Now in its fifth edition, Diffusion of Innovations is a classic work on the spread of new ideas. It has sold 30,000 copies in each edition and will continue to reach a huge academic audience.

In this renowned book, Everett M. Rogers, professor and chair of the Department of Communication & Journalism at the University of New Mexico, explains how new ideas spread via communication channels over time. Such innovations are initially perceived as uncertain and even risky. To overcome this uncertainty, most people seek out others like themselves who have already adopted the new idea. Thus the diffusion process consists of a few individuals who first adopt an innovation, then spread the word among their circle of acquaintances—a process which typically takes months or years. But there are exceptions: use of the Internet in the 1990s, for example, may have spread more rapidly than any other innovation in the history of humankind. Furthermore, the Internet is changing the very nature of diffusion by decreasing the importance of physical distance between people. The fifth edition addresses the spread of the Internet, and how it has transformed the way human beings communicate and adopt new ideas.

In 1850, a German educator named Friedrich Froebel labored to implement his idea of a child's garden, a place where small children were removed from parental influences, to instill a joy of learning through playful activities. Within two decades, his idea had spread throughout Western Europe and the United States. Within a generation, nearly every child on the planet was attending or had attended some form of school with a funny German sounding name... Kindergarten. Was it just a great idea that hit at the exact right moment in time? Is it possible to recreate a lightening strike or must we wait for nature to take her course? As an agricultural extension agent for several large Midwestern universities, Everett Rogers had a front
row seat to one of the most effective organized diffusion efforts in the history of mankind. American agricultural extension offices taught rural farmers about the best available technology and coordinated the efforts of researchers, seed companies and heavy equipment manufacturers. Nearly unanimous adoption of agricultural technology and best practices resulted in American agriculture increasing its productivity by 335% from 1950 to 1970. In his book, Diffusion of Innovations, Rogers examines the science of working to implement new ideas and technologies.

The book is not a how-to guide, but rather an unbiased view of innovations. By examining the unintended consequences of innovations, Rogers cautions leaders to exercise prudence when pushing others to change. Leaders who do not understand the history and culture of the people they are seeking to change, even though well-intended, can instead cause irreparable damage. While his own efforts in agricultural extension were a massive success, he examines unintended consequences such as the loss of the family farm, over production of food and loss of bio-diversity that were not considered when farmers were being pushed to adopt a new way of doing business.

For education leaders who wish to affect change within their organization and broadly throughout their state, nation and world, Rogers' book will provide reference points and terminology to describe critical factors they will encounter when trying to get their new idea adopted. Perhaps the book's opening quote from Machiavelli's The Prince (1513) serves as a warning. "There is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new order of things... Whenever his enemies have the ability to attack the innovator, they do so with the passion of partisans, while the others defend him sluggishly, so that the innovator and his party alike are vulnerable." The natural reaction of many people is to fear change and leaders who consistently advocate for change may become outliers, unable to influence the group.

The book uses well-written narratives to explore diffusion case studies making the material easy for the reader to understand. The stories are engaging and interspersed throughout the book, surrounded by Rogers' discussion of terminology that at times can bog the reader down a bit. Unlike many popular business titles like Collins' Good to Great, Rogers resists the temptation to use inductive reasoning to prove his points. By examining failed innovation implementations, the book points out that sometimes leaders do everything in their power and still do not get the desired result. Studying successful innovation adoptions as well as unsuccessful diffusions demonstrates the complexity of the subject. For example, Rogers' examines great ideas that failed to catch on such as the Dvorak keyboard, which is far superior to the QWERTY keyboard. New typists learn much faster on the Dvorak keyboard and achieve faster and more accurate typing skills. The QWERTY keyboard was developed to accommodate mechanical typewriters whose designers didn't want typists hitting the keys too quickly lest they jam the machine. Obviously we no
longer have this problem... but the QWERTY keyboard remains the English language default keyboard.

Conclusion
While scientific study of this topic is possible, in some respects it may be easier to study how a musician creates a hit song. However, I recommend this book to those aspiring to become leaders in the field of education. Whether the change is external or from within the organization, today's education leaders face a great deal of change and their ability to successfully manage, control and in some cases resist change will determine their success. As Rogers points out in the book, leading change does not necessarily make one popular. Froebel, the inventor of Kindergarten was labeled a socialist and revolutionary by the German government and was banned from his home country.

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