



Men, Machines and Modern Times

Elting Elmore Morison

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People have had trouble adapting to new technology ever since (perhaps) the inventor of the wheel had to explain that a wheelbarrow could carry more than a person. This little book by a celebrated MIT professor -- the fiftieth anniversary edition of a classic -- describes how we learn to live and work with innovation. Elting Morison considers, among other things, the three stages of users' resistance to change: ignoring it; rational rebuttal; and name-calling. He recounts the illustrative anecdote of the World War II artillerymen who stood still to hold the horses despite the fact that the guns were now hitched to trucks -- reassuring those of us who have trouble with a new interface or a software upgrade that we are not the first to encounter such problems.

Morison offers an entertaining series of historical accounts to highlight his major theme: the nature of technological change and society's reaction to that change. He begins with resistance to innovation in the U.S. Navy following an officer's discovery of a more accurate way to fire a gun at sea; continues with thoughts about bureaucracy, paperwork, and card files; touches on rumble seats, the ghost in *Hamlet*, and computers; tells the strange history of a new model steamship in the 1860s; and describes the development of the Bessemer steel process. Each instance teaches a lesson about the more profound and current problem of how to organize and manage systems of ideas, energies, and machinery so that it will conform to the human dimension.

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