

Chapter 2

Areas of Change

Important intentional changes are particularly common in four areas: (1) job, career, and training; (2) human relationships, emotions, and self-perception; (3) enjoyable activities; and (4) residence location. These four areas account for 75% of all intentional changes.

This picture emerged from interviews with 150 American, British, and Canadian men and women. Details regarding the samples are given in the preface. These interviews used an intensive probing approach and leisurely dialogue to elicit the person's largest, most important intentional change during the preceding two years. The interviewer allowed plenty of time for the person to recall various intentional changes from the past two years and to choose the largest one. The questions, diagram, and probe sheet used to enhance recall are reproduced in the Appendix. With or without using those aids, you might benefit at this stage from recalling your own largest intentional change during the past two years.

David Blackwell and I worked at categorizing the particular changes into several areas or clusters. At first we worked quite independently. Each of us wrote the particular changes on slips of paper, and then moved these around on our respective dining room tables until some clusters emerged that were reasonably clear-cut. We then compared our lists, which turned out to be remarkably

similar, and moved toward a list containing nine areas of change.

Shorthand labels for the nine areas are given in table 1, and fuller descriptions are provided in this chapter and by Blackwell (1981). Table 1 shows the percentage of changes that falls into each area.

Career, Job, and Training

One-third of our interviewees chose a change related to their job or career as their largest and most important change during the previous two years. Within this broad area of change, several clusters are evident. The most common job-related change of all was to move from one job to another. A 28-year-old flight instructor, hoping eventually to be a pilot for a major airline, obtained a job as a copilot. As often happens with a job change, he had to move to another state for this promotion. A man in his late thirties left his job with a public transit system to become an independent long-distance truck driver. The interviewer commented that "this man's passion for trucking was evident when I arrived on Sunday evening: instead of watching the season's biggest football game on TV

Areas of Change

<u>Area</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Career, job, and training	33
Human relationships, emotions, and self-perception	21
Enjoyable activities	11
Residence location	10
Maintenance of home and finances	7
Physical health	7
Volunteer helping activities	3
Religion	3
Basic competence (in reading, goal-setting, driving, etc.)	3

Note: Each figure indicates the percentage of adults whose largest, most important intentional change in the past two years falls primarily within the given area. N=144.

Table 1

he was reading trucking magazines, and he'd traveled more than 1300 miles on the road during the previous 48 hours!" A woman became the successful owner-manager of an Oriental restaurant. She talked at length about her first crisis of losing the head cook and her trip to New York City (her first trip there) to search for another cook. "Everybody thought I was crazy, going alone and all." A lithographer moved to a smaller company with a more personal atmosphere where he felt more appreciated and had greater variety in his work. We also interviewed a few people who had moved into paid employment after a few years without paid employment, and a few who greatly increased or decreased the amount of time spent at the job.

Especially when jobs are scarce, it is common for a person to shift responsibilities or projects within the same position. Only the activities change, not the title and usually not the salary. One government employee in Vancouver, for instance, managed to hurdle all the red tape required for a major shift in his responsibilities.

A few interviewees who operated their own small businesses made significant changes within them. Some changed their product line or office location. One had his sons take over more and more responsibility for the operation of the business. An Ontario farmer changed to corn as his major crop because it seemed safer for the long-term future for himself and his sons. One person developed a new way of making musical instruments, and another wrote and marketed a series of books about antiques.

For several interviewees, the largest change was a major effort to become more competent at certain job responsibilities. One young woman enrolled in a two-year graduate program in social work as preparation for employment. A car mechanic, already competent at repairing medium and large cars, taught himself about small-car engines. Predicting that microcomputer technology would be increasingly important in his field during the next ten years, a man became expert in this area by taking courses.

Human Relationships, Emotions, and Self-Perception

We saw in table 1 that 21% of all intentional changes were in the area of human relationships, emotions, and self-perception. We turn first to changes in particular relationships and then move on to more general changes.

Many persons reported changes in their closest existing human relationships. They changed how they were relating to a parent,

spouse, or child. An 83-year-old man stopped handing over large sums of money whenever his 56-year-old son needed it. Other parents reduced their efforts to influence their children as the children reached their late teens, or changed their child-raising approach with younger children. Some men became more involved with their families and decreased their time at other activities. People improved their primary relationship through developing their acceptance of their own feelings, through changing their sexual behavior, through decreasing sex-role stereotypes, and so on. In a related study, a wide range of intentional changes to improve one's marriage relationship has been found by Margaret Brillinger in a doctoral dissertation in progress at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. The most common changes in her study were communications (self-disclosure, listening, asking), attitudes and expectations toward self and partner, scheduling of time together, and entrance into counseling or a group learning experience.

Another kind of change involves adding someone to one's household or to a central place in one's life. People decide to have a particular person as best friend, for instance, or to begin a new primary relationship, or to live together or be married, or to have or adopt a child.

The opposite sort of change is to arrange for someone to leave one's household, or to greatly decrease a significant relationship. Separation and divorce are common examples. Because her 92-year-old father was becoming too great a drain while living with her, one interviewee arranged for him to move into a nursing home. She reported her benefits as "happier husband, happier me, relief, less stress, more time."

Rather than changing some particular relationship, many persons set out to change in more general ways within the area of human relationships, emotions, and self-perception. Some gained self-awareness and self-insight, and some gained greater self-esteem, self-confidence, or self-acceptance. People also reported becoming more assertive, more willing to follow their own interests and needs, more willing to speak out in groups and take the initiative, more liberated from attitudes and behavior that are sex-role stereotyped. In order to achieve changes in this general area, several interviewees chose a powerful ongoing method, such as individual psychotherapy or a Gestalt group.

Intentional changes in the area of human relationships, emotions, and self-perception have been particularly salient since 1965 or so.

Even 130 years ago, however, this area of change was recognized and discussed. For instance, in a book (Grey and Shirreff, 1851) outlining how women can change and learn and educate themselves, a section of more than six pages is devoted to developing self-insight and self-knowledge.

It is interesting that many of the changes in this area focused on one particular relationship, or one fairly specific goal or problem. In contrast, many psychotherapists and human growth groups focus on much more general and comprehensive sorts of changes, such as broad-gauge personality change. Strupp and others (1977, p. 96) have pointed out that "most mental health professionals tend to view an individual's functioning within the framework of some theory of personality structure": as a result, their views and diagnoses do not always fit with the individual's own assessment and with the opinion of society.

Enjoyable Activities

Several interviewees told of adding, expanding, or modifying a specific enjoyable activity, or increasing their involvement in such an activity. These activities included social activities, a new circle of friends, sports, hobbies, crafts, art, theater, music, travel, hiking, cross-country skiing, sailing, traveling in a houseboat, and other recreational activities.

A prosperous 72-year-old farmer who had never before traveled outside the state of Vermont began taking vacation trips to major cities such as Washington and Quebec. On one of these trips he experienced his first flight on an airplane. On the trip to Washington, D.C., "I saw more than most people do who live right there. The traffic made me nervous, though, and the people and the fast pace. I was always worrying we'd get lost, but Mrs. said there was no reason to worry because we could always get a taxi to take us back to the hotel. I'm more interested in the news now—enjoy seeing famous buildings in the news from Washington."

Some major learning efforts fit better in one of the other areas of change, such as job or maintenance, but learning about something for interest or enjoyment fits best in the present area. A resident of an old British town, for instance, recently began spending a great deal of time studying local history and architecture because of fascination and enjoyment.

For two interviewees, the largest intentional change was cutting back on a particular enjoyable activity. A 75-year-old man reduced

the amount of time spent at his hobby, which was the development of an extensive collection of wrenches bought at farm auctions. A 69-year-old man had been bowling and curling with the same group for 30 years. He quit that team so that he was free to play on different teams as he chose.

Residence Location

A move from one home to another was the largest, most important change for 10% of the people we interviewed. One young woman moved from an apartment to her first house. Several moved from a bustling city to a rural area.

In addition to the new physical surroundings and neighborhood, a change in residence can also involve a change in one's living arrangements. One might be sharing space with new people, for example, or be living alone for the first time. One person moved from a house with relatives to a bachelor apartment, another from her own apartment to her daughter's home, and one woman moved into a nursing home that she chose herself.

Sometimes the main change is to live apart from someone. One woman moved in order to be away from her adult sons because they were often visited by her estranged husband.

Other interviewees moved from one home to another and yet did not select that as their largest change. Moving from one apartment to another nearby, for instance, can be a fairly small change. Moving to a new job can require moving to a new city as a subsidiary change.

Maintenance of Home and Finances

Sometimes one's largest intentional change occurs within the area of maintaining a suitable home, car, and pattern of personal finances. Common examples are building a patio or making some other improvement to one's home, buying furniture or equipment for the home, and buying a car.

An American couple, for example, completely winterized their home during the past two years with new windows, insulation, and a new roof: the house was a 100-year-old horse barn that the couple are gradually turning into a lovely rustic home. A British couple spent 18 months in a trailer on a rural plot of land they had bought. The land contained a derelict cottage. They renovated this cottage enough to move into it in December, even though the cottage did

not yet have water or electricity. One man selected his newly acquired skill in woodworking as his most important change.

These days most of us can identify with the 44-year-old homemaker in Iowa whose change was "living more economically and making better choices in purchasing." She achieved this change through listening to consumer programs on television and radio, and through reading. Through the support of a peer self-help group for people who had become deeply in debt, one man threw away his credit cards and shifted to using only cash. He knew he had succeeded when he made it through the next Christmas season with absolutely no debts.

Physical Health

Many intentional changes in the area of physical health are dramatic or at least clearly discernible. Several interviewees quit smoking, one stopped drinking with the help of an Alcoholics Anonymous group, and several became physically fit (and often simultaneously lost weight) through an exercise program. A woman with arthritis of the spine changed from her long-standing doctor to one with a different treatment approach.

The diversity of factors leading to a decision to change is well illustrated by one of the people who quit smoking. He had smoked for sixteen years and had finally quit two years before the interview. Here are some of the events and factors that he mentioned as leading up to his decision: "I read about the danger of lung cancer though I did not search specifically for this sort of reading material; I saw a TV program on lung cancer; my wife pointed out that I had started coughing; when I went out in the cold, I, too, noticed that my coughing was a problem; smoking is a dirty habit and produces nicotine fingers; it makes me fidgety and agitated; smoking contributes to my poor self-image."

A British woman's health change was seen by the interviewer as part of a broader reorientation. The specific change was to "a wholefood diet" that emphasizes organically grown vegetables, free-range farm products, and unprocessed food. The interviewer described this woman as vigorous, energetic, well-liked, approachable, personable, and able to cheerfully complete a range of commitments. His view is that "the specified intentional change could be regarded as the most visible index of a broader cultural reorientation: making the personal commitment to a wholefood diet reflected a wider involvement in ecological matters and volunteer

activity with the local wholefoods-ecological group as a valuable publicist and fundraiser." That involvement led, in turn, to her becoming a candidate in the local council election as the representative of a newly formed conservation-conscious party. She also took courses in politics, sociology, local history, and ecology.

Volunteer Helping Activities

Sometimes one's major change occurs in volunteer activities to help other people, in volunteer activities to improve the local community or the world, or in very large charitable donations.

For instance, a self-employed 46-year-old woman "became more giving of time, energy, and understanding. I try to spend 60% of my time giving out. I consciously make two phone calls or visits every week to an elderly or sick person, baby-sit, and generally try to be supportive to people." A 72-year-old retired editor went with her sister-in-law to a Catholic charismatic movement service, and then "I began trying to model myself after the other members, who show great depth of charity to others." She now does some errands for the senior citizens near her home and drives one woman to stores and appointments. In Nova Scotia, a dentist donated his time to set up a volunteer dental clinic in an old-age home. A 47-year-old professor in Vancouver sponsored a Vietnamese refugee who now lives with him. A 76-year-old woman developed and published a game based on her extensive study of the Bible.

Religion

Some people achieve major changes in their religious practices or spiritual insights. A 65-year-old janitor in Iowa gained spiritual and religious understanding by reading and by attending study groups. A 27-year-old man in Newfoundland changed from having little interest in religion as an inactive Protestant to being an active Roman Catholic. A 46-year-old homemaker in Nova Scotia changed her relationship with God. She intentionally set out to achieve inner happiness through a better and clearer understanding of God and religion. An Ontario man began to set aside time each day for religious devotions, beginning with a 31-day published schedule received in the mail. An earlier study by Wickett (1977) found that a great many activities, such as cross-country skiing or liturgical dance, can be deliberate paths toward greater closeness to God.

To understand basic reality or to grasp the ultimate meaning of life, some people choose a somewhat different focus that is remarkably close to being spiritual or religious. For example, some try to gain perspective or wisdom through a broad understanding of history, the social sciences, or the long-term future of life in the universe. Some struggle to choose and then answer the basic or ultimate questions in life. Some describe their quest as a search for a philosophy of life, for an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, for consciousness expansion, for mystical experiences or cosmic union, for an encounter with ultimate reality or the fundamental nature of the universe. The methods for all these goals cover a wide spectrum: meditation, private prayer, reflection, reading, writing, discussion groups, wilderness solitude, sexual union, music, astral travel, training in extrasensory perception, psychedelic chemicals, the deep symbolic and mythical levels described by Grof (1975), high dreams, and simply letting go. This paragraph is based on early exploratory interviews and on conversations over the years with various people; none of the changes in our 150 final interviews fits this paragraph.

Basic Competence

Sometimes a person sets out to improve some basic competence or skill. In this area I am thinking of a broad or basic competence, potentially applicable in more than one area of life. Job competence, interpersonal skill, or a specific recreational skill would fit into other categories in table 1.

Here are some examples from the various interviews:

1. reading effectively at faster speeds,
2. driving a car,
3. thinking creatively and using problem-solving skills,
4. becoming more open-minded and inquiring, seeking an accurate picture of reality,
5. becoming competent in self-directed learning,
6. setting goals and priorities, and managing time effectively,
7. getting a general liberal education in order to be broadly knowledgeable and competent (not primarily for enjoyment or for a particular career),
8. gaining an extensive knowledge of current events and social conditions around the world.

Some Reflections on the Changes

As I reflect on the intentional changes found by various interviewers, several thoughts come to my mind.

Before any of the interviews, I tried to predict the sorts of changes they would uncover. Looking back now at my early list, I realize that everything in it was a single, neat, clearly defined event such as having a baby, switching to another job, or moving. In fact, many changes turn out to be not so clear-cut. Some changes are largely internal (psychological or spiritual) rather than external. Several changes involve two levels: (1) several particular changes, and (2) a broad, underlying direction or theme, such as being more independent, more assertive, more willing to use power, more direct in communicating feelings, more spontaneous.

In a supplementary analysis, I categorized changes as primarily occurring in the external world, in the person's activities, or in the person's inner and outer behavior. About 16% of all intentional changes were primarily changes in the person's environment. Examples are residence location, adding a significant person to one's household, buying or selling something, and remodeling one's home. About 42% are changes in one's activities, in how one spends one's time. Examples are a new job, changed responsibilities within the same job, new recreational activities, and volunteer activities to help others. The other 42% are primarily changes in the person himself or herself. Examples: becoming physically fit, gaining basic understanding or perspective, modifying one's habitual behavior (stop smoking or stop losing one's temper).

One sort of change I did not anticipate at all is developing some new product or invention. For instance, one person patented a new musical instrument (a job change), and another person developed and published a 52-card Bible verse game (as a volunteer helping activity). My own largest change during the past two years has been to devote a major portion of my time to working on this book.

I have become increasingly certain that intentional change is often a natural and healthy component in a person's life. It is wrong to assume it is a sign of severe difficulty, illness, or a highly unsatisfactory life. It is more appropriate to empathically grasp and treasure another person's changes than it is to judge or criticize them. It is rarely correct to consider one area or type of change as inherently better than all others, or inherently worse or more dangerous or unimportant.

Many changes could be intended in either direction. For example, some interviewees increased the amount of time spent at work

and some reduced it. One mother stopped "sitting on my tongue" with her children, and another stopped speaking up about her daughter's decisions. Other intended changes would almost always be in one direction, not the opposite direction. It is hard to imagine someone setting out deliberately to become less self-confident, for example, or less physically fit, less knowledgeable about the world, or less skilled at something.

When they first hear of my research into intentional changes, many people assume I am focusing on the adult life cycle. Although I have studied and taught the psychology of adult development, that is not the focus of this book. In fact, most of the changes in the interviews are not particularly related to the person's age or stage in life. When I first read each change (which was recorded at the top of the data sheet shown in the Appendix), I usually could not guess the person's age (which was at the bottom of the sheet).

Every change area in table 1 is the target of at least one major movement or enterprise. Programs in adult education, continuing education, lifelong learning, and the human growth movement try to facilitate change within several of the areas. Traditional counseling and psychotherapy touch on most areas at times. Self-help books are available to facilitate changes in almost every area. Peer self-help groups are springing up rapidly in several areas. No area seems particularly neglected or overlooked.

Almost all the changes reported to us are socially acceptable, or at least not widely condemned. Probably a few interviewees concealed an even larger change that they considered socially unacceptable. I find it hard to believe that, over a period of two years, not one of the 150 interviewees began a clandestine love affair that was a larger intentional change than the one reported to us.

Variations in the Basic Pattern

The basic pattern for the areas of change was presented in table 1. We turn now to the patterns for various particular groups, shown in table 2.

Simply by looking at table 2, we can see that the basic pattern is remarkably consistent from one group to another. Job, career, and training is the most common area of change in every group except people in their sixties and older. Human relationships, emotions, and self-perception is the second most common area for almost all groups. Changes in enjoyable activities and residence location are fairly common in most groups. It is clear, then, that the relative

Areas of Change in Several Groups

	Job and Training	Relationships, etc.	Enjoyable Activities	Residence Location	Maintenance	Physical Health	Volunteer Activities	Religion	Basic Competence
Country									
Canada	32	21	11	8	9	6	7	3	2
England	37	19	12	12	0	12	0	0	6
USA	38	21	10	14	7	3	3	3	0
Sex									
Male	38	17	13	6	10	5	5	4	1
Female	29	26	9	14	5	8	6	2	3
Age									
25-39 years	43	28	11	8	3	3	2	2	2
40-59 years	29	15	10	8	13	10	8	3	3
60 years and older	12	18	18	24	6	6	12	6	0
Educational Level									
Less than Grade 10	44	4	12	4	20	12	0	4	0
Medium Education	29	14	16	16	6	10	4	2	2
Some Post-Secondary	34	32	7	7	3	1	9	3	3
Social Class									
Lower and Working Class	37	17	10	10	12	10	0	2	0
Middle and Upper Class	32	22	12	10	6	5	8	3	3

Note: N=144. Each number is the percentage of interviewees in that group who reported the given area of change. For example, 32% of all the interviewees in Canada reported a job change. People in the medium education group ranged from those who had completed grade 10 through those who had graduated from secondary school or high school. People who had completed at

least one year of post-secondary education were placed in the post-secondary group. For convenience in reading, the three levels of post-secondary education used in the statistical analyses have been combined here into a single category, and the four social classes have been reduced to two. Because of the small number of nonwhites, figures are not presented here for race.

Table 2

frequency of the various areas is remarkably consistent from one group to another. Although there certainly are differences among the groups, they do not overshadow the basic pattern.

We used a chi square test to see whether the distribution over the nine areas of change varied significantly (at the .05 level) from one group to another. No significant relationships were found between the areas of change and country, sex, age, or race. The areas of change did vary significantly, however, with educational level and with social class. When differences in sex were controlled for, it became apparent that the variation with educational level occurred largely among the men.

Children and Adolescents

So far in this chapter, all of the interviewees have been at least 25 years old. Let's change our focus for a moment and look at teenagers and even younger children.

Informal conversations with children and adolescents have convinced me that they, too, make intentional changes. Here are some of the intentional changes that children age 15 and under have reported to me informally:

1. chose a best friend or a new dating partner,
2. chose a new circle of friends,
3. changed behavior with friends (for example, deeper genuine communication),
4. changed relationship and behavior with a parent,
5. became well informed on a subject through extensive reading in that area,
6. became skilled and knowledgeable with computers (through experimentation and friends),
7. discovered and followed own interests and preferences despite peer pressure,
8. chose a different enjoyable activity (new sport, hobby, craft, or recreational activity),
9. gained perspective on other cultures through travel,
10. improved fitness and health practices,
11. successfully sought self-understanding,
12. altered appearance (contact lenses, style and length of hair, clothing style),
13. chose a school,
14. chose and achieved a high level of academic performance,

15. chose a broad career path and particular school courses,
16. became more assertive in standing up for personal rights and wants.

An unpublished study by Fr. Harvey Roach focused specifically on intentional change among children. He spontaneously adapted our interview schedule to the language and concepts of each age group. In Stoney Creek and Hamilton, Ontario, he interviewed ten children at each age from 5 to 13, giving a total of ninety children. The data from these children have not been included in any of the data presented earlier in this chapter.

In his correspondence with me, Roach commented on the enthusiasm and animation with which the children described their intentional changes once they realized he was interested in freely chosen changes, not changes required by school or home. "An example was the thrill described by a 6-year-old when, after numerous attempts, a strategy to ride a two-wheel bicycle gave her new mobility." Roach was struck by the ability of children to choose and achieve changes, and he concluded that adults ignore or at least underestimate this capacity in children. Certainly, very few adults do much to foster and facilitate it.

In general, the changes of the older children were more varied, more complex, more thoughtfully planned, and more self-directed than those of the younger children.

Money and parental influence played important parts in affecting some changes. "A 10-year-old girl no longer wishes to study the organ after a year of instruction. Her parents invested \$6 a week in lessons and \$3,500 in an organ. The lessons are continuing." Another example was provided by one of the persons for whom collecting a particular type of object was a major change: "One 7-year-old was experiencing discouragement because the beer bottles he was collecting were persistently cashed in by his father."

Almost all of the changes were in such enjoyable activities as sports, games, hobbies, dance, music, arts and crafts, riding a bicycle, gymnastics, building models, and collecting. The changes of only six children did not fit into that category. Five of them were 12 or 13 years old, and their five changes were as follows: sewing, carpentry, study of encyclopedia, air cadets, religion. The other child, age 7, had also changed in the religious area. I cannot explain why several of the changes that arose in my informal conversations with children did not arise in the Roach interviews.