

I spent months collecting diffusion curves for different activities and found there was no clear correlation between a percentage of adoption and when something evolved. I was unable to make statements such as “when 10% of the population have this it’ll become a product”. Hence, I looked at the time axis. Surely, if it wasn’t adoption then we must be able to measure this evolution over time? I took the diffusion curves and hypothesised that we could measure over time when the transition between stages would occur e.g. the first five years would be genesis and in the next three years we would see custom built examples. However, when looking at the data then it turned out not to be constant and comparisons over time demonstrate a wide variety of different timescales for how things evolved. I was stuck. I couldn’t seem to use time or adoption to measure evolution.

To make matters worse I was in the middle of a very visible evolution of computing infrastructure from products (e.g. servers) to more utility forms (cloud). The very companies that could be described as early adopters of computing when it was a product were often the laggards in this shift to a utility world. The act of computing was the same though it was now provided in a more evolved form and the social groups leading this change were different from the past. The simplistic association of diffusion and evolution was clearly failing to explain what was happening right in front of me.

Even today, in 2016, some nine years later then I still see “business gurus” take diffusion curves and start slapping on evolution characteristics. Here it’s “innovation” and here it’s a “commodity”. I