



**Northern Illinois
University**

**It Doesn't End with Ultra:
Lessons on Promoting Faculty Change**

October 15, 2026

Presenter



Stephanie Richter, Ph.D.
Executive Director of the Center
for Innovative Teaching and
Learning

Northern Illinois University

srichter@niu.edu

Chat Question 1

When did you start and end your Ultra transition?

The Big Questions

Why are some faculty more eager to adopt new approaches and technologies than others?

How do we encourage and support faculty to adopt innovative practices and technologies?

Session Roadmap



Understanding technology
adoption decision-making



Insights into faculty decisions to
adopt technology



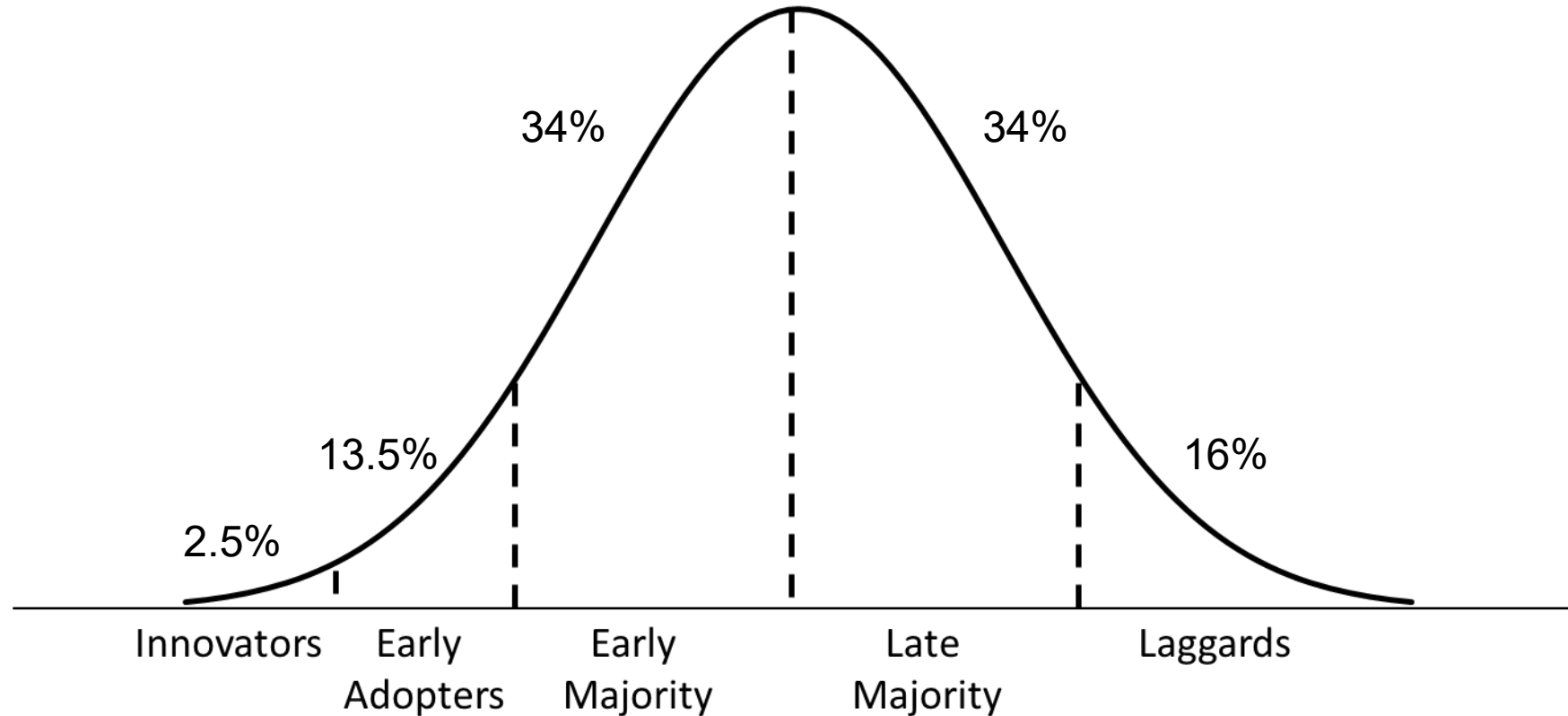
Practical strategies for leading
technology implementations

Technology Adoption Decisions

Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT)

- Innovation-Decision Process
 - Knowledge
 - Persuasion
 - Decision
 - Implementation
 - Confirmation

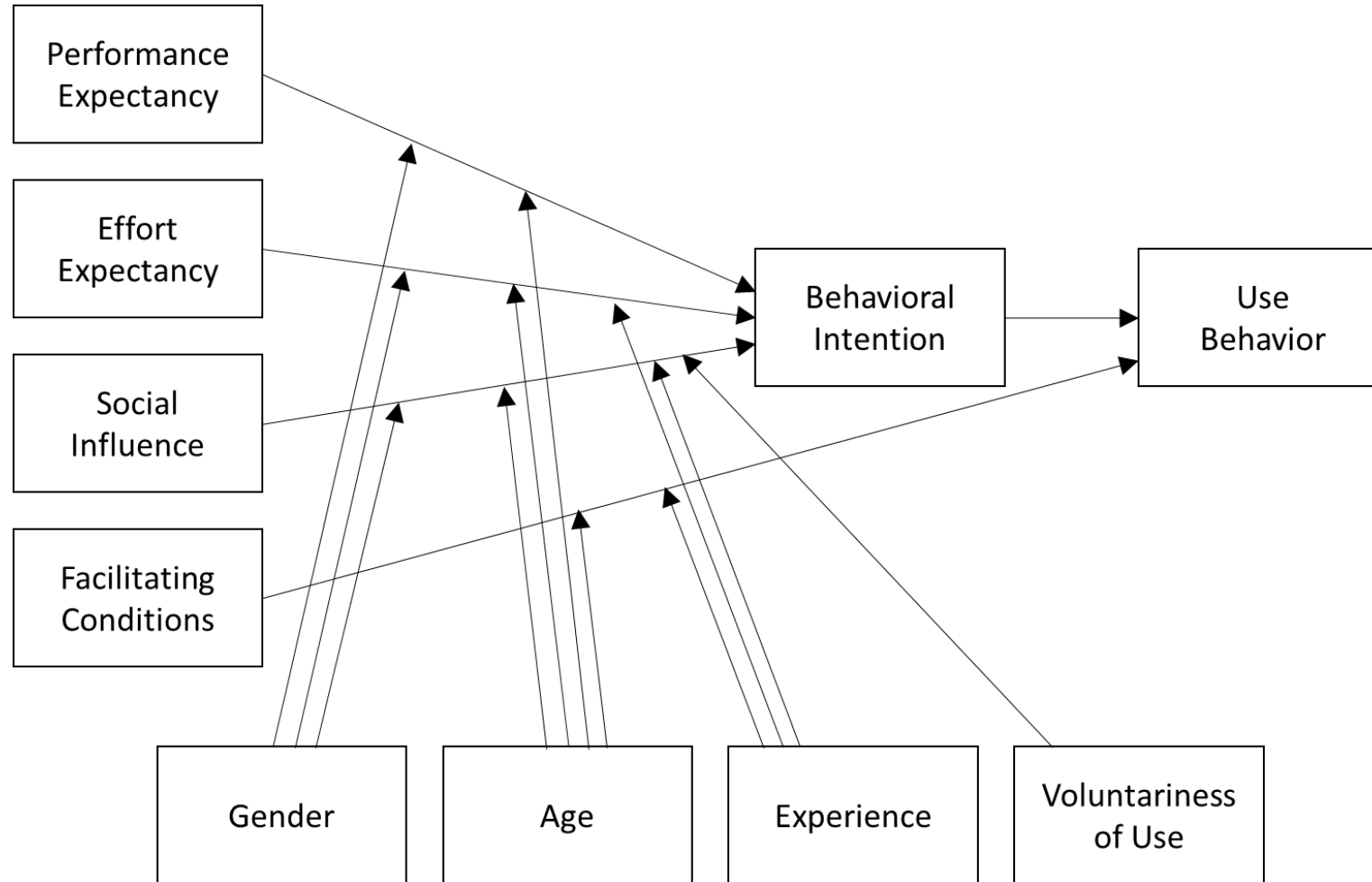
IDT Adopter Categories



Technology Adoption Models

Model	Author(s) and Year	Key Constructs
Theory of Reasoned Action	Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980	- Attitude Toward Behavior - Subjective Norm
Technology Acceptance Model	Davis, 1986	- Perceived Usefulness - Perceived Ease of Use
TAM2 (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000)		GETAMEL (Abdullah & Ward, 2016)
	Expanded TAM (Fathema, 2013)	Intention to Use
Theory of Planned Behavior	Ajzen, 1991	- Attitude Toward Behavior - Subjective Norm - Perceived Behavioral Control
	Decomposed TPB (Taylor & Todd, 1995)	

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)



UTAUT Constructs

Performance Expectancy

The degree to which using a technology improves your job performance

- Usefulness, efficiency, and productivity

Effort Expectancy

The perception of effort required to learn or use the system

- Ease of use, clear interactions

Social Influence

The degree to which others think you should use the system

- People who influence behavior, management/leadership, the organization

Facilitating Conditions

The organizational and technical infrastructure necessary to use the system

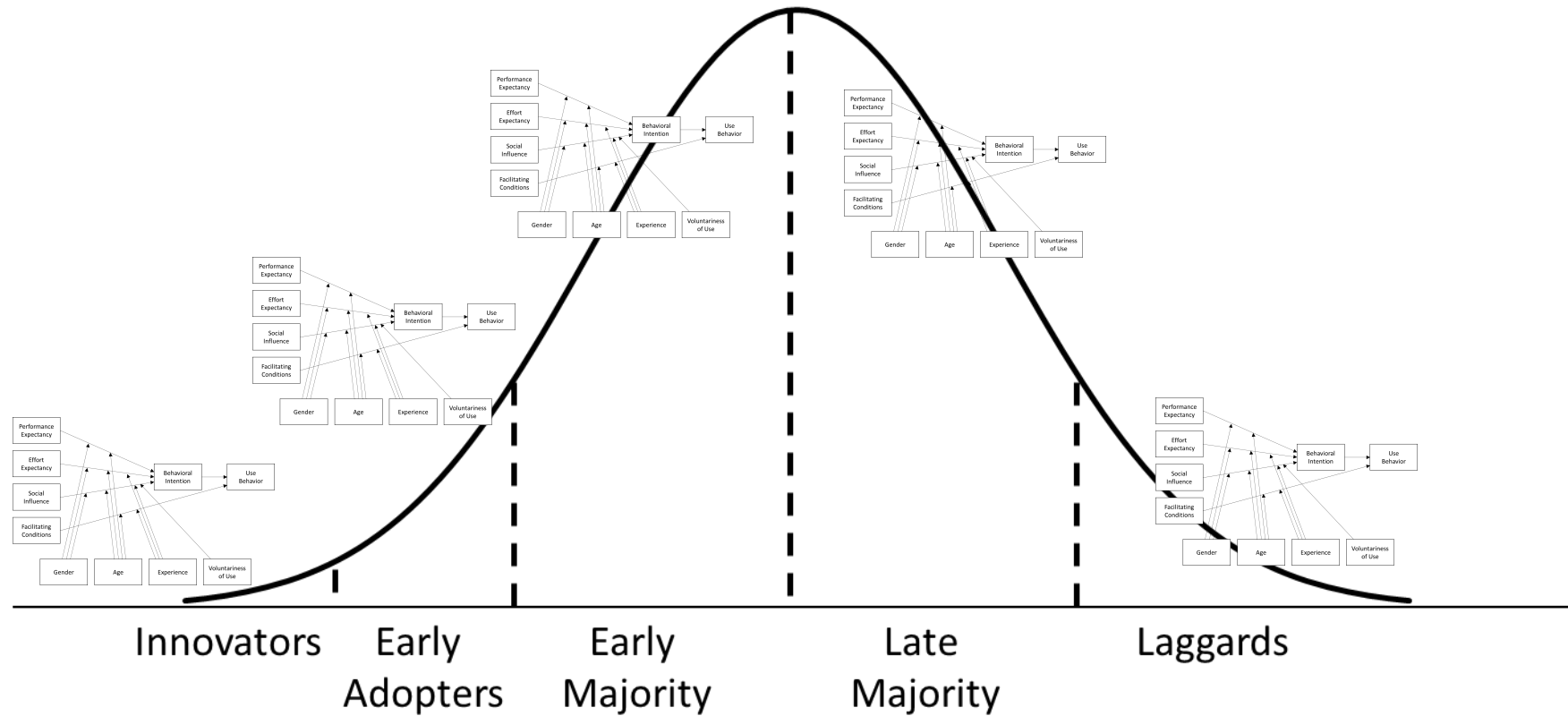
- Resources, knowledge, compatibility, support

Key Takeaway #1

Adoption is not a single decision, and it does not happen at the same time for everyone.

Insights into Faculty Adoption Decisions

What factors influence decision-making at each phase?



Research Design

- Studies faculty adoption of Blackboard Ultra from Original
- Interviewed 28 faculty at 4 institutions
 - All allowed faculty to choose the timing of their adoption
 - All were on different adoption timelines
- Qualitative, comparative case study
 - Construct case studies for each adopter category
 - Compare to UTAUT
 - Contrast across adopter categories

Innovators

Themes

- Improvements in using the technology
- Serving as a role model
- Limited impact on teaching
- Time and effort to adopt as investment

“I felt like it offered just an ease of being able to design and construct learning that would be more interesting and more engaging for students...we need to do this because **it's just going to be better for everybody.**”

“That kind of motivated me to want to demonstrate or model like, ‘we can do this,’ ... **to kind of be a good team player.**”

“**I didn't have any fear.** I was going headfirst into it. I didn't care. I just knew I was going to be better on the other side. **I'd figure it out.**”

Early Adopters

Themes

- Efficiency and improved experience
- Opportunity for redesign and improvement
- Leading their community
- Positive impact of institutional support staff

“**Ultra is cleaner, more straightforward, it’s easier, more efficient** for instructors with drag and drop.”

“Instead of what a hassle or what a pain this is going to be, I adopted a mindset of ‘I wanted to make some of these changes anyway, and so why not take this as **the opportunity to do that and make things better.**’”

“it was pretty much [support] that convinced me to do it...**having the confidence in me** to say you’d be a good person to do this.”

Early Majority

Themes

- Influence of leadership and peers
- Finding the right time for change
- Centering students
- Flexible pathways and support for adoption

“I just wanted to follow the leadership of the school, move forward, and do the right thing and support what they want to integrate.”

“It is what it is, right?” We have to make the change. It's not like I can be like, ‘excuse me, I'd like to just stick with the old version.’”

“I didn't have the time in the spring... I moved my schedule around, and **I made the time because I knew it was important.**”

“I liked that it was more accessible and **seemed to be driven by accessibility for my students.**”

Late Majority

Themes

- Loss of essential functionality and ease of use
- Time and effort as barrier to adoption
- Forced migration, lack of agency, and abandonment
- Mixed messages from peers and support staff

“At the end of the day, we're concerned about the student learning. That's the whole point... **we feel like we're less able to be a good teacher.**”

“I had four different preps this semester. And so **I was just going to tackle one for this semester and see how it goes**, and then hopefully I can transfer some more of my classes in the spring.”

“To be perfectly honest, **the only thing that really impacted my decision was the demand for doing it** and trying to get it under underway.”

Laggards

Themes

- Institutional mandate as the primary driver
- Attachment to established practices and functionality
- Higher effort and inefficiency
- Uncertainty and distrust in the transition

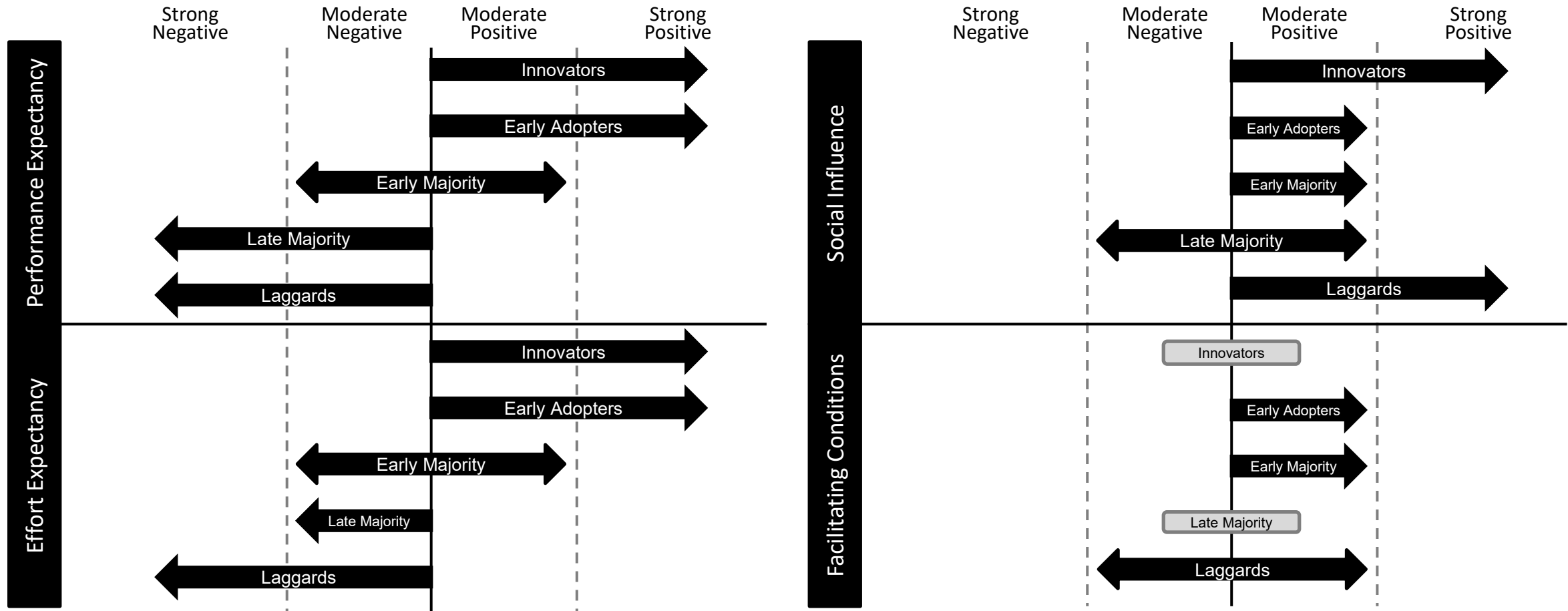
“Honestly, **I would have never done it if they wouldn't have said, it's going away.** You have to change. I wouldn't have.”

“I've been using Blackboard for over 20 years. **Not being able to do things the way I had done things for 20 years was very frustrating.**”

“I **didn't want to take the time** to change.”

“When I switched over the first time, **nobody said there's all these things you can't do.** I had to figure it out on my own. Then that just really put a bitter taste in my mouth because I wasn't prepared for it.”

Influence of Factors for Adopter Categories



A single factor can accelerate or delay adoption

Effort Expectancy



INNOVATOR
I'LL FIGURE IT OUT



LATE ADOPTER
I DON'T HAVE TIME
FOR THIS

Performance Expectancy



INNOVATOR
THE NEW TOOL WILL
BE MORE EFFICIENT



LATE ADOPTER
I WILL BE SLOWER
WHILE I LEARN

Why did each group adopt?

Adopter Category	Primary Motivation
Innovators	Better technology
Early Adopters	Benefit to their work
Early Majority	Practical timing
Late Majority	Mandate approaching
Laggards	Requirement to comply

Workload Calculus

Adoption timing is often based on workload, not mindset

Key Takeaway #2: Faculty need different things at different times

Early adopters want possibilities

A blue downward-pointing arrow with a white outline, indicating a flow from the first box to the second.

Middle adopters want flexibility

A blue downward-pointing arrow with a white outline, indicating a flow from the second box to the third.

Late adopters want reassurance and clear expectations

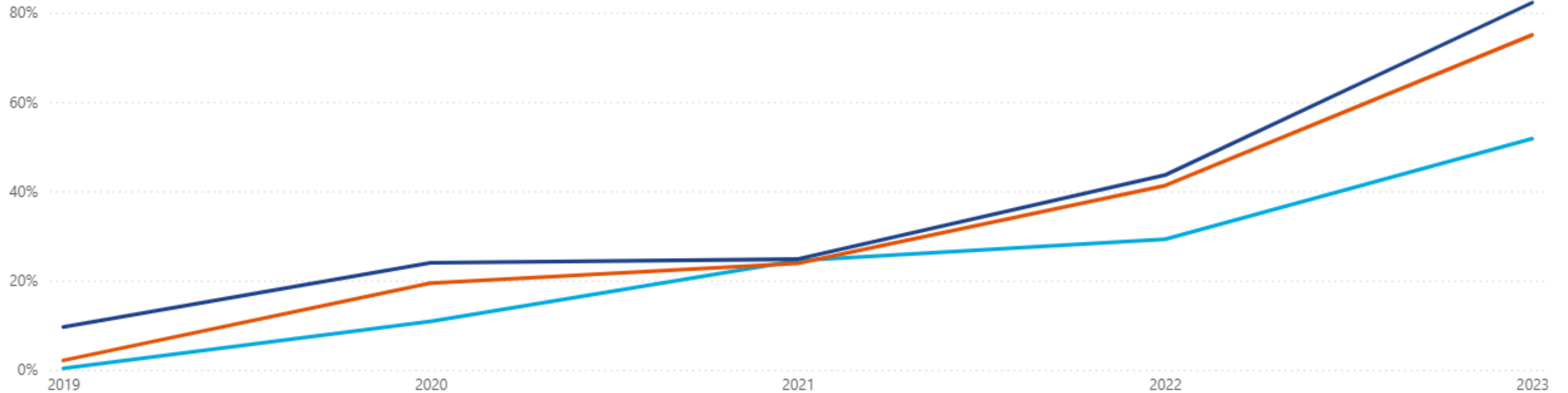
Chat Question 2

Where or when did you hit a barrier in your Ultra transition? How did you move past it?

NIU's Adoption Plateau

Percentage of NIU Faculty/Staff/TAs Using Blackboard Ultra to Teach

Term ● Spring ● Summer ● Fall



Practical Strategies

Follow Up with Reinforcement of Adoption

- Continue to communicate benefits of Ultra
- Reduce cognitive load of new updates by focusing on the most significant changes
- Celebrate champions for innovative new features

Key Takeaway #3: Target communication across the adoption timeline

Innovators – Early Adopters

- Emphasize innovativeness and advantages
- Transparent about deficiencies and acknowledge effort to transition

Early Majority – Late Majority

- Emphasize benefits to students and flexible pathways
- Outline practical advantages of earlier adoption

Late Majority – Laggards

- Increase frequency of communication
- Emphasize institutional commitment and positive peer experiences

Key Takeaway #4: Adapt support over time to meet faculty needs

Innovators – Early Adopters

- Opportunity for experimentation and hands-on learning
- Minimal formal training
- Resources that demonstrate the potential of the replacement technology

Early Majority – Late Majority

- Increased training for faculty with support staff as collaborative partners
- Resources that simplify adoption and support effective practices
- Training and support resources for students

Late Majority - Laggards

- Time and strategies to transition slowly
- Reduce formal training offerings and increase opportunities to connect with peers

Key Takeaways

Adoption is not a single decision, and it does not happen at the same time for everyone.

Faculty need different things at different times.

Target communication across the adoption timeline.

Adapt support over time to meet faculty needs.

Discussion: Looking Ahead

What did you learn from your Ultra transition?

What would you do differently in your next technology adoption initiative?

Thank you!

Selected References

- Abdullah, F., & Ward, R. (2016). Developing a general extended technology acceptance model for e-learning (GETAMEL) by analysing commonly used external factors. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 56, 238–256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.036>
- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Prentice-Hall.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, Theories of Cognitive Self-Regulation*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Davis, F. D. (1986). *A technology acceptance model for empirically testing new end-user information systems: Theory and result* [Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. <http://hdl.handle.net/1721.1/15192>
- Fathema, N. (2013). *Structural equation modeling (SEM) of an extended technology acceptance model (TAM) to report web technology adoption behavior in higher education institutions* [Doctoral Dissertation, Auburn University]. <https://etd.auburn.edu/handle/10415/3889>
- Khechine, H., Lakhal, S., & Ndjambou, P. (2016). A meta-analysis of the UTAUT model: Eleven years later. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 33(2), 138–152. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.1381>
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.
- Taiwo, A. A., & Downe, A. G. (2013). The theory of user acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT): A meta-analytic review of empirical findings. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology*, 49(1), 48–58. <https://www.jatit.org/volumes/Vol49No1/7Vol49No1.pdf>
- Taylor, S., & Todd, P. (1995). Decomposition and crossover effects in the theory of planned behavior: A study of consumer adoption intentions. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 12(2), 137–155. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-8116\(94\)00019-K](https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-8116(94)00019-K)
- Venkatesh, V., & Davis, F. D. (2000). A theoretical extension of the technology acceptance model: Four longitudinal field studies. *Management Science*, 46(2), 186–204. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.46.2.186.11926>
- Venkatesh, V., Morris, M. G., Davis, G. B., & Davis, F. D. (2003). User acceptance of information technology: Toward a unified view. *MIS Quarterly*, 27(3), 425–478. <https://doi.org/10.2307/30036540>