas and the wide-spread social change.