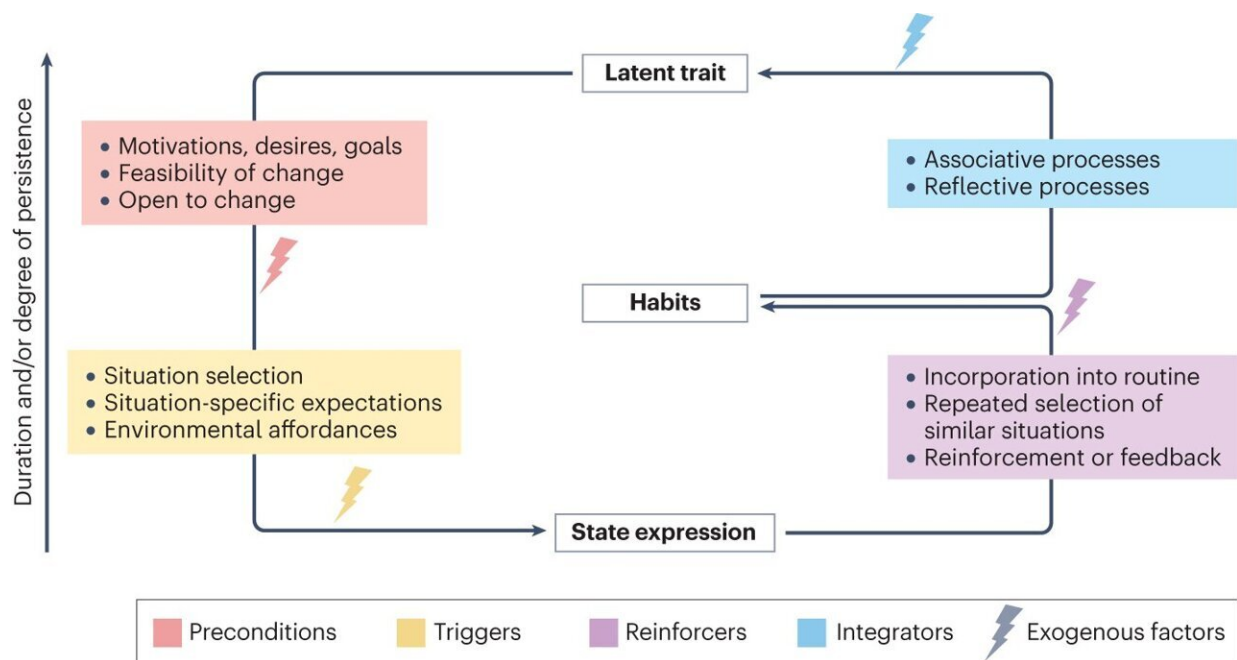


Research review suggests four key mechanisms are involved in changing one's personality

March 28 2024, by Bob Yirka



Process of change across levels of personality abstraction. Credit: *Nature Reviews Psychology* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s44159-024-00295-z

A pair of psychologists, one with Washington University in St. Louis, the other with the University of Zurich, has found via review of prior research that there are four key mechanisms involved when a person truly wants to make changes—albeit small changes—to their personality.

In their [paper](#), published in the journal *Nature Reviews Psychology*, Joshua Jackson and Amanda Wright describe the four mechanisms and how they might be used by someone attempting to change their personality.

A common adage is that human beings develop a personality in their youth and that once set, it becomes permanent. There is reportedly no way to change one's personality—if a person is greedy, grumpy or happy-go-lucky, they remain that way until they die. But [research](#) over the past several decades has shown that these beliefs are not exactly true.

As the researchers note, while a given personality remains in place for most of a person's lifespan, there are examples showing that some changes are possible if there is a strong desire to make them. In this [review](#), Jackson and Wright have uncovered four key mechanisms that come into play when someone succeeds in making personality changes.

The first mechanism involves preconditions, which are the tools needed to alter personality. The second involves making changes to the living [environment](#)—doing so, they suggest, can remove triggers that push a person back to prior personality traits. Such changes lead to the third mechanism: reinforcers. These are elements in a person's life that lend support to a desirable personality trait. Finally, the fourth mechanism involves integrators, which are factors that allow a person to maintain continued support for new traits after they have been attained.

The researchers note that one of the most important factors in attempting to make [personality](#) changes is a strong desire to succeed—a person has to want to make changes and have good reasons for wanting them. Otherwise, they note, they will be fighting their own desires to return to previous traits.

The researchers also note that timing can be important. Making changes

when moving to a new place, getting married or having a baby, for example, can provide ample incentive not only to make changes, but to retain them.

More information: Joshua J. Jackson et al, The process and mechanisms of personality change, *Nature Reviews Psychology* (2024).
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