

The AMOEBA

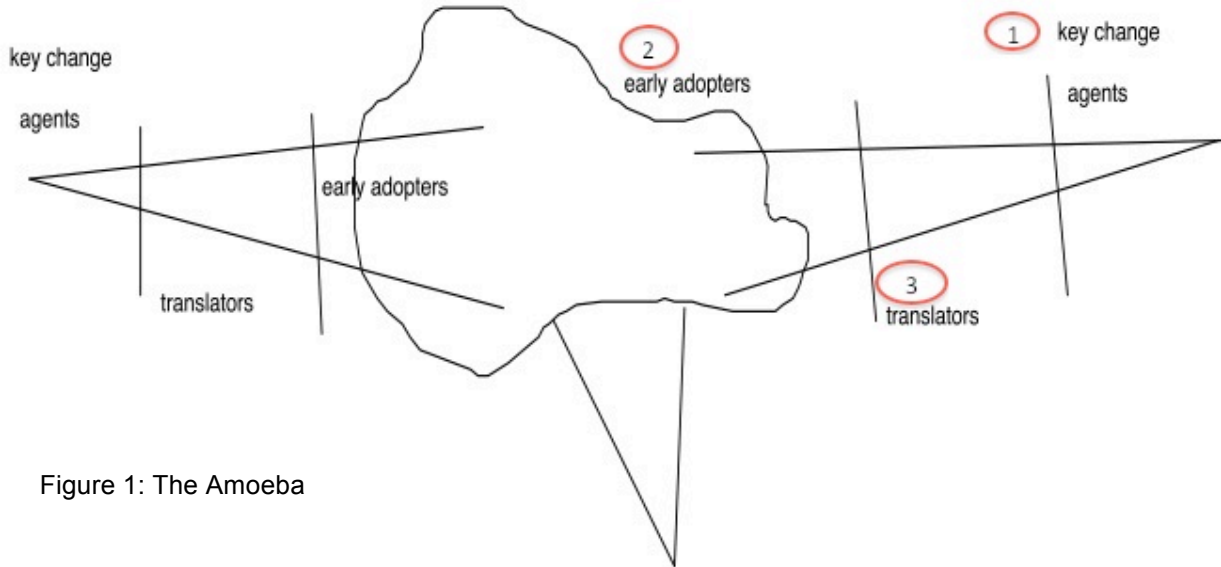


Figure 1: The Amoeba

This model is sometimes referred to as an ‘amoeba’ because it suggests that society (represented by a fluid shape), and any group within it, is constantly changing. At any time, there are efforts for social change in many directions, often diametrically opposed to each other; for example, abolish ‘race-based’ services versus ‘tino rangatiratanga’ (absolute autonomy) for Māori. The successful efforts will be those:

- ▲ With a solid chain from key change agents through to the centre of society
- ▲ In which there are no missing links
- ▲ Where the weakest link is stronger than the weakest in the opposing chain.

The three main parts of the chain are:

1. the key change agents
2. the early adopters
3. the translators

The **key change agents** are few but highly visible because their ideas are considered to be outrageous, completely unreasonable and far too radical by people in the centre. It is a very uncomfortable position to be in, so they need personal and practical support, such as paid employment options.

The **translators** are people who take these outrageous ideas and translate them into more acceptable language, inevitably changing their meaning. These translators can be attached to a dominant organisation, be independent or moving between these positions.

The **early adopters** are the first people to translate the ideas into action. This makes it safer and more acceptable for the next group of adopters to try something.

Each link of the chain passes the idea from the outrageous person on one side to the conventional in the centre. If links are missing, the idea floats around but doesn’t get implemented. As the idea is

passed along in this way it is constantly watered down. This can lead to tensions amongst all the groups, even though they see themselves as being on the same side.

This conflict is similar to that between reformers and radicals. Reformers want immediate, attainable goals and are willing to compromise with the most powerful and use predominantly legitimate means. Radicals are not inclined to compromise because they want nothing to do with the existing elites and believe that anyone who does is undercutting the potential for fundamental change.

Response to conflict between those in different positions.

Do not oppose those on your side of the mid-point. It would be more effective to concentrate on opposing those who are pulling in the opposite direction, that is, those on the other side. The early adopters, translators and reformers, in particular, benefit from the key change agents and radicals because the latter make the former look reasonable by comparison. Also, any efforts in the opposite direction benefits from the division on the other side. A well planned, strategic approach to change involves people at all the positions working to support each other.