

9

Transforming Society

In This Chapter:

The Dynamics of Societal Change

Diffusion of Innovations

The Dynamics of Conflictive Societal Change

Transformation Scenarios

Lay the Groundwork

Gather Support

Struggle for Power

Diffuse Change throughout Society

A Possible Scenario for Fundamental Change

A Typical Failing Scenario

Hope

Another Major Obstacle: Hopelessness

The Hope Factor

Chapter 7 described how Vernal activists could support and educate hundreds of thousands of other activists and greatly increase the strength and endurance of progressive change organizations. If the Vernal Project developed as projected here, in forty years Vernal activists would generate a force for progressive change that would be perhaps three or four times greater than now — with about one million activists working for fundamental change.

This chapter shows how all these activists, working together, could fundamentally transform society.

THE DYNAMICS OF SOCIETAL CHANGE

A progressive movement that is three or four times more powerful than now would have a profound impact on society. Presumably, it would be three or four times as effective in challenging the power structure and overcoming the barriers of widespread ignorance, oppressive cultural norms, and dysfunctional emotional conditioning. However, because of the particular dynamics of social change, if this powerful progressive effort were sustained over many decades, it would likely have an even greater impact — dramatically increasing the chances for ultimate success.

This section first discusses the general dynamics of the diffusion of new ideas or practices through society. Then it explores how conflictive social change enhances these dynamics. Finally, it describes how skilled and dedicated Vernal activists could help other progressive activists take advantage of these dynamics.

Diffusion of Innovations

Progressive social change activists seek to shift the consciousness of large numbers of people so that they will accept creative new ideas, engage in fresh, positive behaviors, and support alternative institutions. In short, activists seek to spread progressive innovations until they are adopted across society.

It takes time for any innovation to be widely adopted, even a non-controversial one such as a new technology like

the telephone. Social researchers have studied the “diffusion of innovation” process extensively. They have learned what it takes to communicate new ideas (including political and cultural ideas) and effective ways to encourage people to adopt them.¹

STAGES IN ADOPTING AN INNOVATION

Generally, in adopting an innovation, people go through six main stages.

1. Need: People experience a problem and feel a need for a new idea or practice that solves the problem.

“Early needers” — those who first experience the problem and feel a need for an alternative — are those who are injured or stymied by the current situation and desire something better. But it is not just anyone who is injured or stymied. The poor and downtrodden experience the problems of our society most strongly, but they often believe these problems are inevitable. People who feel a need must believe that there is some possible solution to their problem.

2. Gain Knowledge: People learn about an innovation and gather information about it.

People may learn about an innovation by traveling to another place where the innovation is used or from a visitor who has already used the innovation. One-way, mass information channels such as television, radio, and newspapers are often effective means to let people know that an innovation exists and that it might solve a problem.

Progressive activists, who are unable to pay for advertising and find it difficult to obtain favorable media attention, can instead use alternative mass media like newsletters, street speaking, tabling, e-mail, web pages, and dramatic protest demonstrations that the news media will cover.

Generally “early knowers” have higher education and are more tuned into affairs outside of their own lives — they are more cosmopolitan, they travel more, they have a greater exposure to the mass media, they have greater social contact with other people, and so on.

3. Shift Opinion: People are persuaded that the innovation is one they should adopt.

Once they learn about an innovation, people are curious and seek more information about the new idea. They evaluate the new idea and mentally try it out in their own lives. They want to know what benefits and drawbacks it may have in their situation.

Generally, they are most persuaded to adopt the innovation if:

- The innovation appears to have a large relative advantage over their existing practice — it is cheaper, saves time or effort, is more convenient, is more satisfying, is more ethical, or bestows higher prestige.
- The innovation is compatible with their needs, existing values, and past experiences.

Figure 9.1: Typical Steps in the Adoption of an Innovation

Typical Steps	Role of Change Agent to Accelerate Adoption
<p>1. Need: People experience a problem and feel a need for an innovation that solves the problem.</p>	<p>Change agents can help people recognize their need for change or show them an innovation that illuminates how difficult their lives are without it.</p>
<p>2. Gain Knowledge: People learn about an innovation and gather information about it.</p>	<p>Change agents can broadcast information that describes the new innovation and extols its benefits. Change agents should present the innovation within the context of existing ideas and practices and explain the innovation using familiar terminology.</p>
<p>3. Shift Opinion: People are persuaded that the innovation is one they should adopt.</p>	<p>Change agents can arrange for people to meet with their peers who have already adopted the innovation. They can also provide samples or arrange opportunities for people to experiment with the innovation.</p>
<p>4. Decide: People decide to adopt (or reject) the innovation.</p>	<p>Change agents can encourage people to adopt the innovation.</p>
<p>5. Implement: People implement the innovation and adapt it to their own circumstances.</p>	<p>Change agents can ensure that people understand how to use the innovation and how to modify it sufficiently to meet their particular needs.</p>
<p>6. Confirm: People confirm that the innovation works well for them and integrate it into their normal routine (or they realize it does not work for them and discontinue using it).</p>	<p>Change agents can arrange for adopters to hear from other satisfied adopters so they do not feel isolated or wrongheaded in their decision to adopt.</p>

- The innovation is not too difficult to understand or use.
- Before they try it, they can observe other people using the innovation in an environment similar to their own — they can watch “early adopters” or see a demonstration project.

- They receive positive evaluations from their peers who have already tried it in a situation similar to their own.
- They can experiment with the innovation for a short time in a limited way — they can try out a sample or perform a small trial.
- Their peers encourage them to adopt the innovation.
- Society encourages them (via the mass media) to adopt the innovation.

Generally, in shifting their opinion, people are influenced more by face-to-face discussions with their peers than they are by mass media pronouncements. People seek solid information, especially from peers whom they have already judged to be trustworthy, sensible, and a good source of accurate information and opinion on other innovations (“opinion leaders”). People are also persuaded more by a two-way discussion that addresses their specific concerns and uses familiar terminology. This is especially true if the innovation is difficult to understand, difficult to implement, or dangerous.

Sometimes a timely event helps to promote the innovation. For example, being laid off from her job may encourage someone to question the current system of employment that is dominated by large corporations. It may encourage her to look favorably on employee-owned businesses or other kinds of cooperatives.

4. **Decide:** People decide to adopt (or reject) the innovation.

People generally adopt an innovation sooner if it has a low initial cost, provides immediate rewards, and has a catchy name with positive connotations. People are also more inclined to adopt an innovation if they are offered an incentive, though they may discontinue the innovation as soon as the incentive ends.

Compared to later adopters, early adopters generally:

- Are better educated.
- Have higher aspirations (for education, occupation, and so on).
- Have higher social status and greater resources (they can risk more without fear) *or*
- Have fewer resources (they have less to lose and a greater incentive for change).
- Are better able to cope with uncertainty and risk.
- Are less fatalistic.
- Are more open-minded (less dogmatic, more open to change, more imaginative).
- Are more likely to be opinion leaders for their peers.
- Are better at dealing with abstractions (such as innovations they have never seen).

5. **Implement:** People implement the innovation and adapt it to their own circumstances.

In this stage, people seek information about how to obtain the innovation, how to use it, what problems might arise when using the innovation, and how to resolve those problems.

6. **Confirm:** People confirm that the innovation works well for them and integrate the innovation into their normal routine (or they realize it does not work for them and discontinue using it).

People are more likely to continue with the innovation if they receive supportive messages from their peers and from the larger society.

Figure 9.1 summarizes the typical steps in the adoption of an innovation and what a “change agent”* can do to accelerate adoption.

RATE OF ADOPTION OF INNOVATIONS

Not all innovations are universally adopted. Some innovations — like fads and fashions — blossom briefly and then fade away. Others are adopted by a subset of the population, but are never accepted by everyone.

For those innovations that eventually *are* adopted universally, the number of people adopting it over time generally traces an S-shaped curve as shown in Figure 9.2.² At first, there are just a few venturesome people willing to adopt the innovation. Then the idea catches on and a steadily increasing number of people adopt it. Finally, after a time, the last few recalcitrant people adopt it.

The first few percent of people who adopt a new idea, the innovators, are usually quite adventurous. They typically like to be on the cutting edge of innovations, so they are usually tuned into many sources of information and are open to new ideas. Generally, they must have the resources and self-confidence to boldly go where no one has gone before. They are often daring risk-takers, willing to accept setbacks and social disapproval if the innovation does not work out.

However, because they are so daring, innovators are often viewed as crackpots in their home communities. Because they are seen as being unusual, they often have few personal connections with other local people and only have friendships with other innovators in distant locales. Isolated and with little social status in their home communities, they typically do not influence the people around them very much, so it takes a while for the innovation to spread to others.

Following the innovators, the early adopters are typically more integrated into the local social system. Though they are not quite as open to new ideas as the innovators, they are regarded by their peers as more sensible and reasonable — more likely to offer accurate knowledge and sage advice. With their high status and numerous social connections,

All truth passes through three stages:

First, it is ridiculed.

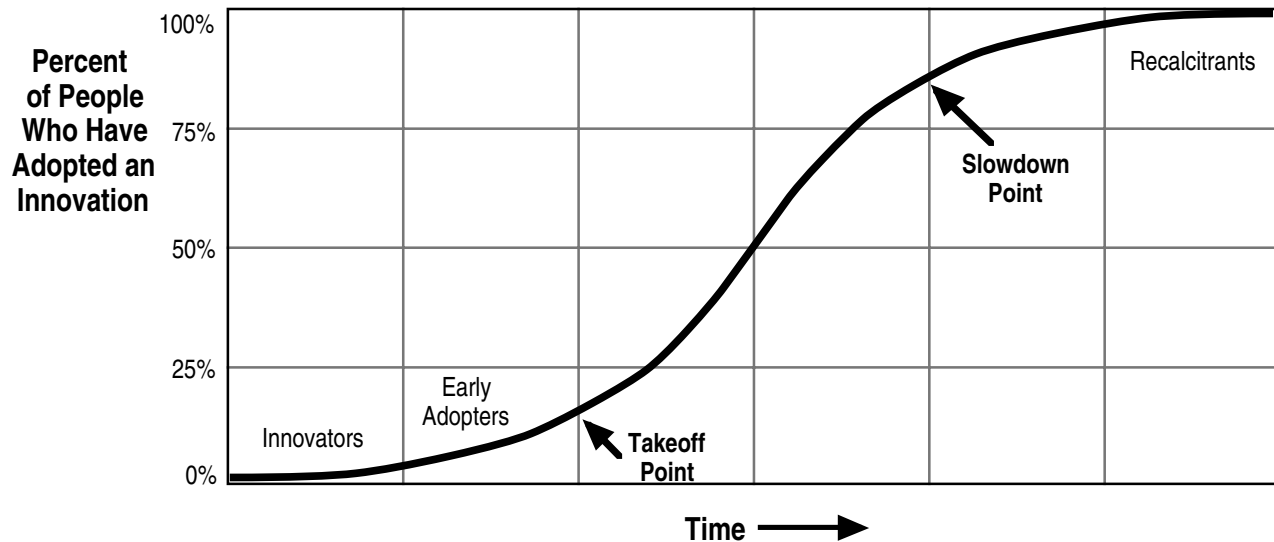
Second, it is violently opposed.

Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.

— Arthur Schopenhauer

* “Change agent” is a sociology term for someone who tries to bring about change.

Figure 9.2: Typical Adoption Rate of Innovations



early adopters often serve as role models and opinion leaders for others: when they adopt a new idea, other people turn to them for their evaluation. If their assessment is positive, then others are inclined to adopt the innovation too.

In general, new ideas spread primarily from peer to peer or from near-peer opinion leaders to those people who share similar traits. The tighter the interpersonal connections, the faster an innovation will typically spread. Generally, people seem to be influenced by others only if they have a direct link to them or only have a single intermediary. Typically, those who have the most connections to other people will pick up an innovation sooner.

A person is more likely to adopt an innovation as the number of people in her peer network who have already adopted the innovation increases and the norms of her social system shift more towards adoption. Usually when about 15 to 30 percent of the population have adopted an innovation (which is also usually when the opinion leaders in a system have begun to favor it), the adoption rate accelerates rapidly.* The adoption process then continues at a rapid pace until almost everyone has adopted it. At the end, there are typically a few recalcitrant people who hold out. It may take many years before they all adopt the innovation.

Figure 9.2 illustrates each part of this typical S-curve dynamic. If we assume — just for the purposes of this discussion — that the time scale at the bottom of the figure covers a total of sixty years, then in the first ten years, only about two percent of the population (the innovators) adopt the innovation. In the next ten years, only another fourteen

percent (the early adopters) adopt the innovation. So, after twenty years, just 16 percent of the population have adopted the innovation. However, once the take-off point is reached in the twentieth year, the rate goes much faster. In each of the next two decades, thirty-four percent of the population adopt the innovation — more than two-thirds of the whole population in this twenty-year period. Then the rate slows down again, and in the fifth decade, fourteen percent more adopt. Finally, in the sixth decade, the last two percent (the recalcitrant people) adopt the innovation.

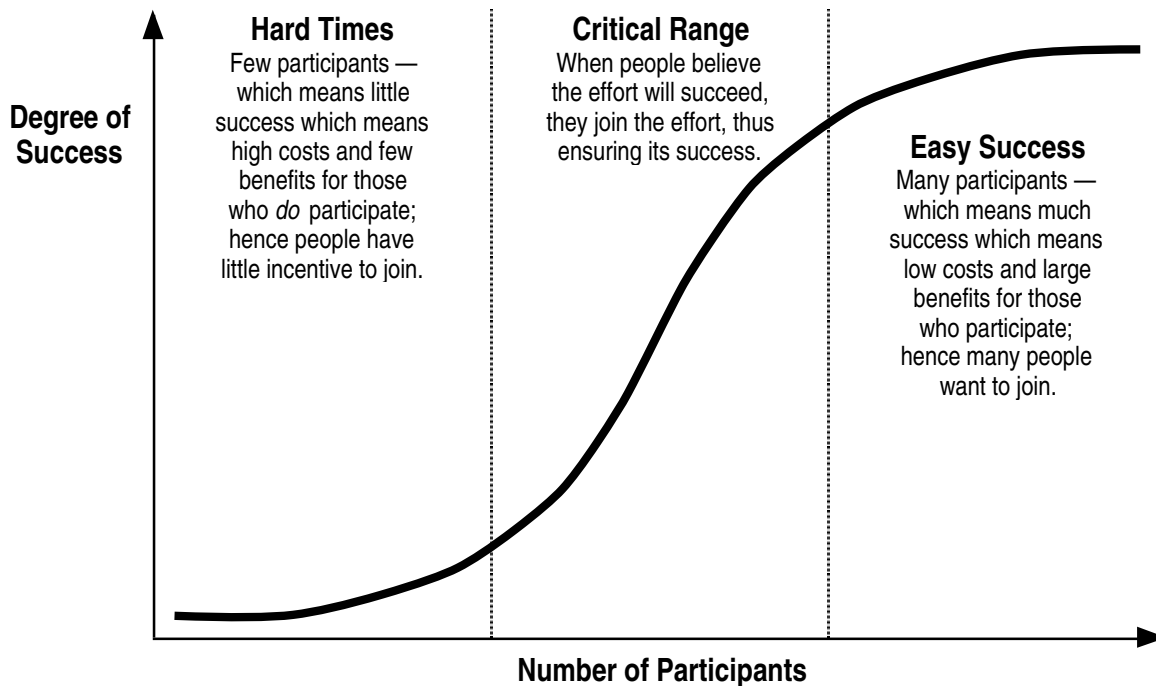
Because of this dynamic, the most difficult part of the innovation adoption process typically comes at the beginning. A few innovators may quickly adopt the innovation, but it may take many more years of hard work to persuade the early adopters and opinion leaders. However, once these critical people have adopted the innovation, then the vast majority may soon adopt the innovation with little additional prodding.

The Dynamics of Conflictive Societal Change

This tendency for the cumulative number of people who adopt an innovation to trace an S-curve is usually even more pronounced for social change that requires arduous struggle against determined and dangerous opponents. While activists attempt to persuade people to adopt an alternative, their opponents actively work to persuade people that the alternative is unfashionable, useless, destructive, or too costly. Opponents may smear and ridicule proponents of the alternative or even threaten harm to anyone who adopts it. This makes it much more difficult for innovators and early

* Note that in a relatively isolated community, the take-off point may come when 15 to 30 percent of the *local* community (not the larger population) adopts the innovation.

**Figure 9.3: Activists' Dilemma:
Success Breeds Success, Failure Breeds Failure**



adopters to decide to adopt the alternative and makes it much less likely that others will even consider adoption.

AN ACTIVIST PREDICAMENT

Moreover, for progressive activists challenging the power structure, another critical factor exaggerates the S-curve phenomenon even more.³ Since progressive activists usually have minimal access to other resources (like money or authority), they typically must rely on rallying large numbers of people to their cause in order to have enough strength to succeed. However, in the early stages of a campaign for change, there are typically just a few activists willing to participate, and consequently their efforts usually fail to have much impact. Moreover, as long as success looks doubtful, other people are quite reluctant to get involved since no one wants to join a hopeless cause. Only when success seems assured will others join the fight. However, until they join, the number of activists remains too small to ensure success.

Figure 9.3 shows this predicament graphically. When the number of people involved in the change effort is small (depicted on the left side of the figure), the power they can exert is small and their efforts to bring about change typically fail. The cost to activists is high — long, grueling work, low pay, and sometimes violent repression — with little to show for it. So naturally, few people want to join the effort.

In contrast, when large numbers of activists are willing and able to work together in an organization, they constitute a powerful force for change. It is therefore much easier to win. As shown on the right side of the figure, the cost to any particular activist is then low and the rewards are great. Activists not only reap a share of whatever benefits come from achieving the goal, but they have the excitement of working on a successful campaign.

For their efforts, they also typically get wide recognition and lavish praise from their fellow activists (and historians). So naturally, near the end of a campaign, many people want to be involved.

Between these two states, there is usually a critical range where a small increase in the number of activists will greatly increase the degree of success. In this critical range, people may see that their participation — if joined simultaneously by others — will lead to success. Therefore, at this crucial point, many people will join the effort.

This dynamic leads to an exaggerated S-curve: a campaign may dawdle at a very low level of effort for many years. Then at some point, it will grow to a critical size or

In the beginning of a change, the patriot is a scarce man, and brave, and hated and scorned. When his cause succeeds, the timid join him, for then it costs nothing to be a patriot.

— Mark Twain

some trigger event will encourage a surge in participation. With this influx of people, the campaign will suddenly take off. With enough people involved, activists are then able to win victory quickly. This victory leads to greater participation, which then produces even more victories.

The demise of the government of East Germany and the other Eastern Bloc countries around 1990 superbly illustrates this dynamic. For decades, people in these countries were afraid to challenge their governments and little changed. The situation only began to shift with the emergence of the Solidarity movement in Poland and the ascendance of President Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. Solidarity experienced less repression than people expected, and at the same time, it became clear that the Soviet Union would not invade Poland. Suddenly, hundreds of thousands of people poured into the streets. With so many protesting, they were virtually immune to government repression. People escalated their efforts, and all of these unpopular governments soon collapsed.

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THIS DYNAMIC

This exaggerated S-curve dynamic causes several major problems for progressive activists. In the difficult early years of a campaign, the activist burnout rate is typically very high and recruitment of new members is extremely difficult. Activists are often frustrated by their repeated failures and cynical about future prospects. Those dedicated activists willing to work for little reward during this bleak time are often obsessive and rigid.

During the take-off stage, with the influx of many people, success suddenly seems possible, but the change organization may collapse under the burden of so many new people. Processes that worked well in a small, intimate organization of dedicated activists often fail when it grows to include a large, diverse group of people who do not know each other well. Quick growth also means that the organization is comprised mainly of inexperienced activists who are more likely to make serious mistakes. Through their ignorance, they may be diverted from their goals, fooled by phony solutions, or drawn into counterproductive infighting.⁴

In the later stages of a campaign, with success just ahead, the organization may be filled with people whose commitment is quite low. Those who join only when victory is near may leave again at the first sign of renewed opposition or internal difficulty. They may also simply grow bored over time and drift away.⁵

ENHANCING THE PROSPECTS OF A NEW CAMPAIGN

In the early segment of a campaign, people are more likely to join and persevere if they believe it is worthwhile. The following situations increase the likelihood of people joining a new campaign:

- If people believe the benefits they will personally reap (their share of the collective benefits — that is, the improvements in their lives that come from making society

better — plus whatever individual benefits might come to them) are higher than the cost of participation (the amount of effort required of them and the danger they face).

- If they believe enough other people will join with them to ensure success.
- If they believe the campaign will be successful even if others do not join them.
- If they believe they should join the campaign for other reasons (moral, communitarian) even though they are not sure it will be successful.

There are several conditions that encourage these beliefs and several means that activists can use to create or enhance them:

• Strong Social Networks

People with bonds of kinship, friendship, or common membership in an organization are more committed to and trusting of each other. Feelings of solidarity and affection induce an obligation to participate in their friends' projects. Social ties also facilitate communication so people have reliable information about other peoples' desires and likely behavior.

• Appealing Goals

Only if the goals are important and likely to confer extensive benefits will people be willing to exert strong effort and subject themselves to risk. People are also much more willing to work together in concert if the objective is simple and clear.

• Respected Leaders

Visible leaders with a record of success (in social change or other endeavors) convince people that the campaign will be focused and well run.

• Persuasive Activists

Activists can help people develop a common understanding of their problems and help them develop a common solution. They can persuade people that the issue is vital and worth working on, that collective action is possible, that others will join with them, that the opposition is not as powerful nor as dangerous as it seems, and that the campaign will lead to victory. Alternatively, they can persuade people that to be morally virtuous, they should work for positive change — even if their effort is ultimately futile.

• Personal Benefits

Activists can offer participants benefits other than victory such as empowerment, prestige, companionship, a loving community, or feelings of belonging.

• A Strong Reputation

If an organization has a reputation for dedication, persistence, resilience, and success, people are more likely to believe it will be competent and successful in any new endeavor.

- **Strong Traditions**

Planning events or demonstrations at traditional places or on significant anniversary dates can remind people of past successes or invoke traditions of resistance to oppression.

- **Energetic Early Participants**

If there are enough participants and they work hard enough, they can constitute the critical mass necessary to win early victories. Even before they achieve any significant gains, other people can see that they are likely to be successful.

- **Confidence**

If early participants appear confident in their success, they are more likely to convince others. Of course, they must eventually win some victories or others will feel they were misled.

- **Early Victories**

A few early victories can convince others that an organization will be successful and they should jump on the bandwagon. Victories may also convince the opposition of the likelihood of change and that further resistance will only waste their resources.

Pick battles big enough to matter, small enough to win.
— Jonathan Kozol

- **Demonstrations of Strength**

Large rallies or marches show participants and the public that the organization enjoys great support.

- **Projections of Strength**

Inflated estimates of the size of the organization, attendance at demonstrations, or polling numbers can convince the public that the change effort enjoys wider support than it really does. However, if the strength is revealed to be inflated, then this can destroy the reputation of the organization.

- **Favorable Mass Media Coverage**

Through news media coverage, the public can learn about the plans of a change organization, the size and impact of its demonstrations, how authorities are responding, whether other people are sympathetic or hostile to the campaign, and other relevant information that enables them to evaluate the campaign's prospects. Favorable coverage can encourage people to join. Moreover, if the news media broadcast the successes of the group, then everyone knows that everyone else is aware that the campaign is succeeding.

- **Innovative Tactics**

A new, creative, or fun tactic can entice people with its novelty or its potential to surprise, befuddle, or disconcert the opposition.

- **Sympathetic, Lax, or Inept Opposition**

Signs that the opposition will not or cannot respond with heavy sanctions encourage people to participate.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF VERNAL ACTIVISTS

With their extensive knowledge, considerable skill, and dedication to change, Vernal activists should be able to create or strengthen many of these conditions. Vernal activists would probably be energetic early participants in change campaigns across the country. They would be skilled at persuading other activists of the moral and practical worth of these campaigns and the value of working together. Most would project confidence grounded in their own social change experience.

As graduates of a Vernal program, they would probably have a strong personal reputation, and they would likely build a strong reputation for their organizations. They would be adept at building a supportive organization culture that would offer appealing personal benefits (like hugs, unconditional love, and solid support) to their colleagues. They would also likely be adept at fostering feelings of camaraderie.

From their experience and relevant education, they should be able to design effective campaigns with appealing change goals, innovative tactics, and effective means to win early victories. They would be good at exploiting the mistakes of their opponents. They would also know how to obtain favorable media coverage and how to accentuate the strength and morality of progressive efforts.

In the take-off and final stages of a campaign, Vernal activists should be especially helpful. Their Vernal education would enable them to facilitate the rapid growth of their change organization and avoid destructive mistakes. In addition, they would probably know how to prudently conclude one campaign and launch the next without losing supporters.

By creating and enhancing all these conditions, Vernal activists would ensure that a large number of campaigns for progressive change were spawned, moved into the critical range (in which the effort is large enough that participants believe they will succeed and so even more people join the effort), and finally took off. They would help progressive campaigns successfully navigate the S-curve dynamic instead of languishing endlessly at a low level of activity or crashing and burning as a campaign took off. As more and more of these campaigns succeeded, it would become even easier to garner interest and support which would lead to even greater growth and more change.

TRANSFORMATION SCENARIOS

If the Vernal Project proceeded the way I imagine, it would generate an unprecedented force of about a million dedicated activists working steadily for progressive change for several decades. They would be able to build powerful organizations and generate massive campaigns for social change. They would help many of these campaigns grow large enough to reach the critical range so they would then rapidly grow even greater in size and impact.

This would generate a growing snowball effect: as change campaigns began to succeed, an ever-increasing number of people would be attracted to join the effort to create a good society. They would win important victories, which would then stimulate even more people to join the effort. This would inspire an ever-increasing number of people to tackle a wider range of problems, to push for more and deeper changes, and to reach for even higher ideals.

I'm not going to spend my time or risk my neck working with a bunch of bozos so we can ultimately elect some mealy-mouthed, blow-dried politician or so we can make some minor change in the status quo while 99.9% of our sick society continues unchanged. But I'll work hard for years and risk my career and even my life for a truly just cause — especially if I can work with wonderful, supportive people. And especially if it looks like we might have some reasonable chance of bringing about real, lasting change.

Because of this snowball dynamic, I believe progressive activists, supported and guided by Vernal activists, could bring about comprehensive and fundamental change of society in as few as eighty years. The transformation would start slowly, but would grow steadily, and then would accelerate to a final fundamental shift of power and consciousness.

I conceptualize the process proceeding through four distinct periods, each roughly twenty years long. Note that I have given these four periods the same names as the four stages of societal transformation described in Chapter 5 since the primary focus during each period would be to implement the corresponding stage of societal transformation. Note also that the Vernal Project would exist only through the first three periods — the first sixty years — and would end before the transformation was complete.

Lay the Groundwork: Vernal Project Phases 1 and 2

As I envision it, over the first twenty years of the Vernal Project (Vernal Phases 1 and 2), the number of Vernal students would grow from 30 attending a single session to 6,000 attending two hundred sessions across the country. In the baseline case, the number of very active graduates would grow at an ever-increasing rate to about 17,000 at the end of Year 20. The number of less active graduates would grow to about 15,000 by the end of this year.

During this twenty-year period, Vernal activists would begin to assist thousands of progressive organizations. They would strengthen these groups and increase the skills and knowledge of their fellow activists. They would help their fellow activists overcome their harmful cultural and emotional conditioning. They would also begin to convey basic information to the public about progressive ideas and alternatives. Their efforts would bolster progressive change organizations and help to lay the foundation for later work.

For the first ten years of this period, the number of Vernal activists would be relatively small. Outside of progressive circles, the work of Vernal activists would probably go almost unnoticed. During this period, I expect that the overall impact of progressive organizations on society would be about the same as it is now.

I walk slowly, but I never walk backward.
— Abraham Lincoln

Only in the second decade (from Vernal Project Years 11 to 20) would the support of Vernal activists enable progressive organizations to begin to grow significantly. In this second decade, progressive organizations would just begin to have enough strength to noticeably challenge the power structure and the dominant culture.

Gather Support: first half of Vernal Project Phase 3

For the next twenty years (Vernal Project Years 21 to 40), tens of thousands of Vernal activists would continue to support grassroots progressive organizations and help them grow larger and stronger. With a strong base, these organizations would begin to demonstrate positive alternatives and to win some campaigns. They would reach out to millions of people, convincing them of the need for fundamental change and painting a picture of a good society. They would teach the basics of democratic governance and nonviolent struggle to large numbers of people. They would also show people how to overcome destructive cultural and emotional conditioning and how to live joyful lives. Their impressive organizations — powerful, yet also adhering to high principles — would rapidly grow until they involved a total of about one million activists and progressive advocates and were supported by tens of millions more people.

Three Important Early Goals

Early in the transformation process, Vernal activists would probably choose to exert some effort towards three goals that would make the change process easier and increase the chances of eventually transforming society:

Create Safe Havens for Activists

Activists are usually forced to work and play within current economic and social systems. Moreover, if they hope to be effective in reaching out to regular people, they must remain connected to mainstream society. However, when activists are immersed too deeply in the dominant culture of competition, prejudice, and consumerism, they may become as frustrated, cold, angry, critical, and materialistic as everyone else in society. Moreover, the culture and the power structure continually thrash progressive activists. Constantly besieged by derogatory propaganda about their social change work, many activists find it difficult to remember why they want to work for progressive change or how to go about it.

Therefore, early in the transformation process, progressive activists probably need to create safe, nurturing havens where they can encourage and support each other to act their best, to strive for their highest ideals, and to heal from attacks. In such an environment, activists could also learn the skills necessary to joyously cooperate and gently struggle with each other.

Vernal centers, with their experienced staffmembers skilled in supporting other activists, would provide one safe haven. Activists might create other havens by living together in a supportive community, or they might meet periodically with other activists for a support weekend at a retreat center. Social change organizations could also become safe havens when they grew strong enough and the members learned enough skills to support each other well.

Shift Resources to People of Goodwill

Our society's economic and social systems regularly reward greed, dishonesty, corruption, and thuggery. The rich steadily amass more wealth and power, and banks, corporations, government, the police, and the military ensure this process continues in an orderly fashion. At the same time, social workers, teachers, counselors, progressive activists, and other people of goodwill working to make the world better are typically poor and overworked.

Progressive activists would probably seek ways to use their time and money so that these precious resources went mostly to other honest and caring people, not to those who make life more difficult and oppose progressive change. Activists unintentionally support domination and dysfunction whenever they pay rent, buy groceries, buy alcohol and other drugs, buy gasoline, attend sporting events, movies, or other entertainment venues, and purchase most

commodities and services. Activists also inadvertently support the status quo by supporting conventional politicians and by paying taxes that are used to train soldiers, build prisons, and subsidize mammoth corporations.

Whenever possible, activists would probably seek to keep resources within the progressive community. To achieve this goal, while still living a reasonable life, they might live simply and give gifts of service and support instead of store-bought goods. Whenever possible, they might also patronize alternative businesses, support progressive politicians, and boycott conventional corporations and organizations.

Reduce Childhood Trauma

Fundamental change requires a citizenry capable of understanding political, economic, and social processes and able to make decisions cooperatively with others. People who grow up in loving homes in which they are supported and guided toward positive social behavior usually learn, as part of their everyday experience, how to work cooperatively with others. As adults, they are typically healthy, clear thinking, happy, and able to secure and keep a job. They are compassionate towards other people and find it relatively easy to cooperate with others.

In contrast, people who are raised in abusive, dysfunctional, loveless, or poverty-stricken families and neighborhoods typically find life extremely difficult. Even if they receive love, support, and favorable opportunities later in life, they are often plagued with depression, deep-seated anger and fear, addictions, health problems, muddled-thinking, and deeply-ingrained prejudices. They are often angry, belligerent, and sullen and find it hard to work with others. They are more likely to mistreat their families, neighbors, and co-workers.

Therefore, early in the process, activists working for fundamental transformation of society would probably seek ways to reduce childhood emotional trauma so that the next generation would have more adults who are functional. Eventually, to transform society, a whole generation of children must grow up in favorable circumstances and experience only minor childhood emotional trauma. Since it takes so long for a generation to grow up, live their lives, and pass on, activists should seek to achieve some success in this realm early in the process.

Therefore, in addition to their other work, activists would probably offer parents information about ways to rear their children with love and support.⁶ Activists might also offer parents information about how to support and counsel each other through their worst emotional problems so they would be less likely to abuse their children. Activists would probably also work for the protection of physically and emotionally battered children.

During this period, progressive organizations would begin to win some important reforms. This would embolden them to work harder and to struggle for changes that are more comprehensive. However, it would also induce elite elements of the power structure to fight back vigorously in order to maintain their control and privilege. The power elite would probably belittle, attack, and infiltrate progressive organizations even more than they do now. They would attempt to disrupt progressive organizations, inflame the public's prejudices and fears, and pit people against one another. They would do their best to assign blame for all social problems to poor people, drug addicts, immigrants, and progressive activists (as they do now).

Like the 1930s and 1960s, this would be a period of intense excitement and activity, but most of the actual changes in society would be relatively shallow and hotly contested. Most societal power would still be firmly controlled by elite interests and would be locked in place by the dominant culture and everyone's ignorance and conditioning. Progressives would win the hearts and minds of many people, but they would not hold the levers of societal power or be able to free most people from their emotional or cultural indoctrination. The struggle that is difficult today would likely grow even harder during this period.

Struggle for Power: second half of Vernal Project Phase 3

However, if the Vernal Project were successful in helping progressive organizations persevere at the same high level of intensity for two more decades (Vernal Project Years 41 to 60), they would be able to bring about much deeper and broader change. This would extend the period of intensive change and struggle for a period of forty continuous years. In my reading of history, there has never been such a strong effort for progressive change sustained over such a long period. Every previous period of intensive progressive change in the United States has faded to quietude after just ten or twenty years. The Vernal Project would make the difference — providing the support, skills, and continuity to ensure that positive, progressive change continued at a high level for four decades.

With such a solid effort sustained all across the nation, almost every person in our society would eventually be able to hear a clear presentation of progressive ideas. Activists would have the chance to change millions of hearts and minds one by one. They could explain unfamiliar concepts and address people's fears. They could show people how to work through their emotional hurts and adopt new behaviors. They could invite people to embrace new cultural norms and to patronize alternative institutions. They could call on people to assert themselves and take responsible control of society.

During this period, tens of millions of people would have the opportunity to try out alternative ways of acting and to test alternative institutions. Many would find these

new concepts and institutions attractive, and they would embrace them and promote them to their friends.

As I see it, individuals and families would come together and form small cooperative communities (neighborhood associations, community groups, labor unions, communes, co-housing projects, and so on). Then these communities would collaborate with others to form self-governing neighborhoods and businesses. In time, these would unite to form self-governing cities.

Simultaneously, hundreds of well-planned and well-executed campaigns for change, carried out by large numbers of participants and supported by millions more, would successfully force the power structure to change. Progressives would secure many positions of authority in government and business. Desiring greater democracy, they would then use their authority to disperse information, power, and wealth more widely.

Over time, clear and balanced information would begin to displace misinformation and deceptive propaganda. People of goodwill would be able to establish and propagate virtuous cultural and social norms. Efforts to challenge people's prejudices and counsel them through their emotional tangles would begin to free them from their irrational behavior patterns and dysfunctional conditioning.

A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it. — Max Planck

Older people, many unalterably wedded to the old order, would grow old and die, while young people, influenced by and accepting positive ideas, would take their places. Over eighty years, almost the entire populace would pass away and be replaced by their more progressively minded children and grandchildren.*

As public support shifted to more compassionate and democratic institutions, the control wielded by the power elite would erode. This would make it much easier to bring about additional change. As more people were liberated from their conditioning and emotional injuries, they would no longer exude hate and prejudice, but would instead spread goodwill. Those working for the common good would support and cooperate with one another, which would free up even greater love and support. Though the effort to bring about progressive change would be very difficult at first, it would finally become easier.

* Appendix C explores in much more depth how aging and population turnover could accelerate progressive social change.

I expect that by the middle of this period, a majority of people would favor fundamental progressive change. By the end of this period (Vernal Project Year 60), most people would feel capable of participating in civic activities and running society's institutions.

Diffuse Change throughout Society (after the Vernal Project had ended)

For the next twenty years (Vernal Project Years 61 to 80), alternative institutions would replace society's conventional institutions in every part of the country. A new, compassionate culture would replace the current culture of greed and competition. Young people would expect and demand a good society, and they would grow up in an environment conducive to emotional health and socially benign behavior. Resistance to progressive change would fade. Though the Vernal Education Project would have ended, Vernal graduates would continue to work for progressive change and to model principled behavior.

As clear knowledge, a compassionate culture, and genuine democracy spread ever wider and ignorance, the adverse power structure, and dysfunctional cultural norms wielded less control, the effort needed to bring about positive change would steadily decrease. The pace of change would accelerate until democracy, compassion, altruism, and cooperation flowed into every corner of society.

At the end of this period, the transformation would be essentially complete. Power and wealth would no longer be concentrated in the hands of the power elite. Instead, institutional power would be dispersed among a very large number of goodhearted people working honestly for the common good. Though still not a completely democratic system, the public would tolerate only those leaders who worked to spread power and wealth more widely. There would be little possibility that the old power elite could reverse this trend or that another power elite could develop since the new culture and institutions would encourage ethical behavior. After several more generations, power would be completely dispersed and true democracy would reign.

By the end of this period, most people's destructive cultural and emotional conditioning would no longer dictate their actions. Most children would be raised in ways that developed their intelligence, rationality, altruism, and love. Consequently, they would have fewer dysfunctional behavior patterns and emotional limitations, and they would be able to live cooperatively with other people. By the end of this period, a new culture of compassion and cooperation would be the norm. Instead of hopelessly accepting indifference and cruelty as innate human traits, people would joyfully help each other.

A Possible Scenario for Fundamental Change

Figure 9.4 graphically details this possible transformation process.* Each of the six diagrams shows a different aspect of the process over time. As indicated at the bottom of the figure, the diagrams begin in Vernal Project Year 1, continue through all three Vernal Project Phases, and extend beyond to Vernal Year 80. The top diagram (Diagram A) is identical to Figure 7.3. It shows that the number of very active Vernal graduates (in the baseline scenario) would grow to about 25,000 over the first thirty years of the Vernal Project, then would remain constant until the project ended at the end of Vernal Year 60.

Since there would not be many Vernal graduates for the first twenty years of the Vernal Project (Phases 1 and 2), society would remain much as it is now. Diagram B shows only about 350,000 people (about 0.13% of the adult population) actively working for fundamental progressive change during most of this time, as many as I estimate are currently working for change. These activists would be laying the groundwork, but having only the same limited impact that they do now.

However, at the beginning of Phase 3, as large numbers of Vernal graduates assisted and supported change efforts, progressive social change movements would grow rapidly and the number of activists and advocates would shoot up. The number of activists and advocates would begin to grow rapidly around Vernal Year 20, swelling threefold to about one million (0.5% of the adult population) by Year 40.

After Vernal Project Year 40, I assume that the number of people working for fundamental change would level off at about one million since I presume that only a small segment of the public would ever have the desire and be able to devote time to change efforts. The number of activists would reach a steady state — the same number of people would be taking up progressive activism each day as existing activists and advocates would be returning to their everyday lives. Still, such a large body of progressive activists working continuously for such a long time would be unprecedented.

* Though grounded in my understanding of social change and supported by estimates which I believe are realistic and self-consistent (as discussed above and in Appendix C), this figure portrays a model of change based entirely on my assumptions about how progressive change movements influence people and about the extent they can influence people. It depicts a kind of societal transformation that has never occurred before. It also shows intangible qualities (like "public support") that are almost impossible to measure.

Even if my assumptions are mostly correct, reality will surely play out very differently than this figure indicates. All of these curves are smooth, and as pointed out in the discussion of Figure 5.4, if they truly described reality, they would be quite jagged. Real change occurs in jumps and starts, accelerated and delayed by various unpredictable events. So please accept this figure only for what it is — an idealized representation of what could occur if my understanding of change dynamics is accurate and the Vernal Project has the impact I think it would.

They would generate a tremendous amount of change activity every year and each activity could build on previous efforts. Also, though the number of activists would remain constant, I expect that the participants in these movements would become more and more knowledgeable and skilled over time, and consequently, their efforts would become ever more directed and effective. This qualitative change does not show on this figure.

Though progressive social movements would be quite large and prominent by Vernal Project Year 30, it would likely take a while for them to have much influence on most people. As described above, people are set in their ways and do not change their ideas or their activities until directly confronted with new situations. People usually only hear about ideas or events through the filter of the conventional news media, which typically characterizes alternatives as silly or distasteful. Embedded cultural conditioning and deep-seated emotional injuries are also difficult to recognize and eradicate. Therefore, it would take many years to significantly influence the majority of adults.

Diagram C indicates how Vernal graduates and movements for fundamental progressive change might affect the public. At first, these movements would have little impact. The vast majority of the public would hardly be affected (shown here by the lightly shaded area).*

However, as progressive movements grew in size, skill, and power, more and more of the public would be swayed. By Year 40, approximately fifteen years after progressive change efforts took off, I estimate more than half of the adult public would be at least moderately affected by progressive movements.

I use the term “moderately affected” to mean that people have heard progressive ideas and found them persuasive. Consequently, they would want to make their lives and their society better, and they would see that it might be possible to do so. They would also have at least some understanding of how society shapes their perspectives, how emotional and cultural conditioning constricts their behavior, and how societal institutions steer their lives. Many of them might only partially understand the implications of progressive ideas and might not fully support fundamental transformation of society. Still, they would try to act ethically and responsibly in accordance with progressive ideals, they would teach their children progressive ideas, they would usually vote for liberal or progressive candidates for political office, they would contribute money to progressive causes, they would patronize alternative institutions, and they would consider themselves liberals or progressives.

* In Figure C.8 in Appendix C, I estimate the extent to which fundamental movements for change would affect various age cohorts over this eighty-year period, including the effect of elders dying and new generations growing up in a changing world. The values of the curves displayed in Diagram C come from this analysis. The terms “hardly affected,” “moderately affected,” and “strongly affected” are described in more detail in Figure C.7.

As progressive movements continued to push for change over the next few decades, the number of people they would influence would continue to grow. By the end of Vernal Phase 3 in Year 60, perhaps 90% of adults would be at least moderately affected and 45% would be strongly affected (shown here as the darkly shaded area).

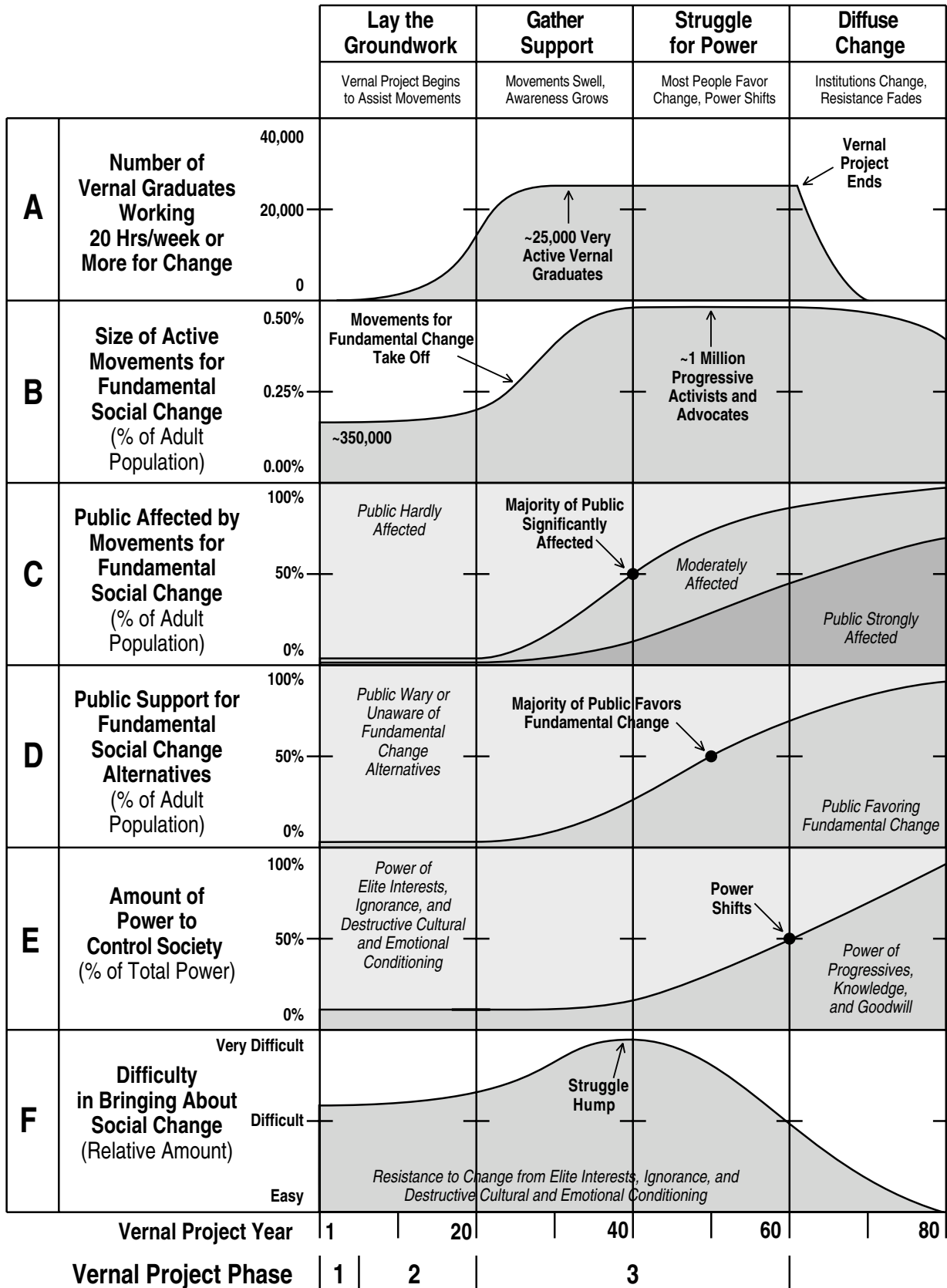
By “strongly affected” I mean people would be deeply connected to progressive ideas and activity, and they would expect and demand a good society. They would consider themselves strong progressives, and they would fully understand and support fundamental progressive transformation as well as nonviolent social change methods. They would have a deep and clear understanding of how society affects their perspectives and lives. They would strive to live up to progressive ideals at all times, and they would actively try to overcome their dysfunctional conditioning and emotional blocks. They would teach their children progressive ideas, they would consistently vote for progressive politicians, they would avidly support alternative institutions, they would conscientiously boycott destructive enterprises, and they would regularly contribute money to progressive change organizations. They would try to convince their family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors to do likewise. Some of them might also campaign for progressive politicians, lobby legislators, speak out, circulate petitions, attend hearings, attend rallies, and so on.

By Year 70, I estimate more than half of the adult population would be strongly affected, and most of the rest would be moderately affected. Only a small percentage would remain unaffected.

Based on the influence levels in Diagram C, Diagram D indicates the overall level of public support for fundamental transformation of society. At first, only a small percentage would even be aware of alternatives that differed significantly from conventional ideas or institutions. As progressive movements pushed for change and acceptance grew, support for fundamental change would grow. By Year 50, when about a third of the adult population was strongly affected by progressive movements and another third was moderately affected, I assume a majority would finally favor fundamental change and would actively support alternative institutions. By Year 80, after most of the transformation was complete, I estimate that more than 95% of adults would support fundamental change.

Diagram E tries to quantify who controls the major institutions of society. In this diagram, I indicate that even after five decades of powerful progressive social movement activity, the power elite, ignorance, the dominant culture, and everyone’s destructive emotional and cultural conditioning would continue to rule society. Although most of the public would support fundamental change by Year 50, it would take another decade of hard work for societal power to shift.

Figure 9.4: A Possible Scenario for Transformation of Society



Only after large numbers of people raised in the old society had grown old and died, large numbers of children had grown up surrounded by progressive alternatives, and a strong majority favored and pushed for fundamental change, would the power of progressive institutions, clear knowledge, and altruism grow to exceed the power of the power elite, ignorance, and destructive cultural conditioning. Once this shift occurred, by about Year 60, progressives would be able to refashion society's institutions more quickly and power would then shift even faster over the following few decades. Transformation could then be largely completed by Vernal Year 80.

Notice that the shift in power (in Year 60) would occur more than thirty years after the take-off of progressive movements. I estimate it would take more than three decades of sustained effort at a very high level of intensity to bring about this shift in power.

Diagram F shows my estimate of how difficult it would be to bring about change. When progressive change movements first began to have a significant impact, elements of the power structure would fight back vigorously. Moreover, everyone's fears about change, concerns about progressive alternatives, and internalized emotional injuries would arise. During this time (shown as a "struggle hump" on the diagram), it would become even more difficult than it is now to bring about progressive change. Only after a majority of the public was significantly affected (in Vernal Year 40)

Few things are impossible to diligence and skill... Great works are performed, not by strength, but endurance.

— Samuel Johnson

would it begin to get easier to bring about progressive change and we would begin to "slide over the hump." Only after a majority of the public supported fundamental change (in Year 50), would the level of difficulty drop back to the current "difficult" level. Only after the balance of societal

power had shifted to progressive forces in Year 60 would it become somewhat easier to make changes.

A Typical Failing Scenario

In contrast to this transformation scenario, Figure 9.5 shows my understanding of how progressive change movements typically fail to transform society. Each of the six diagrams shown here mirrors those in Figure 9.4. I have modeled these diagrams on the history of progressive change movements in the United States, especially the period from the 1950s to the 1990s. At the bottom of the figure, I indicate the historical years that resemble this scenario.

Diagram A indicates there is nothing equivalent to the Vernal Project in this scenario, so there are no Vernal graduates. Still, progressive movements periodically do take off whenever enough good organizing has laid the groundwork and some event (the Depression, the Vietnam War) fuels their growth. For example, the 1950s were relatively

quiescent, dominated by consumerism, militarism and McCarthyism. Long-term efforts in the Black community led to an upsurge in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-to late-1950s. Pacifists were able to launch the Ban-the-Bomb Movement in response to the Cold War, and the Beat Generation advocated a hip culture as an alternative to the dominant culture of "Father Knows Best" home life and "Organization Man" work life.⁷

In Diagram B, I show that social change movements take off and grow rapidly (mirroring the early and mid-1960s). However, as they grow, internal problems and external opposition beset these movements. Police infiltrators and provocateurs disrupt and discredit them, the conventional news media attack them, commentators belittle them, and infighting erupts within (just as it did in the mid- and late-1960s). Without the knowledge and support of Vernal activists, these progressive movements are victims of these corrosive effects. After ten years, there are as many people abandoning these movements in discouragement and disgust as are joining them. As the external attacks mount and internal dissension grows, the movements wither (as they did in the mid-1980s). After twenty or thirty years, they shrink back to about the same number of hardcore activists as before (as the movements of the 1960s and 1970s did by 1990).

Diagram C again indicates that it would take time for progressive movements to affect the public. Even as progressive movements begin to falter (as they did in the early 1970s), the public continues to be affected by them. However, without continued activist energy, conservative counter-movements undermine the effects (as the Reagan Revolution did in the 1980s). After progressive movements begin to shrink, their effect on the public also dwindles.

Overall, I estimate that less than half of adults are moderately or strongly affected by progressive movements before these counter forces shift public opinion back towards a conservative viewpoint. Many children are influenced during the time of expanded progressive movements (as many of us were in the 1960s and early 70s), but as they enter adulthood their expectations shrivel in the arid conservative climate of that time.

Diagram D shows that the percentage of adults who know about and favor fundamental change begins to grow with the rise of progressive movements. It grows as large as perhaps 25% of the population, but then, in the re-emerging conservative environment, it declines.

Since the percentage of people favoring fundamental change in this scenario never rises above 25%, movements for fundamental change are never able to wrest power from the power elite or seriously challenge people's emotional and cultural conditioning. As shown in Diagram E, the total power of progressive movements remains relatively low throughout this period and eventually sinks back to about the same level as before. The power elite, ignorance, cultural domination, and emotional conditioning remain firmly in control throughout the entire period.

Figure 9.5: A Typical Failing Scenario Without the Vernal Project

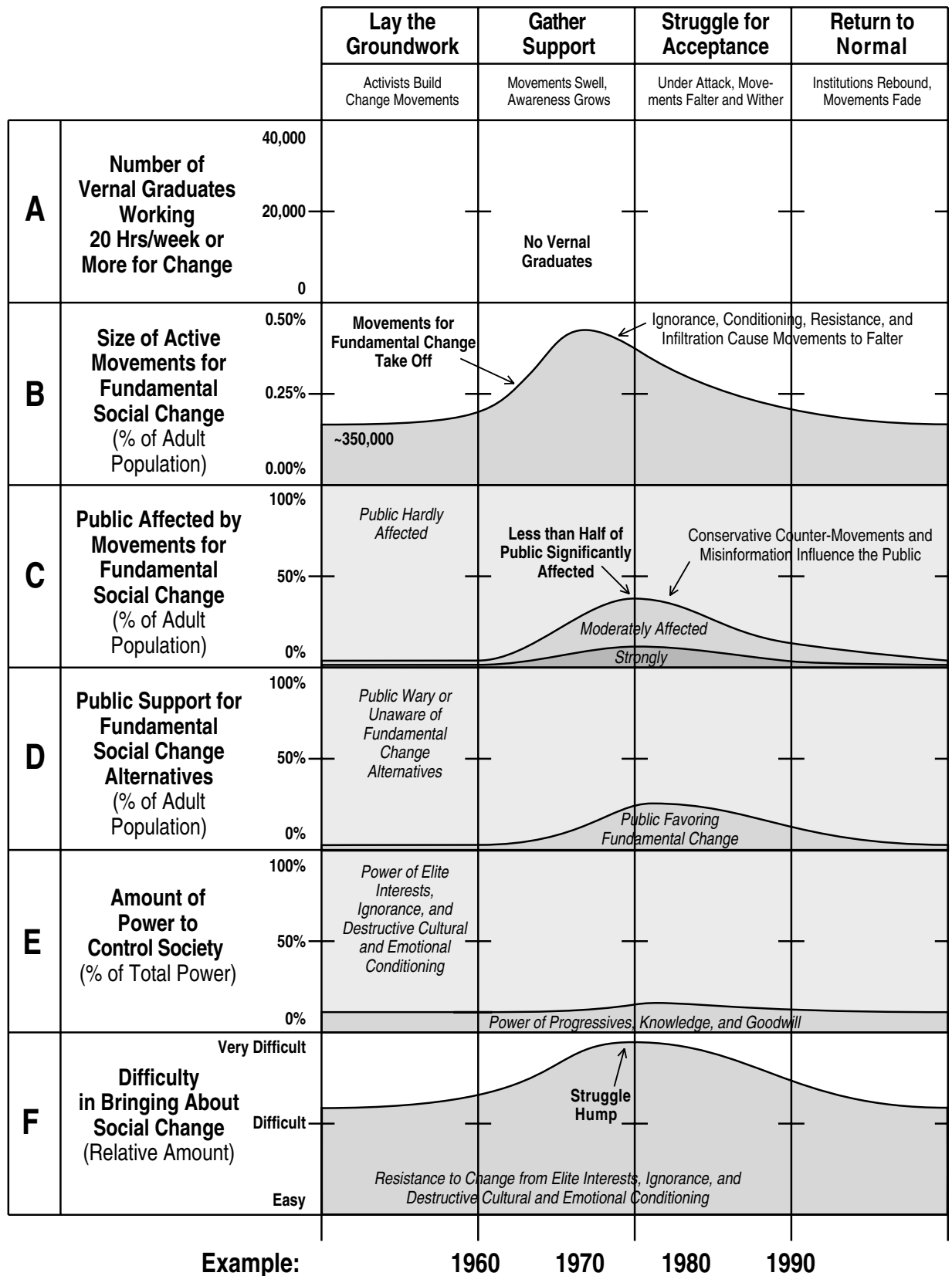


Diagram F shows that the resistance to change during the peak of movement activity increases the difficulty of bringing about change (the “struggle hump”). Then as progressive movements wane, resistance also wanes and the level drifts back down to the difficult level.

At the end, society is in about the same place as before. The situation then continues until the next set of social change movements arises.

The cyclic process depicted in this figure stands in stark contrast to the continually improving process shown in Figure 9.4. It illustrates the difference that I believe the Vernal Project could make. If the Vernal Project produced as many skilled and experienced activists as I assume, and if it could bolster progressive movements for change as much as I expect, then it would enable people of goodwill to finally overcome the combined power of elite interests, ignorance, destructive cultural conditioning, and dysfunctional emotional conditioning. The repetitive cycle of progressive change activity followed by failure and inactivity could shift to a dynamic of change activity leading to more positive change, then leading to even more positive change, and finally leading to a good society.

HOPE

Another Major Obstacle: Hopelessness

In Chapter 3, I described five main obstacles to progressive change. Throughout this book, I have hinted at another

obstacle that stems from the others and may be more important than all the rest: deep and widespread hopelessness. Whenever progressive activists try to bring about far-reaching, positive change, they discover how difficult it is to accomplish their goals. Opponents — who they thought might have some integrity — instead lie, cheat, steal, and attack them relentlessly. People they thought would join

them instead stand to the side in ignorance or confusion — or turn away in fear. Friends they counted on often flake out, burn out, or run away in fear or frustration.

In the face of such difficulties, it is easy for activists to become discouraged. As hopelessness grows, more activists give up and drift away, which makes it even more difficult to bring about positive change. Eventually, only the most hardened activists are left — only those who have steeled themselves to the seeming impossibility of their task and carry on anyway.

More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly. — Woody Allen

The Hope Factor

As you can see, the Vernal Project powerfully tackles this obstacle by painting a powerful vision of a good society and delineating a practical means of creating it. It also ensures there would be enough activists with enough skills and strength working for change over a long enough time to challenge effectively even the most entrenched, powerful, and unscrupulous opponents. With the Vernal Project in full swing, activists would know that there would be more than a million dedicated and skilled activists working for fundamental positive change at the same time that they were. They would see that, together, they had the wisdom and strength to overcome opposition. They would see that their efforts were steadily bringing about positive change.

I expect this knowledge would fill them with profound hope — probably more than most current activists have ever experienced in their entire change careers. This hope would likely excite and empower them to do their best work. It would help them persevere for decades through seasons of drought as well as plenty. I expect it would energize them enough and sustain them long enough so that they could finally achieve their goals.

It would also inspire many people that today are not particularly interested in working for social change to step out of their conventional lives and become activists, thus providing the large numbers necessary to bring about comprehensive change.

It is stupid to be naïvely hopeful, but it is also a mistake to underestimate the power of the human heart. When touched deeply and ignited to a feverish passion, people can hurl rivers into the air and entice mountains to dance.

SUMMING UP

Chapter 7 showed that if the Vernal Project were implemented as described in Chapter 6, it would generate a large number of skilled and experienced activists working diligently for decades. These Vernal activists would greatly bolster the work of other progressive activists, increasing the strength, knowledge, skill, and endurance of progressive change organizations, especially at the grassroots. I estimated they could generate a force for positive change that would be three or four times greater than now — with about a million activists working for change.

This chapter shows that by working steadily for many decades, Vernal activists would enable change organizations to inform, inspire, excite, and support millions of people to

Models/Precedents for Massive Social Change Movements

In considering how to bring about transformation of the United States, I have considered most of the large progressive movements of the last century including the following:⁸

- The Populist movement of the 1880s and 1890s.
- The Progressive movement from 1900 to 1920.
- The labor movement of the 1930s.
- The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.
- The Ban-the-Bomb movement of the early 1960s.
- The Free-Speech movement of 1964.
- The welfare rights movement (late 1960s to early 1970s).
- The anti-Vietnam war movement (late 1960s to early 1970s).
- The anti-nuclear movements of the 1970s and 1980s.
- The anti-U.S. intervention in Central America movement of the 1980s.
- The anti-toxic waste movement (late 1980s and 1990s).
- The women's liberation, men's liberation, and gay liberation movements since the 1970s.
- The current anti-globalization movement.

I have investigated some of the large cultural movements of the last century including the following:

- The religious awakening movements of the early part of the twentieth century.
- The free-love movement of the 1920s.
- The Freudian psychotherapy movement of the first half of the twentieth century.
- The human potential movement since the 1940s.
- The Beat movement of the 1950s.
- The counterculture of the 1960s.
- The New-Age spiritual movement since the 1960s.
- The ethnic identity movements since the 1960s.

I have also studied several previous networks of activists as possible models for the Vernal Project. Though instructive, none of these networks was as large or as comprehensive as the vision described here.

• In India, Mohandas Gandhi established a group of satyagrahis ("truth-seekers"), many of whom lived together in ashrams (spiritual communities). Gandhi exhorted them to adhere to a strict regimen of exemplary behavior and inspired them to courageous actions. By adhering to strict guidelines of action, the satyagrahis were able to inspire deep respect among their adversaries, and they were able to bring about significant changes in Indian society including ending British colonial control. Though very inspiring, serious differences between the culture of India and the United States limit this model for our purposes.

• The Committee for Nonviolent Action (CNVA), the Atlantic and Pacific Life Communities, Peacemakers, and Plowshares are networks of mostly religious pacifists who have engaged in courageous acts of nonviolent social change over the last five decades. Because of their religious nature (or, in the case of Peacemakers, their intense individualism) they have been limited in their numbers and whom they are able to influence.

• The Movement for a New Society in the 1970s and 1980s created a loose network of dedicated and experienced nonviolent activists working for social change. They were influential in inspiring and directing the anti-nuclear power and weapons movements and they built a strong base in their Philadelphia Life Center. However, the total number of MNS activists never exceeded a few hundred.

• Labor union officials and shop stewards comprise a large network of activists, many of them quite progressive. However, their field of focus and methods of change generally are limited to labor issues.

• Similarly, some progressive clergy serve as important organizers, but usually only within their church constituency.

• Greenpeace has several teams of activists that engage in powerful nonviolent direct actions. The activists who carry out these actions are trained extensively and their actions are carefully organized to create a big impact. Because of the nature and style of the actions, however, the number of Greenpeace activists is small. Their actions focus only on illuminating a situation, not on involving large numbers of people.

• Similarly, small numbers of EarthFirst! activists have engaged in intensive nonviolent actions in the last decade. These actions, suggestive of nonviolent guerrilla warfare, have also involved relatively few people.

• Ruckus Society trains activists to engage in nonviolent blockades, tree-sits, and banner hangings. Though some of their actions have been larger in scope (for example, the blockade of a World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 2000), these actions are still relatively small.

• Peace Brigades International sends trained volunteers into conflict areas of the world to stop conflict by nonviolent means (primarily by their presence and witness). Though effective, their efforts involve few people.

• There are also various networks of activists based on Marxist-Leninist ideologies or religious dogma. Though they espouse freedom, fairness, and compassion, provide some camaraderie for their members, and invoke the sanctification of Marx or God, they are often cultish, anti-democratic, intolerant, and violent. Though sometimes successful on their own terms, they are not particularly good models for this project.

work for progressive change. They would enable an unprecedented number of progressive campaigns to grow large enough and strong enough to win solid victories and to implement real change. This would stimulate even more effort and more victories. At the same time, Vernal activists would also help large numbers of people overcome their ignorance, dysfunctional emotional conditioning, and destructive cultural conditioning, enabling them to become self-confident, capable citizens. Over time, older conservative people would die and young people who expected and demanded progressive change would take their place. If the Vernal Project proceeded this way and it was as successful as I predict, it could fundamentally transform society in eighty years. We could create a good society.

The next chapter describes a specific timeline for initiating and implementing the Vernal Education Project.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 9

¹ This summary is based on Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 3rd. ed. (New York, The Free Press, Macmillan, 1983, HM101 .R57 1983), which, in turn, summarizes the results of over 3,000 studies in this field.

² The number of people adopting an innovation over time typically corresponds to a bell-shaped Normal curve — at first, only a few adopt, then there is a rush to adopt until half of the people have adopted, then the rate slows until the last few individuals adopt. The cumulation curve that corresponds to this Normal curve is S-shaped.

Theorists postulate that the number of new adopters traces a Normal curve because it is proportionate to the (multiplied) product of two values: the number of people who have already adopted and the number of people who are still potential adopters. Intuitively, this makes sense: as more people adopt an innovation, there are more people available to demonstrate the innovation to others and convince others to adopt it, so the number of adopters grows rapidly. However, after many people have adopted the innovation, there are fewer people available to be convinced. The adopters mostly interact with each other, not with potential adopters, so the rate slows.

An alternative explanation is that the change in growth rate corresponds to the degree that people are open to innovation. Like most other human characteristics, this tendency probably corresponds roughly to a Normal curve: some people want to be on the cutting edge of every trend, some people do not like to change at all, and most people are in between.

Note that the adoption of innovations does not *always* follow such a curve.

³ This section is based largely on Dennis Chong, “Coordinating Demands for Social Change,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July 1993): 126-141.

See also Dennis Chong, *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, HB846.5 .C48 1991).

⁴ The main student organization of the New Left, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), experienced this exact problem from 1965 to 1969, which led to its demise. See Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS: Ten Years toward a Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1973, LB3602 .S8363 .S24) for a detailed description.

⁵ Also, as Bill Moyer points out, during the take-off stage, activists may keep raising their goals so that by the time they achieve their original goal, they discount its value and focus only on what they have still not accomplished. Inexperienced activists may then grow demoralized and leave just when their change effort is most successful. See Bill Moyer, *The Movement Action Plan: A Strategic Framework Describing the Eight Stages of Successful Social Movements* (San Francisco, CA: Social Movement Empowerment Project [721 Shrader Street, 94117], 1987).

⁶ Currently, 61 percent of parents condone spanking as a regular form of punishment for young children despite research indicating that corporal punishment is harmful. Moreover, 57 percent of parents believe that even a 6-month-old child can be spoiled — a belief that is incorrect. Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, “Year 2000 Parent & Public Survey,” (734 15th St., NW, Suite 1000, Washington, D.C. 20005, 202-638-1144), October 2000. Their study surveyed 1,000 parents with children 6-years-old and younger. <<http://www.zerotothree.org/2000poll-results.html>>

⁷ “Father Knows Best” was a 1950s situation comedy television show that depicted a staid, middle-class lifestyle in the suburbs. William Hollingsworth Whyte’s popular book, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956, BF697 .W47), critiqued corporate culture and mass consumption.

⁸ For a list of references that describe these movements, see Chapter 12.