Article

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Volume 24 (2026), pp. 1-16
American Journal of STEM Education: Issues and Perspectives
eISSN 30.3-1190| Print ISSN: 3069-0072
Star Scholars Press
https://doi.org/10.32674/tn19dq65

Mapping the Technology Acceptance Curve: A New Conceptual Framework for Educators in Times of Rapid Change

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ABSTRACT

This paper probes the theoretical basis of the Kübler-Ross model and the Technological Acceptance Curve model and conjoins the two models to propose the Technology Acceptance Curve Model that maps the technology adoption journey of educators in these rapidly changing times. The fundamental concepts of these models entail different ways to achieve similar goals of adoption, while the former evaluates the emotional journey, the latter a perceptive one. Combining these would enable capturing the entire technology adoption spectrum, thereby including both the emotional journey till technological acceptance and extending it to final adoption. The proposed model can serve as a key framework to understand how successful technological adoption looks beyond functional aspects and includes emotive and perceptive aspects.

Keywords: Technology adoption, educators, Kübler-Ross Change Curve,

INTRODUCTION

As we witness a tremendous boom in technological advances around us, at times, adapting to this fast-changing world becomes quite a challenge that not everyone is overly willing to undertake. With technology evolving more dynamically than ever, the nature of technologies is also becoming increasingly disruptive (Molino et al., 2020). While on the one hand, "people continue to evolve in their level of tolerance and acceptance of technology" (Sotelo & Livingood, 2018), academia, on the other, has time and again extended, adapted, and even repurposed two immensely celebrated theories – the Kübler-Ross Change Curve (KRCC) and Davis's Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to better understand technological acceptance. Both these frameworks have been used concurrently to deduce the journey one undergoes while accepting or adopting any new technology, and there are a couple of studies that have applied both to understand technology acceptance (Sotelo & Livingood, 2018; Dumin, 2025). Sotelo and Livingood (2015) mention that "as obvious as this connection may be, there is little research that has been presented to analyze the human acceptance process" or that of "the technology acceptance experience from an emotional, cognitive perspective".

Granić (2022) notes that "commonly, technology adoption is a term that refers to the acceptance, integration, and embracement of any type of new technology". Furthermore, Granić (2022) mentions that technology acceptance is the "first step of technology adoption". Saghafian et al. (2021) note that while "a number of models and theories have been introduced and used", each of these models "present their findings through different theoretical lenses, and they differ in their area of focus and scope. They point to different and sometimes overlapping and rather general factors of the technology adoption process." Thus, using similar frameworks concurrently does not necessarily capture the entire acceptance-adoption-usage spectrum. This necessitates that a model be developed that encapsulates the entire spectrum and helps to explain both the emotive and behavioral aspects of technology adoption.

Research on technology acceptance in the context of teaching has caught the fancy of many a researcher (Al-Emran et al., 2018). Scherer et al. (2019) highlight the necessity for including technology in education. At the same time, Granić & Marangunić (2019) opine that "the issue of learning technology acceptance or rejection could be essential". In this context, various recent studies have found that a large number of educators are averse to using the latest technologies for teaching (Giray, 2025; Langreo, 2024; Klein, 2024).

Education

Education, especially higher education, has greatly transformed in recent years owing to a number of reasons (Vlachopoulos, 2021). On the other hand, Gumaelius (2024) notes that "digital transformation in today's society is rapid but also unpredictable". Dunning (2019) mentions that various universities are "adopting techniques from the private sector to manage change" and that "institutions have not fully adapted" yet. Given the high degree of volatility that the education sector is witnessing in recent times, it is obvious that survival necessitates adapting to changing times and the adoption of the latest technologies. As put across by Kennerley et al. (2003), the phrase "survival of the fittest" applies to organizations as well. Needless to say, this includes educators and their overall efficacy, especially in these rapidly changing times, largely depending on their ability to integrate technology (Kent & Giles, 2017).

Dhilla (2017) notes that changing over from traditional methods of teaching to those involving technology has added an emotional dimension on the educators' part. Also, Naylor and Nyanjom (2020) have opined that changing the mode of education delivery evokes mixed emotions (both positive and negative) and is often associated with the "rate of change" (Taylor et al., 2022). This was echoed much earlier in Conceição's research (2006), wherein participants narrated their fears, frustration, and insecurities in transitioning to tech-enabled teaching methods. Even recent research resonates with similar findings that educators exhibit reluctance while transitioning to newer methods of teaching (Huang et al., 2022). Various studies over the years have reported a number of different reasons for this, including loss of time, self-efficacy, and control, among others (Palmer, 2007; Geertshuis & Liu, 2022; Taylor, 2022).

Change Management

Kim and Kankanhalli (2009) have noted that the way a person reacts to new technology can vary greatly and is primarily based on the person's evaluation of the "level of change involved (Darban & Polites, 2016). Also, Darban and Polites (2016) opine that for new technologies to be adopted by individuals, they need to "change their allegiance from a familiar incumbent form of a technology to a new version". Bhattacherjee and Park (2014) observe that there is a possibility of short-term resistance owing to a propensity towards maintaining the status quo while failing to change over from an existing to a new technology. Changing teaching practice is difficult (Taylor et al., 2022). AlManei et al. (2018) note that change management is a "behavioral movement" of an entire organization "from one level to another" (Bagga et al., 2023). While change management as a subject area deals in "models and strategies to help employees accept new organizational developments" (Phillips & Klein, 2022), Eze (2019) mentions that "adoption of ICT is a dynamic and continuous action". Thus, in today's dynamic environment,

a more pertinent definition of change management would include "the ever-changing needs of external and internal stakeholders" (Moran & Brightman, 2001).

Change management for individuals necessitates constant adaptation of knowledge (Tsang & Zahra, 2008). Thus, staying abreast of the latest knowledge is of paramount importance (Roling et al., 2023). Schüffler et al. (2020) opine that for successful changes to stick, it is necessary to both learn new things and forget obsolete ones. Thus, unlearning is as important as learning new skills. Also, digital transformation being one of the most significant challenges posed for education in today's times (Voogt et al., 2013, 2018), "the overall culture of teaching and learning" must also change accordingly (Ruloff & Petko, 2025). As for change management, there are several highly successful frameworks in use. Models such as Kotter's 8-Step Change Model (1995), Lewin's Change Management Model (1947), Kübler-Ross Change Curve (1969), or ADKAR (2006) are frequently used by researchers and practitioners alike. However, successful change management often looks beyond the established frameworks, and given the high rate of unintended outcomes from change management initiatives (Boonstra, 2024), despite using some of the most well-known frameworks, calls for taking a relook and figuring out if a new framework combining the existing ones can prove to be more apt for managing change, especially the complete spectrum of technology change.

KRCC

The Kübler-Ross Change Curve (KRCC) is one celebrated framework that has withstood the test of time and remains equally popular to this day as it was when it was first introduced. Over the years, it has expanded its horizon and usage beyond healthcare to culture and social sciences (Thompson, 2012). Researchers have unanimously agreed that "this theory has had a profound and far-reaching influence" (Thompson, 2012; Kelly, 2010; Corr, 2021). Giray (2025) points out that KRCC has "garnered significant recognition as a classic model employed not only in healthcare (Smaldone & Uzzo, 2013) but also in organizational contexts (Zell, 2003)". Giray (2025) notes that the framework has found various applications in organizations, including managing change.

The framework comprises five stages of grief that an individual experiences before the person finally accepts death and dying (Kübler-Ross, 1969). These five stages are discussed below:

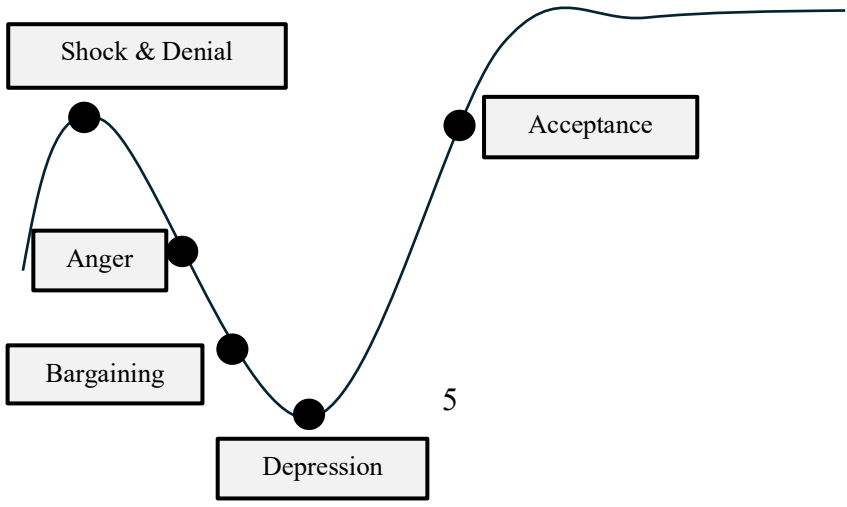
1. **Denial:** the first stage when the news is broken to the individual. For individuals experiencing organizational and technological change, it is difficult for a lot of them to believe that change is imminent, and they prefer to live in denial and keep carrying on with their daily duties as before. Giray (2025) notes that during this phase, educators are prone to resisting acknowledging "the reality of" technological advancements.

2. **Anger:** the second stage wherein the individual experiences strong emotional reactions and may exhibit mercurial behavior. For individuals working in organizations, such behavior is quite common during times of change. Educators, as Giray (2025) notes, "may become visibly infuriated" during this stage.
3. **Bargaining:** the third stage is when individuals finally start acknowledging the news. However, individuals are likely to keep wondering if something can be done to revert to the status quo. For organizational changes, employees, while acknowledging the inevitability of the change, still try to hold on to their current practices to the best extent possible. Educators often tend to seek a middle ground (Giray, 2025).
4. **Depression:** the penultimate stage wherein individuals give way to despair and finally acknowledge the news and that things will never be the same again. In organizations going through change, employees often exhibit low morale, and a sense of loss pervades the environment. Similarly, educators experience "profound sadness and loss as they try to adapt" (Giray, 2025).
5. **Acceptance:** the final stage when an individual finally accepts the truth. For organizations, employees finally start embracing the change, and it is a new beginning for them. Educators, as Giray (2025) notes, finally "come to terms" with the change during this stage.

KRCC, as a model, captures the emotive aspects that an individual experiences, leading to finally accepting reality and change. However, mere acceptance seldom translates to embracing the future state. Thus, it is important for change sponsors, be it organizations or government bodies, to ensure that acceptance of change is further stretched to successful adoption, ideally to the level of internalization, or at least identification, rather than being restricted to mere compliance (Kelman, 1958).

Figure 1

Kübler-Ross Change Curve (1969)

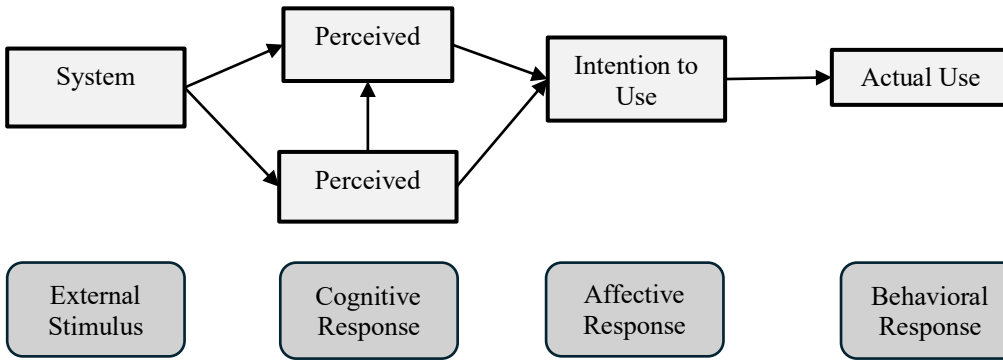


TAM

Among the flurry of theories on how various factors affect "human behavior and usage of new technologies", TAM has emerged as the "leading scientific paradigm" (Al-Emran & Granić, 2021; Marangunić & Granić, 2015), and this "predomination" is witnessed in the field of education as well (Granić & Marangunić, 2019). While the purpose of TAM is to pursue better measures for predicting and explaining use (Davis, 1989), the framework is used as a "powerful tool to represent and understand the determinants of users' IT-acceptance process" (Dwivedi et al., 2012). Davis theorizes two primary constructs, namely perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, to understand the "influence on system use" (1989). The model captures the journey of how these two determinants help develop an attitude towards using a system and culminate in actual system use, as shown in Figure 2

Figure 2

Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)



The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is based on the conceptual framework that "actual usage of the system is a response that can be explained or predicted by user motivation, which, in turn, is directly influenced by an external stimulus consisting of the actual system's features and capabilities" (Marangunić & Granić, 2015). This conceptual framework was then further worked upon, and the TAM model was proposed, wherein Davis (1989) opined that there are three factors that act as determinants to user motivation – perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and attitude toward using (refer to Figure 2). In light of the conceptual framework devised by Davis (1989), TAM stands out as a framework that captures the behavioral aspects of technology adoption. While the model starts with perception, then moves on to show how perceptions influence attitudes, and

culminates in behavior, emotional aspects other than these psychological constructs (i.e., perceptions, attitudes, and behavior) are missing from the model.

The Proposed Model

Quite like the transtheoretical model, which is integrative in nature and "draws together many different types of models, theories and behavior change techniques" (Armitage, 2009), the proposed model integrates two highly discussed and used theories to form a spectrum that covers both the emotional, perceptive, and behavioral aspects of technology adoption. However, before delving deep into the discussion on the proposed framework, a brief discussion on the theoretical foundation of the model would help lend more credibility to the sound academic basis it stands on. While the proposed model stands firmly on two celebrated frameworks – KRCC and TAM, the psychological constructs that underpin these models also require a closer look to understand the journey of the proposed framework.

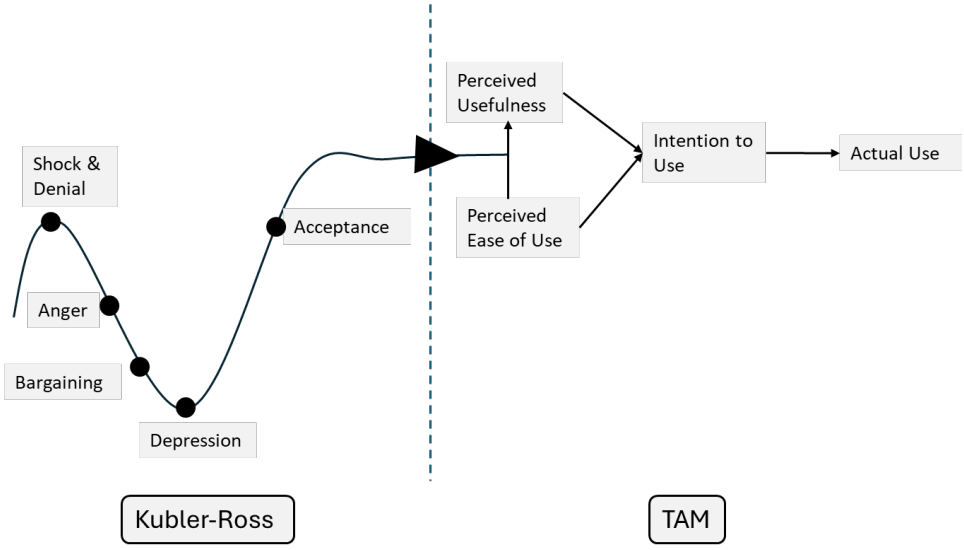
KRCC, on the one hand, deals only in the emotional journey of change and acceptance one goes through. Dennison (2024) opines that emotions are "mental states that our bodies use to govern behavioral reactions to stimuli". He further mentions that emotions are different from feelings and that they often result from emotions (Dennison, 2024). Emotions, on their part, play a significant role in shaping behavior. While researchers have safely assumed that "most or perhaps all psychological processes, and certainly emotion, exist in part to influence behavior", they have also noted that "the primary function of emotion is to cause behavior" (Baumeister, 2007). On the other hand, TAM initiates the model from perceived ease of use and culminates in actual use. Thus, TAM covers the perceptive, attitudinal, and behavioral aspects of adoption. Perception, as opined by Deonna (2006), has two dimensions: "a factual dimension and a perspectival dimension". Attitudes, in comparison, are an internal regulation system that judges before the behavior is performed (Wang, 2007).

Niedenthal and Wood (2019) argue that the "possibility that emotions exert direct and early effects on perceptual processes is important because people act quickly and confidently based on what they believe to be their raw sensory experience of the world". Moreover, Zadra and Clore (2011), opine that emotions often affect perceptions. Others, such as Satpute (2016), have opined that "how people think about their emotions changes their perceptions". Thus, given the absence of emotive aspects, the model focuses only on how perceptions may lead to forming positive attitudes, which in turn result in actual usage. Though extended TAM models such as TAM2 did take emotions into consideration (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000), a precondition in such models is the individual's eagerness to adapt to new technologies, and there is no apparent resistance to using new technologies. Thus, it can be argued that emotions impact perceptions, which, in turn, influence attitudes and behavior, as postulated by Davis in TAM.

These pieces of information, when collated, give rise to a spectrum that includes all relevant psychological constructs – emotions, perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. The spectrum thus formed enmeshes the entire journey that an individual goes through – right from coming to know about the change that is imminent and inevitable, to accepting it, and starting to work on it, to finally be able to use the technology, as exhibited in the proposed model below in figure 3

Figure 3

Proposed Kübler-Ross Davis Model



Considering that rapid technological change may come as a shock to many, coming to terms with the new reality first will allow individuals to start looking at the use cases of the new technology, its benefits, and functionalities, before they form an intent towards using it and finally use it. Thus, the proposed spectrum covers the entire gamut of events that one undergoes, right from when the news is broken to the individual about the new technology and being mandated to use it (the future state), to finally start using it. As for educators grappling with having to constantly evolve depending on technological changes in the education system, owing to various factors, this model reveals the entire chain of events that one goes through. While it is understood that technology is a great enabler, a large section of educators relies less on enabling paraphernalia and banks more on traditional ways to deliver education. Thus, when prompted by macroenvironmental events such as Covid-19 or the emergence of AI, it is less likely that they will start looking at the usefulness or functionalities of new

technologies straightaway. It is rather highly plausible that a lot of them would take time to process the advent of such radically new technologies, and only after accepting that there is no moving back to their old ways, will they start examining the perceptive aspects of the technology.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study proposes a new framework to capture the entire gamut of psychological processes that individuals undergo while accepting and adopting new technologies. While the current study focuses on educators, the model can be applied to other professions as well. As a prefatory step, this study sifts through literature and available models to come up with a framework that better captures the entire spectrum. However, future research on samples will bolster the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

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