

**INFLUENTIAL
IDEAS**

Personal and intellectual influences leading to Lewin's paradigm of action research

Towards the 60th anniversary of Lewin's
'Action research and minority problems'
(1946)

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ABSTRACT

The idea of action research and social change was the last conceptual topic to engage Kurt Lewin's attention and energy prior to his untimely death in February 1947. In this article we commemorate the 60th anniversary of his 1946 paper 'Action research and minority problems'. In the present article, eight principles of action research which were extracted from Lewin's writings are presented and discussed. We attempt to show that the action research paradigm derived from four aspects of Lewin's personal and intellectual background: his personal history as a Jew and an immigrant to America; his field theory and its meta-theoretical principles; a deep commitment to the idea of democracy; and his theory of social change.

KEY WORDS

- action research principles
- field theory
- Kurt Lewin

He disclosed the basic character of science as the eternal attempt to go beyond what is regarded scientifically accessible at any specific time. To proceed beyond the limitations of a given level of knowledge, the researcher, as a rule, has to break down methodological taboos which condemn as ‘unscientific’ or ‘illogical’ the very methods or concepts which later on prove to be basic for the next major progress. (Lewin, 1949, p. 275)

Introduction

The idea of action research and social change was the last conceptual topic to engage Kurt Lewin’s attention and energy prior to his untimely death in February 1947. He first introduced the idea in 1946, in an article entitled ‘Action research and minority problems’. Subsequently, he elaborated on the idea in two articles that appeared in *Human Relations* (Lewin, 1947a, 1947b), as one of the journal’s founders and as a member of its editorial board. However, because of his sudden death, Lewin never systematically formulated the principles of action research. However, the ideas of ‘action research,’ ‘research in action,’ and ‘cooperative research’ were mentioned and utilized in several of his early writings and projects.

In this article, we will present and elaborate on eight principles of action research extracted from Lewin’s three last articles cited above. Based on evidence from literature by Lewin and others, we will attempt to show how the action research paradigm derived from four aspects of Lewin’s personal and intellectual background. First, being an immigrant, who fled from Nazi Germany as a Jew and was considered a minority group member. In turn this brought about discrimination and rejection and hence, his personal interest in applying action research to intergroup relations. A second source of influence on the conception of action research was his field theory and its meta-theoretical principles. The next major source of influence has been his deep ideological as well as practical commitment to the idea of democracy and its implications for education and for the understanding of the relations between the individual and society. The last source of influence on action research is rooted in Lewin’s theory of social change characterized by the three phases of unfreezing, moving and refreezing, which take place within the culture of the small group.

Figure 1 provides a schematic illustration of our argument regarding the sources that influenced Lewin’s notion of action research.

Based on Figure 1 below, we will begin with a description of Lewin’s personal history and a brief review of several points in his (1946) article on action research, which he published toward the end of his life. Afterwards, we will discuss the meta-theoretical principles of field theory (b), Lewin’s ideas of practical democracy (c), his views on the small group and social change (d), and the eight principles of action research (e). The discussion section will elaborate on these principles and link them with the four main sources that influenced Lewin’s con-

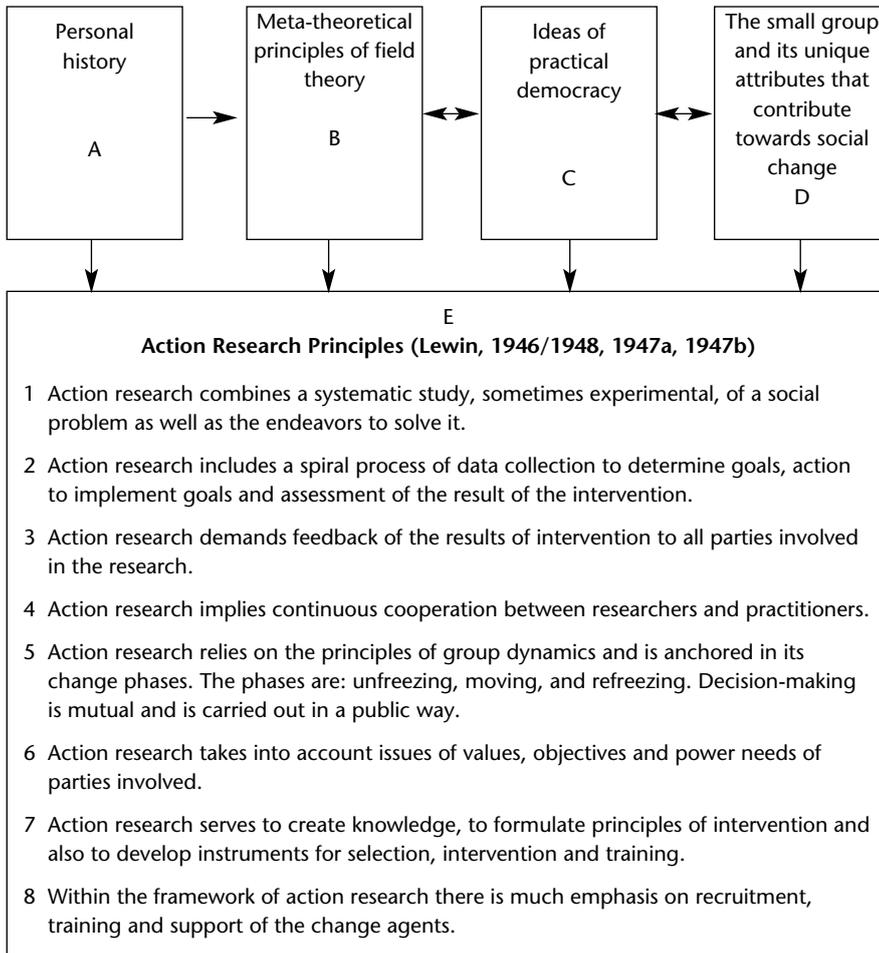


Figure 1 Personal and intellectual influences leading to Lewin's paradigm of action research

ception of action research, as reflected in the diagram. It should be emphasized here that the presentation of the action research paradigm as well as the personal and intellectual factors that contributed to it is 'through the eyes' of Lewin and in the context of his cultural and historical milieu. Lewin's ideas inspired many scholars in the domains of social and organizational psychology, as well as outside of those fields. Two seminal summaries of his work and its contribution to psychology were published by Cartwright (1959) and Deutsch (1968). Moreover, Lewin's influence on developmental psychology is reflected by Bronfenbrenner (1979), and his influence on communications studies is reflected by Rogers (1994). A recent handbook of organizational culture and climate refers

extensively to Lewin's contribution to this domain (Ashkanasy, Wilderom & Peterson, 2000).

a) Kurt Lewin: highlights of a personal and professional biography

Kurt Lewin was born in 1890 in Mogilno, a small town near Posen, now Poland and formerly Germany. He was the second of four children in a middle-class family that made a living from a farm and a small store. When Lewin was 14, his family moved to Berlin, and he spent most of his adolescence in an atmosphere of open discrimination against Jews, including direct manifestations of anti-Semitism (Lewin, 1992).

Initially, Lewin aspired to become a physician and began his studies in Freiburg, where he specialized in medicine and philosophy. In 1910, he abandoned the study of medicine and moved to Berlin, where he studied philosophy and psychology. In the First World War, Lewin served in the German army. He rose to the rank of lieutenant, and earned a military award for his excellent service after being wounded in the war. In 1916, he was granted a PhD degree for his doctoral research on 'The psychic activity on interrupting the process of the will and the fundamental laws of association'. Although he devoted his career to the social sciences, he was strongly influenced by philosophers such as Cassirer and Brentano, who provided the epistemological basis for Lewin's future theoretical and experimental work.

At the University of Berlin, Lewin developed an interest in Gestalt psychology under the leadership of Carl Stumpf, and was also influenced by colleagues such as Wertheimer, Koffka, and Köhler. Whereas his colleagues mainly developed theories on perception and its organization, Lewin started to apply theories on memory, will, and intention, and later also in the realm of group dynamics and intergroup relations. From 1921 to 1926, Lewin served as an assistant professor at the Psychology Institute of the University of Berlin; however, his promotion was difficult because of his Jewish identity. From 1926 to 1932, Lewin nonetheless served as a professor of psychology and philosophy at the Institute, and his work focused on performing several experiments on will, tension, needs, motivation, and learning. The experiments stand out even today as exemplary works in the literature of psychology.

Following a lecture series in Europe, the United States, and Russia, Lewin was appointed visiting professor at Stanford University in California. When he heard that Hitler rose to power in 1933, Lewin returned to Germany, wrapped up all of his affairs, and moved to the United States with his family. His sorrow about having to leave his intellectual and cultural roots behind are reflected in a detailed letter to his former professor Wolfgang Köhler, which he never sent

(Lewin, 1933/1987). In that letter, two themes stand out. First, Lewin described the suffering, injustice, and discriminatory acts which he personally experienced in Germany, even though he manifested a very patriotic behavior. Second, he emphasized his deep sorrow for being forced to abandon his personal and cultural assets and face an uncertain future in the US.

As a visiting professor at Cornell University, he negotiated a position at the Hebrew University, and prepared a plan for the establishment of an institute of psychology there. According to the plan, Lewin suggested that the institute conduct research on problems of acculturation among immigrants (Bargal, 1998). Even though the chair of psychology did not materialize, probably because of lack of resources, Lewin nonetheless decided to build his career in the United States.

In 1935–6, two of his important books were published. The first, *Dynamic theory of personality* (1935), is a compilation of articles which were formerly published in German. The second, *Principles of topological psychology* (1936), delineates his mathematical presentation of field theory. This book was dedicated to the Hebrew University in the following words: 'I dedicate this book to a young scientific center at the meeting of the East and the West where I hope new productive collectives will arise' (p. ix).

From 1935 to 1944, Lewin was on the faculty at the University of Iowa, where he conducted most of his theoretical and experimental work. His influence and inspiration attracted students, who made outstanding contributions to field theory. The students who worked with Lewin and later became the leaders of social psychology in America included Lippitt, White, Kelley, Deutsch, Horowitz, French, Cartwright, Zander, Festinger, and many others. During that period, several of Lewin's most famous experiments in social psychology were carried out.

Toward the end of the Second World War, Lewin moved from Iowa to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he established the Research Center for Group Dynamics (Lewin, 1945a). The research center was involved not only in research and theoretical projects but also in efforts to solve social problems. Through contacts with the American Jewish Congress, he invested considerable time and energy in dealing with problems of discrimination and minority and majority relations. The fact that Lewin himself was a minority group member as a Jew who still carried the experience of anti-Semitic humiliation in Germany, made him especially sensitive to these problems. His intense involvement in these issues brought about the development of a new research methodology, in an attempt to find solutions to social issues and contribute to the development of an intervention theory. This led to the conceptualization of action research (1946/1948), which he formulated during the last two years of his life (1945–7). The Research Center for Group Dynamics at MIT carried out many action research studies, as well as more basic research in social psychology (Marrow,

1969). Lewin's untimely death prevented him from formulating the action research principles more systematically. Taking into account his personal experiences as an immigrant and minority group member, it is understandable that he chose intergroup relations as the central issue for his action research interventions.

Action research and minority problems

In 1946, Lewin wrote the article 'Action research and minority problems' as part of an endeavor to improve intergroup relations in several American communities. Lewin, who was called upon to assist practitioners in assessing the outcomes of their interventions among those groups, realized that they would have to devise a different method of practice. In this regard, he observed:

The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management, or social engineering. It is a type of action research, comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that provides nothing but books will not suffice. This by no means implies that the research needed is in any respect less scientific or 'lower' than what would be required for pure science in the field of social events. (pp. 202–03)

The term 'social engineering' should be understood here in the context of Lewin's personal, cultural, and historical milieu as well as in the general historical context of the 1940s. Lewin's personal and scientific approach was the antithesis of the impersonal, mechanical behaviorism that 'social engineering' might imply. This image is strengthened by biographical sources, which portray Lewin as a humane, personal, and exceptionally sensitive human being (Allport, 1948; Cartwright, 1951; Lewin, 1992; Marrow, 1969). Notably, the term 'social engineering' was coined after Lewin launched the research center for group dynamics at MIT (Lewin, 1945a). At that time, he borrowed the term in a metaphoric sense from the physical realm where the engineering profession has the reputation of an applied science, with the know-how and techniques to effectively change the physical world. Lewin aspired to create an identical profession in the sphere of human sciences through research and theory in the social sciences. By no means was the term used to undermine the human aspect of individuals and social groups (for details, see Lewin, 1945a). Further to this argument, Lewin proceeded to delineate the research and knowledge required for practice, as distinguished from a more academic research objective:

Social research concerns itself with two rather different types of questions, namely the study of general laws of group life and the diagnosis of a specific situation. Problems of general laws deal with the relation between possible conditions and possible results. They are expressed in 'if so' propositions. The knowledge of

(general) laws can serve as a guidance for the achievement of certain objectives under certain conditions. To act correctly it does not suffice if the engineer or the surgeon knows the general laws of physics or physiology. He has to know too the specific character of the situation at hand. This character is determined by a scientific fact-finding called diagnosis. For any field of action both types of scientific research are needed. (p. 204)

In this statement, he clearly states that there are two origins of knowledge which are needed for practice or for action research: 'general laws,' which are the product of basic and academic research; and more specific knowledge, which derives from the 'specific character of the situation'. Here Lewin echoes a central meta-theoretical principle of field theory known as 'emphasis on the total situation', which we will relate to later in more detail. According to this principle, individual psychological processes are: 'always to be derived from the relation of the concrete individual to the concrete situation' (Lewin, 1935, p. 41).

An additional issue which Lewin dealt with in his article on action research and minority problems is the need to integrate social science in endeavors to conduct action research. Lewin realized that the issue of intergroup relations, which was the focus of his action research project, requires an interdisciplinary approach, or a holistic approach in Gestalt terms. In Lewin's own words:

Psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology each have begun to realize that without the help of the other neither will proceed very far It may mean . . . the cooperation of various sciences for the practical objective of improving social management. (p. 204)

The course of action research, in the eyes of Lewin, is very similar to the problem-solving process: 'It proceeds in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact finding about the results of the action' (p. 206). Indeed, Lewin highly appreciated the importance of an evaluation component in action research. Without evaluation, the people involved in the process do not know to what extent their objectives were achieved. The evaluation activity may sometimes bring about changes in methods of intervention, suggest different approaches to solving the problem, and even change the whole course of the research.

Lewin's paper is full of important insights regarding methodological considerations for recording the process of action research. He was aware that small units of observation, which may be adequate for laboratory research, are insufficient in the context of action research, which operates in real life situations. In that context, it is necessary to adopt methods of documentation similar to those used by historians, which focus on larger units of observation.

Lewin addresses the issue of cooperation between researchers and practitioners by stating: 'action, research and training are a triangle that should be kept together for the sake of any of its corners' (p. 211). He goes on to state that 'the

future progress of the social science and action research in it depends on the extent that large numbers of social scientists . . . are also equipped for the task of building productive, hard hitting teams with practitioners' (p. 211).

The article concludes with almost a prophecy as regards a system/ecological view of world events and their interrelations:

No one working in the field of intergroup relations can be blind to the fact that we live today in one world So far as interdependence of events is concerned we are living in one world Intergroup relations in this country will be formed to a large degree by the events on the international scene and particularly by the fate of colonial peoples Jim Crowism on the international scene will hamper tremendously progress of intergroup relations within the United States and is likely to endanger every aspect of democracy. (p. 215)

b) Meta-theoretical principles of field theory

Lewin's field theory reflects several intellectual influences to which he has been exposed. He was educated in the tradition of Gestalt psychology and drew considerably from the work of Ernst Cassirer (Lewin, 1949). As a consequence, Lewin formulated six meta-theoretical principles which characterize the field theory approach (Lewin, 1942/1951), and stressed that theory-building in psychology must always rest on those principles. In this section, we will briefly elaborate on five relevant principles: 1) an emphasis on the total situation; 2) the psychological approach; 3) the constructive versus the classificatory approach; 4) systemic versus historical causation; and 5) the dynamic approach. In the Discussion section, we will show how these meta-principles were incorporated into the idea of action research.

An emphasis on the total situation

According to Lewin, all psychological events (hoping, dreaming, thinking, planning, etc.) are conceived as a consequence of the interaction between the person and the environment. In Lewin's words, the psychological processes of the individual must 'always be derived from the relation of the concrete individual to the concrete situation and so far as internal forces are concerned, from the mutual relations of the various functional systems that make up the individual' (Lewin, 1935, p. 41). This principle leads the researcher to focus on understanding the immediate situation in which the behavior takes place. Field theory emphasizes the interdependence among variables that characterize a phenomenon. The method of field theory 'proceeds step by step from the general to the particular and thereby avoids the danger of "wrong simplification" by abstraction' (1936, p. 17).

The psychological approach

According to Lewin, all psychological phenomena must be explained in psychological terms. Consistent with the constructivist tradition, Lewin asserts that psychological phenomena are real, and that there is no need to search for neurological correspondence to emotions such as hope, aspiration, and skill. In Lewin's own terms: 'The field which influences an individual should be described not in "objective physicalistic" terms, but in the way which it exists for that person at that time' (1942/1951, p. 62).

The constructive versus the classificatory approach

Lewin derived this meta-principle from the philosophy of Cassirer, who suggested two different theoretical approaches for conceptualizing situations. The classificatory approach focuses on generalization from particular objects to an ideal object, which is an abstraction from the particular object. The constructive approach, by contrast, stresses relation concepts, as Lewin described them: 'The essence of the constructive method is the representation of an individual case with the help of a few elements' (1942/1951, p. 61). According to the constructive approach, no contradiction should exist between general laws and the individual case if appropriate scientific concepts have been provided. Thus, Lewin favored the method that preserves the uniqueness of a phenomenon but remains applicable to other instances which are similar to it.

Present time versus historical concepts of causation

Lewin described this meta-principle as 'behavior as a function of the field at the time it occurs' (1942/1951, p. 63). That is, past events count in the chain of causation only if they exert influence in the present time. According to Lewin, derivation of behavior from the past is not valid, because 'the past psychological field is one of the "origins" of the present field and this in turn affects behavior' (1942/1951, p. 64). This criticism is directed towards associationism as well as psychoanalysis. Lewin did not mean to underestimate past events and their effect on behavior, as he stressed that 'to link behavior with a past field . . . supposes that one knows sufficiently how the past event has changed the field at that time and whether or not in the meantime other events have modified the field again' (1942/1951, p. 64).

The dynamic approach

According to this meta-principle, behavior is conceived as emanating from a constant equilibrium, which is achieved as a consequence of the forces that impinge on people and on situations. Thus, individual or group behavior is analyzed in the

context of the forces which enhance efforts to achieve goals, while there are inhibiting conditions which prevent it. Thus, reality is characterized as an ongoing process of achieving equilibrium in a social unit, while the process is being disrupted by the ever-changing field of forces.

c) Ideas of practical democracy

Lewin did not relate to democracy in a systematic way, and therefore did not devote an entire article to the topic. However, many of his writings are imbued with his deep conviction and high respect for democracy, its merits, and advantages – especially compared to ‘laissez faire’ regimes, or to the autocratic regime that he was exposed to and fled from in Germany. He was aware that ‘nations need generations to learn the democratic way of living’ (1943/1999, p. 321); and he referred to British history in this regard, while criticizing the ‘mistakes which the German democrats made after 1918 when they tried to build up a democratic government with a people who were without democratic tradition and without adequately trained leadership’ (p. 321).

The action research components rely on democratic principles of cooperation among researchers, practitioners, and clients. They utilize rational, transparent procedures for decision-making, and have high regard for humanistic values.

The following are two relatively systematic definitions of democracy, formulated by Lewin in 1941 and 1945. In an article devoted to democracy and the school (1941/1999), Lewin wrote:

Democracy is opposed to both autocracy and laissez-faire. It includes long range planning by the group on the basis of self responsibility; it recognizes the importance of leadership, but this leadership remains responsible to the group as a whole and does not interfere with the basic equality of rights of every member. The safeguard of this equality of status is the emphasis on reason and fairness rather than personal willfulness. The right to influence group policy must have as its counterpart the willingness to accept majority decisions. (1943/1999, p. 325)

As emphasized in this definition and in many other writings by Lewin, the democratic leader is the most important gatekeeper of the group, organization, or culture. Beginning with his famous pioneering experiment on leadership styles in experimentally created ‘social climates’ in 1939, Lewin perceived leadership as playing a central role in democratic life. He even believed that Germany can culturally be reconstructed after the war with a group of democratically trained new leaders.

In 1945, Lewin formulated a working definition of democracy as follows:

It is the larger pattern of group life and group atmosphere . . . it includes . . . form of leadership, type of interdependence of subgroups, the way in which the policy of the

group depends on the will of its various sections or members This holds for a small group . . . for the life of a whole community or state, or for the organization of the world. (1945b, pp. 302–03)

Lewin perceived the democratic society as a pluralistic entity, and emphasized the need to grant freedom of expression and respect the diversity of the various groups. He formulated the definition in 1943, before 'cultural diversity' became a central coin of language in American society: 'The parallel to democratic freedom for the individual is cultural pluralism for groups' (1943/1948, p. 36). However, he was also realistic enough to express his views about restricting freedom of expression for extreme groups in society, an issue which continues to be debated to this very day. In this connection, he argued that democratic society has a right to defend itself against destructive, intolerant cultures: 'Intolerance against intolerant cultures is therefore a prerequisite to any organization of permanent peace' (1943/1948, p. 36).

We conclude this section with a statement by the prominent psychologist Gordon Allport, who wrote in the foreword to Lewin's book on *Resolving social conflicts* (1948): 'There is a striking kinship between the work of Kurt Lewin and the work of John Dewey. Both agree that democracy must be learned anew in each generation . . .'. And he then refers to 'the dependence of democracy upon social science . . . without freedom for research and theory as provided only in a democratic environment social science will surely fail . . .'. He concludes by further contrasting Dewey's and Lewin's contributions. The first is 'the outstanding philosophical exponent of democracy, Lewin its outstanding psychological exponent' (1948, p. xi).

d) The small group and social change

Lewin's approach to the topic of social change is elaborated in his last article 'Frontiers in Group Dynamics' (1947/1951). Under the subheading 'The creation of permanent changes' (p. 224), Lewin described social change as a change of force fields. As he put it:

. . . in discussing the means of bringing about a desired state of affairs, one should not think in terms of 'the goal to be reached' but rather in terms of change 'from the present level to the desired one' A planned change consists of supplanting the force field corresponding to an equilibrium at the beginning level L^1 by a force field having its equilibrium at the desired level L^2 . It should be emphasized that the total force field has to be changed at least in the area between L^1 and L^2 . (p. 224)

Lewin applied the principle of behavior as 'a function of the total situation' to his theory of social change, as follows.

'For changing a social equilibrium, one has to consider the total social field'

(p. 224). In the same vein, Lewin claimed that changing peoples' attitudes or behavior 'means trying to break a well-established "custom" or "social habit." Social habits usually are conceived of as obstacles to change' (p. 224).

He later termed those habits as 'inner resistance' to change. 'To overcome this inner resistance an additional force seems to be required, a force sufficient to break the "habit," to "unfreeze" the custom' (p. 225). Lewin's more general and sociological explanation for the presence of inhibiting or resisting forces is that:

social life proceeding on a certain level leads frequently to the establishment of organizational institutions. They become equivalent to 'vested interests' in a certain social level. A second possible source of social habits is related to the value system, the ethos of a group. (p. 225)

Lewin applied the force field approach to individuals and groups alike. On the individual level, he referred to the pressure that group members exert on individuals who deviate excessively from group standards. In that connection, group standards become a 'central force field which keeps the individual in line with the standards of the group' (p. 226). In this connection, Lewin used the following principle to summarize his view regarding the issue of social habit and resistance to change: 'The greater the social value of a group standard, the greater is the resistance of the individual group member to move away from this level' (p. 227).

Lewin believed that the best and most effective means for bringing about change in individuals is through group encounters. In his own words:

Experience in leadership training, in changing of food habits, work production, criminality, alcoholism, prejudices – all seem to indicate that it is usually easier to change individuals formed into a group than to change anyone of them separately. (p. 228)

Toward the end of the paper 'Frontiers in group dynamics,' Lewin characterizes the change process as follows: 'A successful change includes, therefore, three aspects: unfreezing (if necessary) the present level L^1 , moving to the new level L^2 , and freezing group life on the new level' (p. 228). When elaborating on each of the steps, he claimed that at the unfreezing stage the individuals who take part in the change process need to be emotionally stirred up many times. Allport (1954) referred to this process as catharsis, which he defined as the situation that is necessary before prejudices can be removed. In Lewin's words, unfreezing is important in order 'to break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness' (1947/1951, p. 225).

The 'moving' stage, or the change process, is best demonstrated through the principles of change, or reeducation. Lewin formulated these principles in 1945/1948, in his paper 'Conduct, knowledge and acceptance of new values'.

Principles of change: re-education

Lewin used the term 're-education' to describe a change process that is more than merely acquiring new information, habits, and social skills. It is a process of effecting change in self-perceptions and enabling individuals to overcome inner resistance. Because behavior patterns are anchored in norms and interpersonal relations originating in the groups to which one belongs or aspires to belong, successful re-education must include changes in one's own culture. In Lewin's own words:

It is a process in which changes of knowledge and beliefs, changes of values and standards, changes of emotional attachments and needs, and changes of everyday conduct occur not piecemeal and independently of each other, but within the framework of the individual's total life in the group. (1945/1948, p. 58)

Changes in values, in the self, and in one's social perceptions can only be effected if the individual is part of a small group. Lewin characterized the optimal conditions for change in terms of group norms. Then he described the social climate that must prevail, and the central role of the trainer. The group is the major leverage for changing the individual's attitude and behavior because:

only by anchoring his conduct in something as large, substantial and super-individual as the culture of the group, can the individual stabilize his new beliefs sufficiently to keep them immune from the day-by-day fluctuations of moods and influences to which he, as an individual, is subject. (1945/1948, p. 59)

In order for re-education to succeed, the group trainer must create a strong 'we feeling'. As Lewin formulated it, 'the establishment of this feeling that everybody is in the same boat, has gone through the same difficulties, and speaks the same language is stressed as one of the main conditions facilitating the re-education' (1945/1948, p. 67). An additional condition facilitating re-education is:

the creating of an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity within the group. Voluntary attendance, informality of meetings, freedom of expression in voicing grievances, emotional security, and avoidance of pressure may lead to changes in the individual's self-perception and social perceptions, including the stereotypes he or she holds, and even in his or her value system or super-ego components. (1945/1948, p. 65)

According to Lewin, provision of information is insufficient to change the individual's values and opinions about the other group. 'We know that lectures or other similarly abstract methods of transmitting knowledge are of little avail in changing his subsequent outlook and conduct' (1945/1948, p. 60). Moreover, he felt that even the experience of meeting representatives of different attitudes and values is not enough. In his view, only revision of self-perceptions and social per-

ceptions will enable the individual to perceive people and social events in a way that reaches beyond common stereotypes or false notions.

Lewin likened false stereotypes and prejudices to erroneous concepts and theories. In his view, the first step to changing those concepts and theories is to re-examine them. Re-examination should be carried out through an alternative perception of the self and one's social relations. It cannot be left to accident, and group experiences should be planned as a forum for it. Lewin suggested that through the group, one can acquire norms and means to learn new perceptions and behaviors, marked by a commitment to self-examination, active confrontation with one's own perceptions and perceptions held by the other group members, and active involvement in:

problem-solving, and a willingness to expose oneself to empirical examination of ideas and conceptions. A factor of great importance in bringing about a change in sentiment is the degree to which the individual becomes actively involved in the problem. Lacking this involvement, no objective fact is likely to reach the status of a fact for the individual concerned and therefore influence his social conduct. (1945/1948, p. 63)

The group within which the person experiences such reexamination is the vehicle for adopting new behaviors:

This principle of ingrouping makes understandable why complete acceptance of previously rejected facts can be achieved best through the discovery of these facts by the group members themselves. Then, and frequently only then, do the facts become really *their* facts (as against other people's facts). An individual will believe facts he himself has discovered in the same way that he believes in himself or in his group. (1945/1948, p. 68)

The third stage in the change process proposed by Lewin (1947/1951) is termed 'freezing', namely, following the group's advancement from level L^1 to level L^2 , group life will be determined on a new level. Lewin summarized this stage as follows: 'Since any level is determined by a force field, permanency implies that the new force field is made relatively secure against change' (p. 229).

Lewin applied these principles to the context of intergroup relations. At MIT's Center for the Study of Group Dynamics, he and a team of researchers were invited to assist the newly formed Connecticut Advisory Committee on intergroup relations in an attempt to train community workers to deal with intergroup tensions. The workshop lasted two weeks, and was perceived as a pioneer experiment. Lippitt (1949) summarized the project as follows:

The research techniques of social science were brought to bear on the ever-present task of training community leaders to deal effectively with the problems of intergroup relations. *Bringing together in a single cooperative adventure the skills and resources of both men of science and men of action, this project is an example of action research.* (p. ix; emphasis added)

e) Action research principles

Based on Lewin's writings (1946/48, 1947/51), the following are the eight main principles that characterize action research. Note that these formulations are suggested by the author of this article, and were never formulated in this way by Lewin.

1) Action research combines a systematic study, sometimes experimental, of a social problem as well as the endeavors to solve it

In contrast to the scientific model, where the researcher's main task is to study and understand the problem, the action researcher studies the problem and offers interventions for its solution. When studying the problem, the researcher may suggest data collection methods that are experimental in nature (Chein, Cook & Harding, 1948). In these cases, efforts are made to select participants who match the experimental and control/comparison groups. However, data collection is intended to achieve the main goal of responding to the problem, which is the purpose of the intervention. At this stage, the theoretical and research literature are surveyed to provide a solid conceptual basis for the action research. We are reminded here of Lewin's dictum: 'There is nothing so practical as a good theory' (1943–44/1951, p. 169).

2) Action research includes a spiral process of data collection to determine goals, action to implement goals, and assessment of the results of the intervention

Lewin conceived of action research as a problem-solving process which occurs in an on-going changing environment. Therefore, in principle, there is no end to the intervention because problems that need to be addressed arise all the time. Each problem-solving effort consists of the three stages mentioned above: data collection to decide the goals of the intervention; implementation of the goals through certain individual group or community/organization intervention; and evaluation.

3) Action research demands feedback regarding the results of the intervention to all parties involved in the research

Feedback is a term drawn from the open system terminology (Katz & Kahn, 1978), and was originally used for two purposes: as a correction mechanism, and as a means for choosing action directions. The literature dealing with therapy and change also emphasizes feedback (Rogers, 1957; Watzlawick, 1978). When a system is in action, like the intervention in action research, it may deviate from

the original course planned at the beginning. Feedback to the parties of the intervention may reveal deviations, generate alterations in the original plan, and expose incongruities in the process that can be corrected in real time. The emphasis here is also on the active role played by all parties in the research enterprise – including clients, who are usually excluded from power positions and do not have access to the information available to those in charge of the intervention.

4) Action research implies continuous cooperation between researchers and practitioners

In the conventional scientific model of research, the researcher is the director of the operation. She or he is sometimes the only one familiar with the research hypotheses, procedures for selecting participants, etc. In action research, by contrast, practitioners are equal partners in all the decisions arrived at in the research. The underlying principle of cooperation is that the participants should be responsible for decisions that affect their lives, and that they need to understand the rationale underlying the intervention. Being equal partners in the research project, and knowing the content and rationale for decisions that are made enable the participants to maintain high motivation.

5) The small group plays a central role for decision-making and for achieving change in people

Lewin perceived the small group as the most important vehicle for democratic decision-making. The small group is also the most effective means to achieve change in people (Coch & French, 1948; Forsyth, 1990; Lieberman, 1980). According to Lewin, the change process consists of three phases: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. The process through which the individual person is changed within the climate being created in the small group and its dynamics is described in detail in Lewin (1945/1948).

6) Action research takes into account issues of values, objectives and power needs of the parties involved

Because each party to the action research process has its own set of priorities and values, the only way for the research project to succeed is to deal openly with conflicts that arise. An ongoing process of managing and solving these conflicts guarantees that the research will proceed as planned. This is in contrast to a conventional research design, where the principal investigator usually has the sole power to make decisions and solve conflicts unilaterally.

7) Action research serves to create knowledge, to formulate principles of intervention and also to develop instruments for intervention and evaluation

Action research is expected to generate two kinds of knowledge: ordinary data collected in any scientific research project, and 'actionable knowledge'. Actionable knowledge is important not only for the intervention itself, but it is also expected that the knowledge gained through the intervention will improve the functioning of the particular group, community or organization. The instruments or packages and measurement devices used in the action research project may serve a group, an organization, and a community, even beyond the period of the intervention.

8) Within the framework of action research there is much emphasis on recruitment, training, development, and support of the change agents (the trainers)

Because action research strives to achieve social change, it is essential to invest in the change agents, who are the main means for effecting change in human systems. In Lewin's definition, action research is portrayed as a triangle: *training* is the first component, and the other two axes are *intervention* and *research*. In contrast to ordinary research, the role of trainers goes beyond collecting data and conducting the evaluation. In action research, trainers need to have a deep understanding of the participants in the intervention, and should have the appropriate means to achieve the goals of the research. Hence, it is essential to select appropriate trainers, and to provide them with guidance and support them throughout the intervention.

Discussion: Lewin's personal and intellectual influences as reflected in the action research paradigm

By conceiving and proposing the paradigm of action research as he published it in 1946, Lewin defied the academic establishment of psychology in a way, and perhaps even challenged the social science establishment as well. He deviated from the common methodological norm, which focused on the positivistic paradigm and enabled ivory tower scholars to 'intrude' in the realm of practitioners. By introducing action research as a methodology, Lewin essentially obliterated the boundary that existed between research and practice, and highlighted their interdependence.

The idea of action research evolved gradually in Lewin's mind. In his article 'Problems of research in social psychology' (1943–4/1951), he still spoke

about the applied versus the theoretical psychologist. He points out their close interrelations because ‘there is nothing so practical as a good theory’ (p. 169).

The energy that he devoted to action research during the final years of his life and in his efforts to establish the Center for Group dynamics at MIT attest to his real passion for the new paradigm (Lewin, 1945a). In her recollections of her father, Miriam Lewin (1992) wrote: ‘I believe doing social action research was in part his response to the tragedy of his mother’s death [Lewin’s mother and aunt were killed by the Nazis – DB]’ (p. 28). Lewin’s memory of the rampant anti-Semitism and discrimination in Germany, which he expressed candidly in his letter to Köhler (1933/1987), evidently provided the impetus for his efforts to alleviate discrimination and tensions among minorities in the US.

At the beginning of the article, we argued that Lewin’s conceptualization of action research was influenced by his meta-theoretical principles, his concepts of field theory, and his profound concern for democracy (see Figure 1). We will briefly describe how those components influenced the eight principles of action research mentioned above.

The first principle of action research deals with the interdependence between a systematic study of a social problem and the efforts at its solution. This is an example of the Gestalt perspective, which emphasizes the total context and the interaction between researchers acting in a concrete situation. First, it is necessary to study the situation. Then interventions can be applied to solve it. Here, one can also discern the social responsibility and commitment of the action research scientist working in a democratic society. Lewin was one of the founders of the Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). To this very day, the Society has been the only division of the American Psychological Association to address social issues from the perspectives of research, policy and action.

The second principle of action research reflects several components of Lewin’s intellectual background. The spiral process of data collection to determine goals, followed by implementation and assessment of the goals, reflects the dynamic nature of the forces in the field where the research-intervention takes place. These four steps – data collection, setting goals, implementation, and assessment of goals – also represent the problem-solving process (Dewey, 1910) which is the culmination of the human capacity for logical thinking and reasoning. Here, one can also identify an additional meta-theoretical principle of field theory. The ‘constructive versus the classificatory approach’ speaks for construction of the situation which is the focus of the research, rather than relying on a mechanical act of classifying the situation as a class of behaviors that are not based on authentic data.

The third principle of action research speaks for the equality of the research process, where all of the parties involved share information. This leads to the next principle, which speaks about cooperation between researchers and practitioners. Cooperation and feedback between people as individuals or in groups presup-

poses mutual respect and equality. These attitudes predominate among leaders and groups in a democratic climate, which encourages freedom of speech and 'space of free movement'.

The fifth principle embodies Lewin's credo about the central role that the small group plays in democracy. Society is made up of numerous and diverse groups. To quote Lewin's dictum: 'The parallel to democratic freedom for the individual is cultural pluralism for groups'. This speaks for the need to create harmonious intergroup relations in a heterogeneous, democratic society. However, the small group is also the cornerstone for reaching decisions in politics, in the family, in the community, and in organizations. The dynamics created within the group make it possible for the individual to grow, to be socialized, to reach effective decisions, and to plan activities. In this regard, we are reminded that the group leader's central role in this process is:

not to interfere with the basic equality of rights of every member. The safeguard of this equality of status is the emphasis on reason and fairness rather than personal willfulness. Every group member is expected to exert his or her influence on its activities. The prerequisite to it is that the group member is willing to accept majority decisions. (1993/1999, p. 325)

The sixth principle of action research also reflects Lewin's pluralistic perspective, which grants equal weight of opinion, ideology and power to all parties involved in the action research process. In operational terms, this means that decision-making regarding methods of intervention, the rationale for the intervention, and its implementation are arrived at in a democratic way.

The seventh and eighth principles focus on creation, formulation and codification of knowledge, as well as on selection, preparation, and support of the change agents serving in the action research enterprise. According to Lewin, it is neither sufficient, nor effective to know the 'general laws' of theory when we embark on an action research project. Rather, we have to 'know the specific character of the situation at hand'. Essentially, the character of the situation is determined by studying the present psychological field and the forces which impinge on it. In the attempt to understand and solve the situation, it is necessary to construct it and take its unique components into account. For example, in Bargal and Bar's (1992) action research interventions, which utilized dialogue groups to bring together Jewish and Arab youth, the researchers-facilitators relied on social psychological literature, but also had to create terms (constructs) to explain the situation. At the same time, they had to take into account the relations between the concrete individual (or group) and the concrete situation, in addition to considering how the content of the intervention changed after the last year of Intifada. In order to create a dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian youth in the format of action research, reconciliation interventions had to be introduced (Bargal, 2004).

Embarking from Lewin's notion about the difference between knowledge created through academic research and knowledge created for utilization in practice, new epistemological constructs have developed. Schon's (1983) 'reflection in action' and Argyris's (1993) 'actionable knowledge' are direct successors of Lewin's paradigm of action research. Whereas academic research aspires to be value-free and objective, Argyris claimed in his Kurt Lewin Award Lecture that 'action research at its core is normative and prescriptive' (Argyris, 1997, p. 812). Reason and Bradbury (2001), in their definition of action research, provide the explanation for this sharp conclusion. They write: '[Action research] seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people and more generally *the flourishing of individual persons and their communities*' (p. 1; emphasis added).

Kurt Lewin, the founder of the action research paradigm had 'to break down methodological taboos' to legitimize it as a research and intervention method. Reason and Bradbury's (2001) handbook and its rich variety of articles, point out in a convincing way that the 'unscientific' and 'illogical' became a legitimate and important means to 'pursue worthwhile human purposes'.

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