

# **Accelerating the Diffusion of Effective Forest Science Practices**

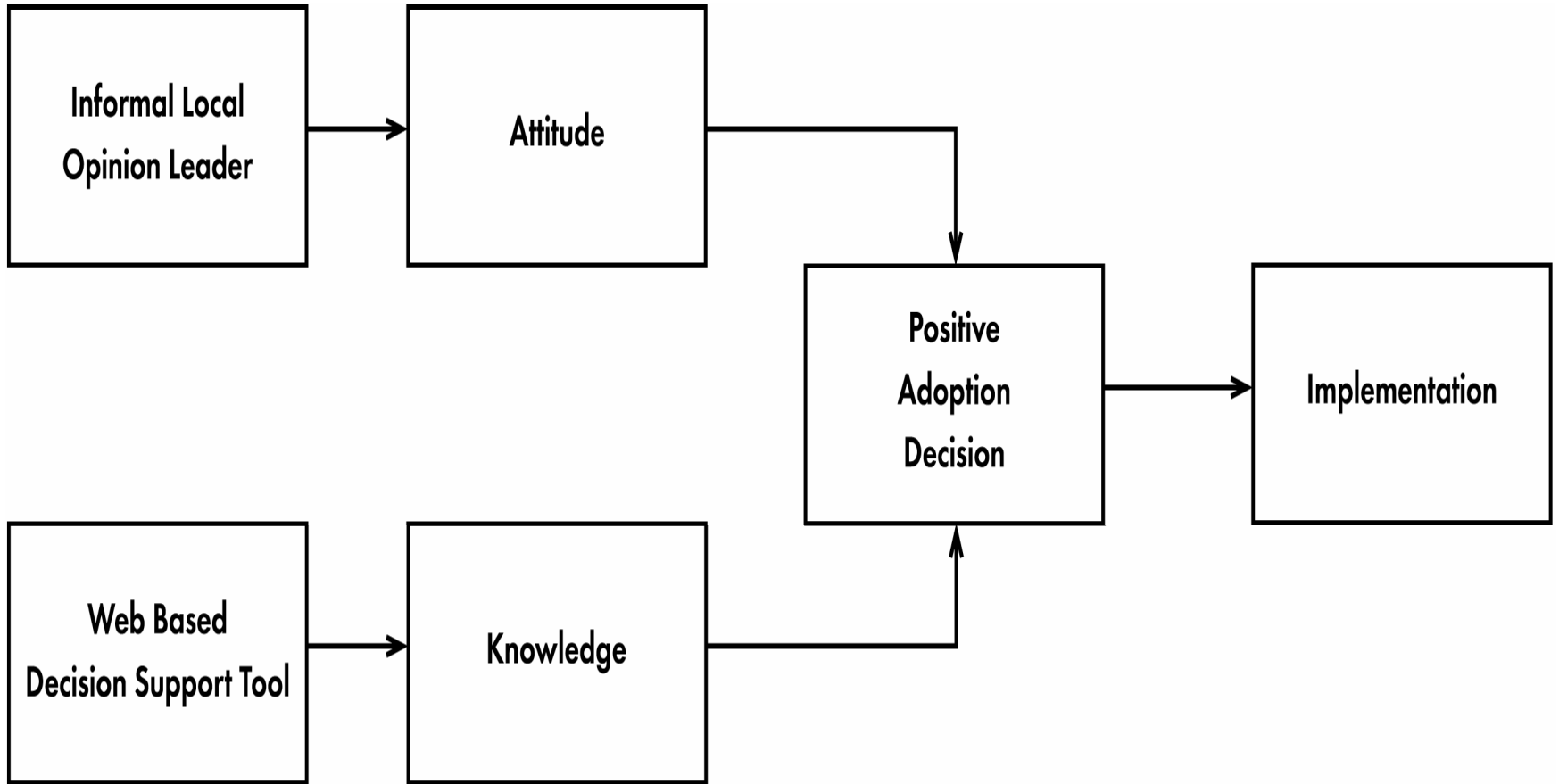
**James W. Dearing  
Ohio University  
and  
Diffusion Associates**

# Overview

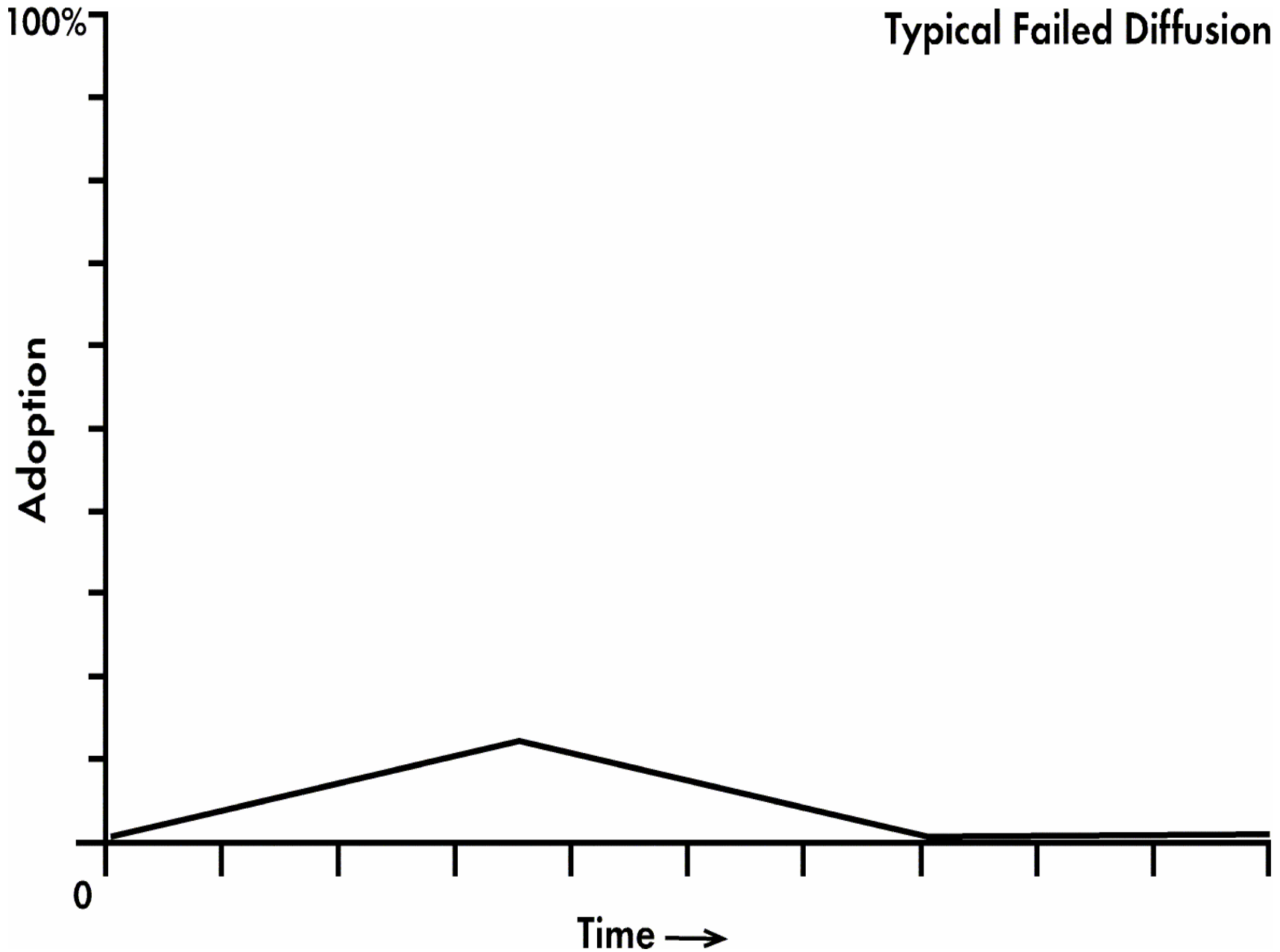
- The diffusion of innovation paradigm
- Why apply diffusion concepts?
- Common application mistakes
- Three diffusion principles:
  - Opinion leadership
  - Innovation attributes
  - Clustering of innovations

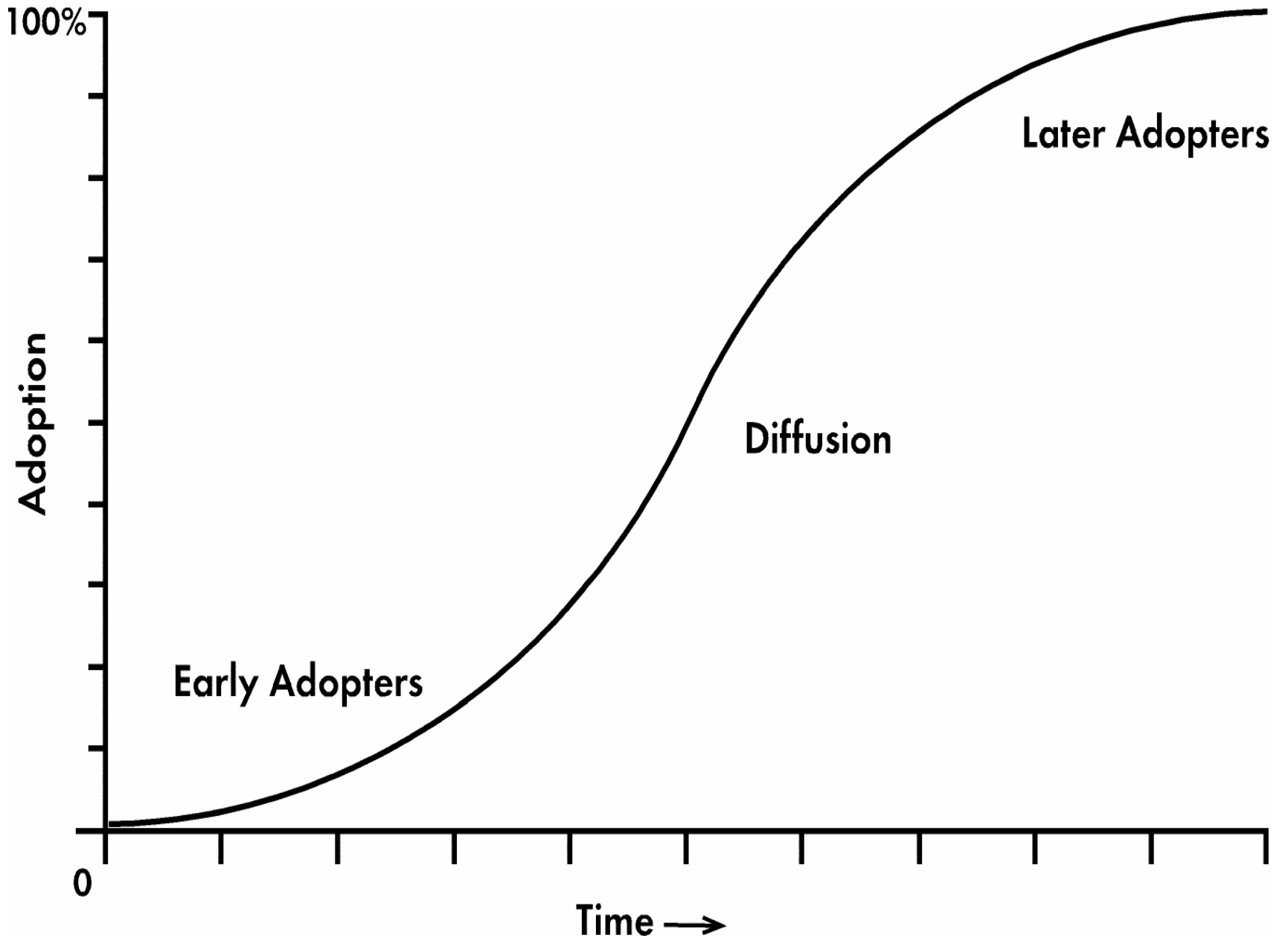
# The Diffusion of Innovations Paradigm

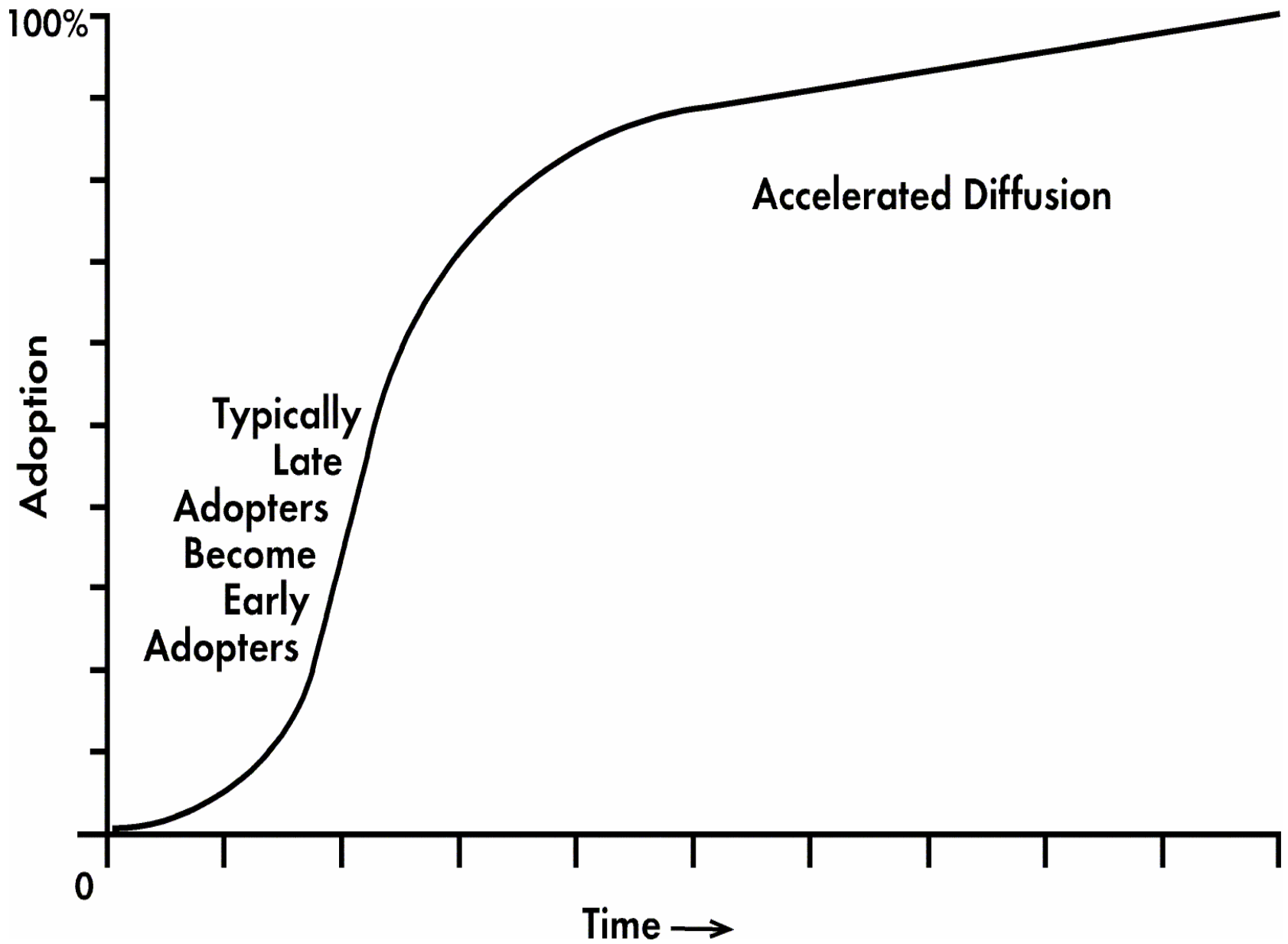
- *Diffusion* is a social process by which an innovation is communicated over time among the members of a social system or sector.
- Diffusion relies on:
  1. The communication of information; and
  2. The communication of influence.



# Typical Failed Diffusion







# Why Apply Diffusion Principles?

- To spread the use of effective practices to more practitioners/policy makers, more rapidly;
- The paradigm is inductively based on thousands of studies, thus valid;
- The paradigm is interdisciplinary and international, thus generalizable;
- The paradigm's special promise.

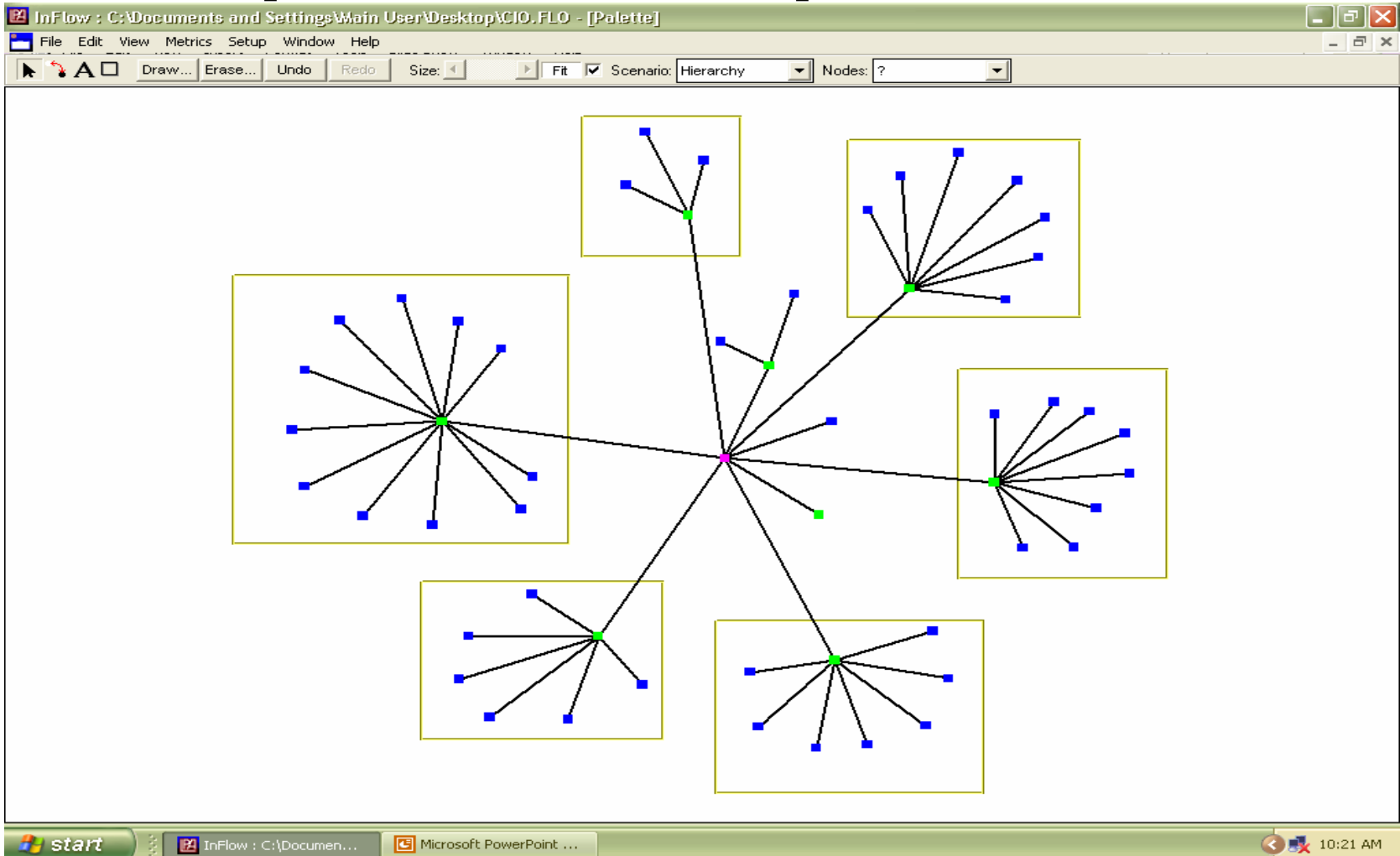
# Common Application Mistakes

- Over-reliance on effectiveness;
- Use of creators as communicators;
- Premature introduction/misuse of demonstration;
- Under-use of formative evaluation to assess the issue context, social structure, and perception;
- Treating diffusion as dissemination or marketing;
- Confusing status with influence;
- Lack of strategic selectivity regarding early adopters;
- Requiring too much of adopters/implementers.

# Principle 1: Opinion Leaders Can Be Identified and Recruited

- Someone most of us look to for advice or example, including what *not* to do.
- Influence is informal, local, and often not concomitant with authority.
- Characteristics: Relatively higher SES & education, near-peers, proximate, social, worldly, accessible, credible, likeable.
- Gatekeepers, caretakers.

# Opinion Leaders as Keys to Adoption and Implementation





# **Principle 2: Codified Attributes Can Be Used Formatively**

- Perceptions of compatibility, relative advantage, trialability, and observability and complexity (pros & cons) contribute to adoption decision.
- Framing the meaning of the innovation through association with desired wants of potential adopters can heighten selective attention.
- Formative evaluation of an innovation via these attributes can heighten and predict potential for adoption.

# **Principle 3: Clustering Innovations Together Benefits Sources and Adopters**

- Complementary clusters take advantage of temporarily lowered thresholds, reduce risk of adoption.
- Alternative clusters provide choice, are less subjectively perceived, promote identification by adopters of a best fit.
- Cluster portrayals (such as through interactive web sites) can be designed to enhance evaluability, fidelity of effect, adaptation.