While C.C.I. was being established, Lewin was also busy in Cambridge launching the M.I.T. Research Center for Group Dynamics and assembling its Advisory Board. At a dinner he gave for board members, President Compton spoke briefly about the future of the social sciences and the research Center for Group Dynamics. Compton described his pride in having the center on the M.I.T. campus, adding that he hoped no one would ask for at least three years what the name meant, why the Center belonged at M.I.T., and what sort of work it was doing.

In staffing the new Center, Lewin relied heavily on the membership of the Iowa City Hot-Air Club—a phenomenon on which Hendry too would remark early in his association with Lewin. Once a student-associate-colleague of Kurt Lewin, always so! And though President Compton might be unsure of what was to go on at the M.I.T. Center, Lewin was not. In an article published in the September 1945 issue of Sociometry, he outlined what he conceived to be the objectives of the institution.

He wanted to reach beyond the mere description of group life
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and to investigate the conditions and forces which bring about change or resist it. He meant to look at group life in its totality, not just at individual instances of it. He insisted that any research started at the Center would have to take into consideration all aspects of group behavior. In addition, any study put in motion would seek to employ new approaches, avoiding hackneyed methods as well as traditional categories and points of view.

The chief methodological approach would be that of developing actual group experiments, especially experiments of change, to be carried on in the laboratory or in the field. The importance of theorizing and conceptualizing was emphasized by Lewin. The Center was not going to concern itself with the mere gathering of data; indeed, he hoped that theorizing would steadily keep ahead of all data gathering. He felt it necessary that no field experiment be made until everything was "ready" for it, because the efficacy of field experiments depended so greatly on just the right social situation.

He wanted to make sure that his staff of experimenters were themselves an integral part of the situation they proposed to explore. Only as they themselves were involved in the planning and execution of data gathering could the experimenters attain the insight and interest required for success.

Finally, Lewin hoped to avoid any idea that the purpose of the Research Center was to train experts in "brainwashing" or "group manipulation." Experiments conducted by the staff and students at the Center should not only have for their purpose overcoming philosophical prejudices and technical difficulties; they should also be justifiable as honorable and necessary social procedures. "Group manipulation" would directly contradict the purposes of the Research Center for Group Dynamics, and Lewin wanted no part of it.

He also formulated his justification for locating the Center at M.I.T., rather than at a large university with a strong program in the social sciences and the humanities. "The main purpose of engineering," he declared, "is the release of human energies and the enhancement of man's power of dealing with nature—a goal for which the development of machines has provided the principal means. In the course of doing this, engineering has not completely
overlooked the human element heretofore; but it has had a tendency
to minimize it.” To Lewin, a factory was much more than a struc-
ture of production lines; it was the “creation of a group with certain
patterns of leadership, and any progressive factory management had
to consider ‘total culture,’ which meant all aspects of group life.”

Lewin and his family left Iowa City for good in September 1944.
They spent four months in Washington, where Kurt finished his
work with the OSS, and moved to Newtonville, Massachusetts, at
the end of January. The family’s household goods, much of it sal-
vaged from Germany a decade or more before, preceded them on a
moving van. They went last in the family automobile and spent a
night en route at the Bronxville, New York, home of Charles
Hendry and his family. Their arrival at the Hendry home was an
occasion that the hosts have not forgotten.

The Lewin family car appeared in the Hendry driveway “loaded
as one would load a covered wagon heading for the Western fron-
tier of old.” To Hendry’s utter amazement, out of the car and from
the midst of all its gear climbed Lewin, Mrs. Lewin, their two chil-
dren, and “a huge dog.” Hendry still cannot imagine where the dog
had been “stowed away.”

“Unusual efforts had been made because we were very proud to
be entertaining so great a scientist and so warm a friend and col-
league.” But alas for the celebration! “At a crucial moment when
water was required for the preparation of the dinner, Mrs. Hendry
discovered that the pipes had frozen. Amateur efforts to thaw them
almost burned down the house, and the meal finally proceeded only
after water was borrowed from a neighbor. But Lewin being Lewin,
the mishap went almost unnoticed in the merriment, enthusiasm,
and warmth that his presence as usual generated.”

Pioneers in Group Dynamics

Lewin hoped to get the new Center at M.I.T. into full operation by
the fall of 1945. His newly appointed staff was asked to set up
residence as quickly as possible. Marian Radke was the first, arriv-
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ing about the same time as the Lewins. Festinger and Lippitt came a little later. Cartwright was the last, and the group celebrated with a festive get-together at the Lewin home Thanksgiving Day.

All five faculty members settled within a few blocks of each other in Newtonville, so that they could get together informally in the evenings for work and conversation. The following morning they usually commuted together to Cambridge. The staff Lewin had chosen were all under thirty-five years of age. All had worked with him at Iowa, and all had participated in one way or another in the research that laid the groundwork for the new Center. They shared a Lewinian point of view, but each brought a particular specialization in such things as personality development, intergroup relations, laboratory methods, action research, training in field experimentation, and survey techniques.

The famous Tuesday seminar, or Quasseltrippe, which the staff had been part of in Iowa, was re-established. The discussions initially centered on Lewin's developing ideas about group dynamics, his notions of social space as contrasted to life space, his involvement in expanding the theory of quasi-stationary equilibria to the process of social change, the growth of prejudice in young children, the origin of self-hate, and other practical social problems. Informal meetings were held almost anywhere and at any time of the day or night. Discussions took place while driving through heavy traffic, during evenings at the Lewin home, or on train trips between Boston and New York. The pace for Lewin was particularly hectic since he was carrying the major responsibility for organizing both the M.I.T. Center and the Commission on Community Interrelations in New York. The staff helped in such diverse activities as planning the research for both organizations and simultaneously establishing the doctoral training program at the university.

M.I.T. provided an ideal institutional setting for Lewin. Its flexibility with respect to administrative arrangements permitted him to design the Center's program as he thought best. He was comparatively free to pursue his interests wherever they might lead and he responded to this opportunity with great excitement. The Center was located in the Department of Economics and Social Sciences, which had little concern for disciplinary boundaries within the
social sciences. This was perfect for Lewin, who, being eclectic about approaches to design and methodology, found this setting ideal for the varied research interests and preferences of his group.

Lewin worked closely with Professors Douglas McGregor, Charles Myers, and other faculty members of the Department of Economics and Social Sciences at M.I.T. Equally close working relations were established with Henry Murray, Gordon Allport, and others at Harvard. Several pre-doctoral students, who were also research assistants, soon arrived and joined the seminar sessions, which now grew to a dozen or more. The pre-doctoral group took about half of their courses at Harvard under an inter-university arrangement for graduate work between the two universities.

The offices of Lewin and his staff were close to each other and there was a great deal of running back and forth between rooms. Lewin frequently stuck his head into one of the offices and asked for help in writing a research proposal, interviewing a graduate student, or acting as host to some prominent visitor.

An increasing number of students came from the Harvard Graduate School to take courses at the new center at M.I.T., and Lewin was pleased when at the end of the first year he was able to get additional funds to add John R. P. French, Jr., to the faculty. French had studied under Lewin and, like the others, found it easy to adjust to the shift from student to colleague.

Among the faculty members relatively little interpersonal competitiveness was evident compared to what one might have expected. Lippitt believes that it was a combination of Lewin's leadership, and the cohesion generated by the sense of the importance of their mission, that reduced the frequency and intensity of interpersonal and role conflicts.

"Those of us who assembled in Cambridge at the end of the war to embark on this new venture thought of ourselves as pioneers," says Cartwright. "We were members of an organization with no history or established tradition and with few precedents anywhere in the social sciences; we were committed to the creation of new

techniques of research and the utilization of established procedures in investigating new kinds of problems; we thought that the term 'group dynamics' could be made to refer to a reasonably coherent field of knowledge; we established a new program of graduate training for a Ph.D. in 'group dynamics' and we shared, in varying degrees, a rather uncommon view of the proper relation between social research and social practice."

The handful of people who made up Lewin's staff were aware that they were charting new territory and, indeed, carving out a whole new discipline in the behavioral sciences. But they were not without advantages. When the Center was established at M.I.T., few academic institutions existed with comparable experience in conducting organized research programs. M.I.T. had already developed administrative machinery making possible the organization of research projects involving large numbers of people. While financial support was always a problem, the Center did get support from such prestige organizations as the National Institute of Mental Health, the U. S. Air Force, the Field, Rockefeller, and Carnegie foundations.

Considerable attention was given to the proper relation between social research and social action. Ultimately, Lewin knew, the amount of support any research organization received would depend on the practical value of that research. At the same time, he and his staff were aware that too great a concern for immediate results could retard the scientific advances necessary for long-range usefulness. Lewin aimed to achieve the kind of balanced program at M.I.T. that took into account both the necessity of verifiable theory and the practical requirements of society. At the same time, Lewin did not hesitate to plan basic research which had no immediate application to real-life problems. The creation of an empirically verifiable theory, Lewin knew, was the essence of science; research, therefore, had to be guided by the need to develop an integrated concept of the processes of group life. Without a vigorous program of basic research, he felt, the other types of research would become sterile.

From this group's discussion six major "program areas" gradually
emerged to give coherence to the total undertaking of the Center. The first area related to group productivity. Why were group enterprises so frequently inefficient or ineffective in getting things done? A series of experiments was subsequently begun to analyze the complex problems of the determinants of group efficiency. These included Lippitt’s study, “The Strategy of Socio-Psychological Research in Group Life,” Cartwright’s “Psychological Economics,” French’s field experiments in “Changing Group Productivity,” and Festinger’s laboratory experiments on “The Role of Group Belongingness.”

A second program area dealt with communication and the spread of influence, with much of the research deriving from a housing project for married student veterans at M.I.T. One study was conducted by Festinger, Stanley Schachter, and Kurt Back. Other studies in the area of communication were conducted by Lippitt, French, Gordon Hearn, and Morton Deutsch. “A Study of Rumor: Its Origin and Spread” was made by Festinger and Cartwright.

Social perception—closely related to communication—was a third area of investigation at the Center. One topic closely studied was the way in which a person’s group roles and memberships affected the manner in which he saw social events. The nature of the process was studied by David Emery in a doctoral dissertation on industrial role and social perception, by Ronald Lippitt and David Jenkins, in terms of “Interpersonal Perceptions of Teachers, Students, and Parents”; by Harold H. Kelley in “The Warm-Cold Variable in First Impressions of Persons”; and by Albert Pepitone, on “Motivational Effects in Social Perception.”

The field of intergroup relations, in which Lewin was already deeply involved through C.C.I., comprised the fourth major program area at M.I.T. Lewin sought to integrate the research at M.I.T. in this area with the work of the American Jewish Congress commission. He knew how inadequate society’s ability was to reduce intergroup conflict. He was also deeply aware of how much more had to be known about the forces which produced conflict or harmony between different races and religions and how they could be controlled or directed. Action research offered a promising begin-
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The fifth program area dealt with group membership and individual adjustment. In his articles on the psycho-sociological problems of a minority group, on bringing up the Jewish child, and on self-hatred among Jews, Lewin had emphasized how personal self-esteem was influenced by the position in a status system of the group to which a person felt most strongly attached. If a person's racial, religious, or ethnic group was held in low esteem, he often had a low opinion of himself. Similarly, a high evaluation placed on a man's group by society as a whole tended to make him feel secure and worthy of approval.

Finally, the Research Center marked out the sixth area for study; the training of leaders and the improvement of group functioning. Of particular concern were the tasks of introducing change and of overcoming resistance to change. In his paper "Conduct, Knowledge, and the Acceptance of New Values" (written with Paul Grabbe), Lewin had pointed out that, while resistance to change arose almost inevitably when a modification of a group's customary procedures was attempted, it did not necessarily follow that change had to cause as much disruption as it often did. Much of the disruption was the result of inappropriate procedures in the effort to introduce change—for example, a failure to solicit the participation and planning of those whose jobs, responsibilities, or schedules were to be changed.

The role of the leader was recognized by Lewin as vital in the process of introducing changes needed to improve group life. At Iowa, Lippitt had done his experimental study of the effect of democratic and authoritarian group atmospheres, and Bavelas had also done a study at the Harwood plant which he discussed in his paper "Morale and the Training of Leadership." Both studies demonstrated that leadership skills could be identified and taught. At M.I.T. particularly promising results were obtained from experi-
ments in training not single leaders but leadership teams in groups. Among those who participated in these studies were Lippitt, French, Kelley, Pepitone, Zander, and Pearl Rosenberg.

If Lewin was concerned with communication and the spread of influence as a problem in the behavioral sciences, he also recognized how essential it was for the advancement of science itself that there be a free flow of communication among scientists. While there was adequate communication within each discipline, there was little opportunity for a psychologist to know what political scientists were doing, for example, or for sociologists to be exposed to recent thinking in education. Lewin, therefore, encouraged his associates and students to take advantage of opportunities for personal interaction with colleagues in other disciplines by frequently attending meetings of related professional societies. The Research Center itself also sponsored a number of interdisciplinary conferences.

Lewin attracted to M.I.T. many brilliant students, among them was Simon Herman, who came from South Africa and who later went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, as Lewin himself had wanted to do many years back. Herman arrived in the United States to do his postgraduate work. He was intent on seeking out Lewin in the hope of studying under him. The two met in January 1945 in New York. Herman recalls “It was agreed that I would join him as one of his research assistants at the Research Center for Group Dynamics, which was then in its planning stage. To work under Kurt Lewin in that great experiment was an experience that profoundly influenced my understanding of the whole field of human relations.”

From Canada came Gordon Hearn, a graduate of George Williams College, who left his post with the Y.M.C.A. in order to study with Lewin for his doctorate. Hearn’s memories of the time he spent as a student at the Center provide another glimpse of Lewin in the teacher-student relation. Hearn had considerable experience in group work but little formal training in psychology. As he laughingly relates, “Lewin made my education a project for the entire faculty.” In addition to his regular graduate courses, the new student received special tutoring in individual psychology from Radke and in group psychology from Festinger. Lewin himself set Thursday afternoons as his time for regular conferences with Hearn.
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Teacher and pupil met out-of-doors to walk and talk up and down the banks of the Charles River. Lewin instructed his secretary that he was not to be disturbed during these meetings as he needed the exercise. But Hearn adds, “I suspect he knew I needed all the help I could get.” The sessions were a sort of two-man Quasselstrippe, with Hearn telling Lewin what he was doing in the program, what ideas he was exploring, and what conceptual problems he was facing. As a rule, the pupil’s exposition released a stream of creative suggestions and comments from the teacher. “I’d listen and build on the discussion, and when our walk was ended, I’d have a dozen new ideas to explore and new problems to tackle.” Recognizing that his was a unique opportunity, Hearn always tried to make careful preparation. “A week later, when we resumed our walk, I’d be eager to show him what I’d done with the problems and questions he’d posed—and he was exploring some new train of thought. It was a memorable experience.”

Another student was Morton Deutsch who first heard of Lewin while at C.C.N.Y. Lewin’s Dynamic Theory of Personality excited him “enormously,” as did J. F. Brown’s Psychology and the Social Order, which articulated Lewin’s theories of social psychology. Torn between social and clinical psychology, Deutsch arranged for interviews with Lewin and Carl Rogers. He met Lewin for breakfast on V-J Day in a hotel lobby in New York. Lewin was late and suffering from a severe sunburn. Deutsch remembers Lewin as “captivating and charming” as he described the Research Center at M.I.T. “His facial glow was not only from his sunburn,” Deutsch reports. “He communicated an intense enthusiasm and the feeling of being engaged in work that was scientifically pioneering as well as socially significant. He was irresistible. M.I.T. was the place. I had to be there.”

Deutsch did not regret his choice. At M.I.T., Lewin created a stimulating and fruitful atmosphere for graduate work. As soon as a student appeared, he was immediately involved in a research project in a colleague-like relationship with a faculty member and given considerable responsibility. “Friendly but sharp controversy about research and theoretical issues was the norm in the faculty-student seminar on ongoing research,” Deutsch says. The sense of being
part of an elite scientific group gave Lewin’s graduate students at M.I.T. an unusual élan—a feeling created and sustained by Lewin’s gentle but enthusiastic personality, his deep commitment to the relevance of science, and his way of thinking about psychological questions.

Harold H. Kelley chose to study with Lewin at the urging of Stuart Cook, Director of the Commission on Community Interrelations. Kelley, like the other graduate students, attended the weekly seminar given by Lewin. Though he had received his M.A. in psychology at the University of California in Berkeley, under Ralph Gundlach, and had had extensive experience in the Army working with Cook, John Lacey, and others, Kelley felt himself ill-prepared for what he recalls as the “exotic, specialized stuff that Lewin covered—topological and vector analyses, Aristotelian vs. Galileian modes of thought, and a whole new approach to research procedures. “I couldn’t see the forest for the trees,” Kelley now confesses. “I lacked perspective to realize the value of the studies, not for what they proved but for the problems they tackled and the questions they raised.” Yet Kelley vividly describes as “exciting” interaction the planning sessions he attended while serving as Marian Radke’s research assistant. “He imparted such enthusiasm to us about our own project that sparks seemed to fly as we discussed various possibilities.”

Looking backward nearly a quarter of a century later, Kelley now believes that Lewin exerted “more influence on the directions of social psychology than any man before him.” This influence, according to Kelley, was “not in terms of specific concepts or results—how could it be, if social psychology is to advance?—but in terms of level of theoretical analysis (the interpersonal and the socially relevant intrapersonal) and general approach (theory-guided experiments).”

John Thibaut was another research fellow at M.I.T. Before the war he had been a graduate student in philosophy at the University of North Carolina. Returning to Chapel Hill in March 1946 after military service, he took a reading course with J. F. Dashiell, the chairman of the Psychology Department. One day he told Dashiell
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of his plans for continued study in psychology at Yale. Dashiell replied that he thought Lewin's new Research Center at M.I.T. would be more appropriate for him. Although Dashiell—an eminent figure in psychology—was a behaviorist and an "objectivist," he expressed great admiration for Lewin's work. "He convinced me on the spot and I mailed off a letter the same day asking for the application forms," Thibaut says.

At M.I.T. in the fall of 1946, Thibaut was assigned to Lewin as his research assistant. "Lewin talked and my job was to listen and later to set down as accurately as I could the content of what he had said. I was encouraged to question him and to develop further any of his ideas, but I don't recall that I was ever able to do much along those lines. On those afternoon walks he talked on a great range of topics in social psychology but he concentrated on the ideas of quasi-stationary equilibrium and of a psychological ecology—the first formulation of the ideas later published posthumously in his article 'Frontiers in Group Dynamics' in the first two issues of Human Relations."

Today Thibaut finds it hard to characterize Lewin's influence on psychology, not because it is difficult to find but because "it has been so pervasive." Whatever the trouble in describing the nature of Lewin's influence, Thibaut has said, "it is not so difficult to understand why he was influential. He had an uncanny intuition about what problems were important and what kinds of concepts and research situations were necessary to study them. And though he was obsessed with theory he was not satisfied with the attainment of theoretical closures but demanded of the theory that its implications for human life be pursued with equal patience and zeal."

Lewin rarely lost touch with former students. He maintained close contact with those on the staff of the Center and kept in touch with others through correspondence and intermittent visits. Roger Barker came to see Lewin from Clark University. Cambridge being much more accessible from Worcester than Iowa City. Alex Bavelas had joined the M.I.T. staff and often drove to Lewin's house in Newtonville to get his counsel on some of his own knottier problems. "We'd walk up and down in the snow in front of the Lewin
house, Lewin talking and gesticulating and drawing excited diagrams in the snow. Lewin was not hesitant to look at a small thing, probably because he often saw in it a meaning that others had not seen. He was not insecure about anything and so didn’t care whether it was a full-dress or half-dressed experiment. The point was that it was interesting.”

Then there was always the family. Lewin had housed them in a big, rambling, quite old Newtonville cottage. Sundays he planned to spend with the family. Too often these Sunday plans were interrupted by the constant ringing of the phone and long telephone discussions. But Lewin always looked forward to these days at home—even though his work took most of his free time.

In sheer numerical terms, the output of published doctoral dissertations, experiments, and research reports at the Research Center for Group Dynamics at M.I.T. (many of them finished at the University of Michigan, to which the Research Center was transferred after Lewin’s death) is formidable—some 125 papers in all. When added to almost as many published during the same period under Lewin’s aegis at the Commission on Community Interrelations, the total is unprecedented among any group of psychologists.

In commenting on Lewin’s influence as a teacher and intellectual leader during this period, George Mandler declared that Lewin’s students and associates at M.I.T. comprised “an honor roll of current psychology.”