

Internalizing Change: What the Research Says

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The Research Foundation

Harvard University in late 1950's and 1960's carried out a combined research project across three schools—education, sociology, and psychology, with the intent of understanding what makes successful change possible, without recurrence of or reverting to old patterns. Pattern changes that were studied were alcoholism, smoking, regular exercise, delinquency and recidivism in criminal activity, language learning, and immigrant socialization. They looked at individuals working independently and at persons working in collective programs to support change (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous).

Summary of findings:

The Harvard research indicates that change seems to be most effective when some fundamentals elements are present, no matter the nature of change that is being undertaken.

Fundamental Elements for Successful Change:

- *Intensity*- Those changes that were sustainable in terms of permanent patterns changes were characterized by people having invested 10%-20% average of waking time immersed in shifting to the new pattern. This means that the changers were actively thinking about and learning new processes related to the changes they were seeking to make, while the remainder of their time was spend in using old patterns on routine tasks. In other words they did not try to change everything every minute. In fact the study seems to indicate limited benefit for focusing on the changed patterns above 20% of an individual's or group's time. Spacing was needed in terms of time to integrate and experience the difference in results and outcomes. There was benefit in seeking to elaborate the options and approaches available for the new patterns and in trying out new skills on different situations, rather than working on the change always on the same routines.
 - *Frequency*— Working for 10-20% of each day is more ideal than saving up and only working intensively a few days a years as frequently happens after a new resolution. Daily is ideal but a minimum is weekly produced the best change of success.
 - *Duration*—Patterns we have built over a lifetime are very tenacious and cause a great deal of inertia to restrain us as we move toward

change. For most areas, “lasting” change is defined as 5-7 years. This seemed to be the amount of time that was required for internalization and full integration of the complex new patterns where non-reversion to old patterns was very atypical.

- *Context*—The environment of change is critical also. The environment necessary for change is characterized by the study as one that nourishes experiences of change through the impetus that comes from shocks or stimulating sources outside the system introduced into the systems in order to break up existing patterns and initiate the repatterning of systems. The external sources must be ones with extensive previous experience on the path of change themselves, and therefore able to recognize, confront, and reframe the patterns for others. (e.g. Alcoholics’ Anonymous, and Weight Watchers meetings). These were most effective in settings where self-discipline was developed through interaction with a teacher or guide who was themselves disciplined in following a set of rituals aimed at change.
- *Mentor*: or a person who has been along the path before you and been successful greatly improved the chance of long-term pattern change. The mentor seemed to serve several purposes. First and foremost they encouraged people to not give up when the going

got rough. Second, based on their own experience, they could offer practical and meaningful practices and tools to deal with the rough spots. They tended to push a bit and place demands that raised expectations while never allowing excuses to supplant determination. And finally, they insisted on celebrating even small successes and doing so regularly.

- *Whole person approach*: the plans that succeeded most often included three elements consistently. The approach worked with
 1. the intellect or functional elements of us as humans by providing knowledge tools and behavioral guidelines;
 2. the emotional or being level through providing visioning processes, character development and personal reflection for self-discover
 3. the will or motivation by raising the level of aspiration and expectation along with the development of internal discipline

The change process itself, researchers found, must incorporate these three dimensions of experience— physical and functional patterns (some skill development or activity patterns to perform), emotional and state of being patterns, (some processes from reflection and self-management) and motivation

or thought patterns (development of will and intentionality) – for the change to be achieved. Working on any one or even two is not sufficient for lasting effect. Without intention and without a designed effort toward change of patterns, people tend to reify and revert to existing patterns as the “right” way. Development of will through process of reflection were found to be highly effective. Familiarity was found to be the greatest deceiver by causing one to think that what their own experience is the best or only way. Other studies of change have indicated that integration of learning in a natural work or home setting, not separate out from life and work is imperative.

The change to occur more quickly and more permanently if there is a group or partnership in the repatterning process. Externally developed reward and incentive systems (those developed by others for reinforcing someone else’s behavior) seemed to have very little effect. The most effective incentives were self-developed and self-administered programs of reinforcement within a guided program. Most effective were those that experienced or found a higher value purpose, objective, or order as a source of motivation or inspiration.

Most of these elements can be seen as common sense in regard to change if we look at our own attempts at personal change when trying to institute a New Year’s Resolution, a new diet or exercise regime or other significant change requiring a change in patterns that has become automatic to us.

InterOctave's Comprehensive and Integrated approach:

Since one of our consulting team, James V. Clark, was a faculty member in the school of Psychology at Harvard at the time of the study and was one of the primary leaders of the research work into change, InterOctave have been utilizing these findings in an integrated and comprehensive way for over 25 years. Over the years we have gained understanding of how to work with these principles and how to get the most out of every effort undertaken. We have learned to stretch and modify to some degree to make them workable in industrial and organization settings. That is why any effort where we have been involved with the process for about five years has sustained itself and not reverted to or adhered tenaciously to, old patterns. Understanding the true nature of change is important to contemplating the proposal we will make.

We have found that change occurs in industrial settings with people as long as we have contact for at least eight cycle of connection in one year but with more depth when it is monthly. We have never agreed to less than eight since we know that the lapse of time that is any greater makes the effort impotent and it is like beginning over each time and therefore an unproductive use of resources. In cultures where a great deal of inertia exists because the history of the people or the patterns of industrialization, this is the bare minimum and is somewhat risky

even then. In the case of any English factory, inertia is very high, only exceeded by the American culture of the United States, and perhaps the French culture which are further fostered by national chauvinism in both cases. It will be a great deal more difficult than in South Africa or in Latin countries.