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# Adopting Innovation in Product Design

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When passenger lifts were first introduced, people were anxious about the change. At the time, the idea of standing in a small closed box and being lifted to the top of a building was understandably not immediately welcomed.

It is no surprise that distractions were incorporated in the design of the lift to relieve people's anxiety. A mirror, music, placebo buttons and even a lift operator were some of the tactics used to ease people into the new experience. More recently, the introduction of self-driving trains was met with a similar unease.

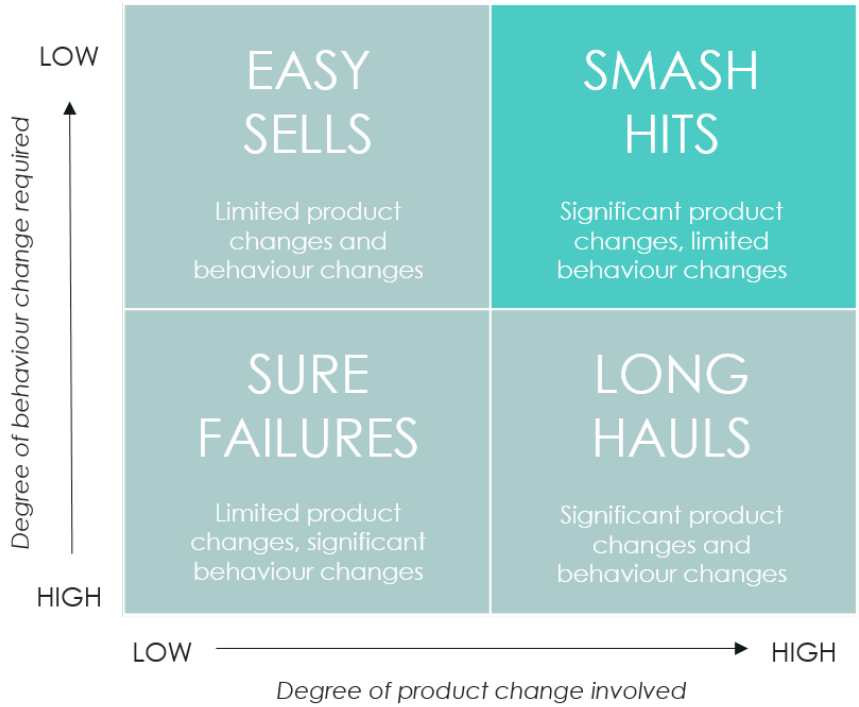
Whether it's the design of a lift, a train, a self-driving car or a portfolio management system, there's one thing you can be certain of.

*People don't like change.*

The uncertainty that product uplifts and innovation can create is not only valid, but is an effect that should be anticipated and planned for. Assessing **the impact of the change on users** will help predict the innovation adoption rate and help you consider the measures to put in place to improve it.

## Degree of behavioural change required

It's critical that products are improved over time to continue to add value for users and meet their evolving demands. When you plan a product innovation, you can evaluate the likelihood of its adoption by looking at the degree of behavioural change required of users together with the degree of product change involved. To increase the rate of adoption, the behavioural change required from users should be minimised. This is what is set out in "The 9x Effect" theory.



The idea it illustrates is that users assess the benefits of adopting new features relative to the cost of giving up existing ones. They attach three times less weight to the new benefits and three times more weight to the losses. They evaluate the new product experience in comparison with the status quo and exaggerate the cost of the loss in their mind. Therefore, what the "9xeffect" suggests is that for users to adopt the new product, it has to be, or be perceived to be, nine times better than the existing one.

Four categories for innovation emerge from this:

- **Easy sells** - These are changes to the product that provide low improvement but also require very little behavioural change. These can be quickly adopted by users.
- **Sure failures** - These are changes that provide low improvement and require a lot of behavioural change. These are ones to avoid.
- **Smash hits** don't require a significant change in the behaviour of users, yet deliver significant benefits. These changes are quickly adopted.
- **Long hauls** add a lot of value but also require significant behavioural change. The adoption timeframe can be quite long and more effort must be spent to ease users into the change.

Assessing the impact on users depends on the level of behavioural change required of them, as well as whether the change impacts the workflows they interact with the most.

## Frequency of interaction with impacted workflows

Any change in the product will have more impact on some user groups than others. Creating what I refer to as a User Matrix will give you visibility of which workflows are most commonly used by each user group and the percentage of users within each group.

| | User group 1 | User group 2 | User group 3 | User group 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **% of users** | 45% | 30% | 15% | 10% |
| **Workflow 1** | High | Medium | High | Medium |
| **Workflow 2** | Low | High | Medium | Low |
| **Workflow 3** | Low | Low | Low | High |
| **Workflow 4** | Low | Low | Low | Low |

The changes made to the product may only alter a subset of user workflows and therefore, predominantly impact the users that interact the most with those. Assessing which workflows are impacted will allow you to focus on the user groups that would be most affected by the change.

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## Lifting your product

When you create a successful product, it becomes familiar to its users and embedded in their daily life. Innovation necessitates making changes. Bigger changes are likely to cause more disruptions to the user's familiarity with the product. Therefore, there will always be some reluctance to adopting innovation.

Increasing the innovation adoption rate is facilitated when you meet both of the following:

1. the benefits of the changes you're introducing substantially improve the existing product; and
2. you've assessed who the changes impact most and how, and mitigated for that.

That being said, even when most people get on board with travelling to the top floor more quickly and with minimal effort, it's inevitable that others will still take the stairs.

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