CHAPTER 22
UNIFYING THEMES AND THE LAST DAYS

By the fall of 1946 the continuing C.C.I. studies of the nature and causes of tensions between people and the methods by which these tensions might be released had received wide recognition. The authoritative *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* published a special issue that dealt with the subject "Controlling Group Prejudice." Almost half the articles presented were by C.C.I. staff members or advisers, and Dr. Charles Johnson of Fisk University wrote, "The most significant recent undertaking in this field [group prejudice] is the Commission on Community Interrelations." Numerous other articles appeared in professional journals and in popular magazines.

Lewin, now more than ever, was in close contact with the "gatekeepers" of society. He and the C.C.I. staff were often called on to advocate policy, initiate action, and participate in setting goals for changing major social situations.

During this period Lewin was becoming ever more concerned with the problems of the Negro and the methods by which the attitudes of blacks and whites toward each other and, more impor
tant, the Negro's attitude toward himself could be changed. In a number of unpublished papers and talks, Lewin pointed out that the behavior of the American Negro is based on an image of himself that was shaped and transmitted over three centuries of collective history—and the first three years, or perhaps less, of his personal history. This self-image must be changed, he said, if the collective and personal history of the Negro were to take a new and positive direction.

He believed that the Negro who is determined to face the challenge of changing his self-image must have the courage to begin with the upbringing of his children; the courage to deal candidly with the black as well as the white causes of their condition and how to overcome them. But the Negro parent who seeks to raise his children's sights must improve his own self-image as well. Adults as well as children, confused by their status—as virtually all members of minorities are likely to be—feel unsure about themselves. They need help in defining their images of themselves as members of a group seeking a better future; in distinguishing between those situations in which the fact of their belonging to a minority culture is pertinent and those in which it is irrelevant; and in appraising what they share and what they do not share with the white culture.

Minority-group members, Lewin maintained, will rapidly learn to overcome their shortcomings if they can be induced to face them. It is neither healthy nor helpful, then, to meet shortcomings by crying "Prejudice!" Negroes can help themselves more, not less, by facing the statements that many of them are satisfied with low achievement, are apathetic toward self-improvement, have a high crime rate (especially for crimes of violence), often create disciplinary problems in school, fail to support their own organizations, and too frequently depend on the generosity of whites. Because he knows these statements are at least in part true, the Negro harbors a depressed self-image. To lift it he must recognize the reason for this partial truth, so that he may overcome it.

"To reverse self-segregation," Lewin said, "a minority should demand substantial sacrifices from its members. Sacrifice gives each member a greater stake in the group; he will not falter in a cause to
which he has given so much of himself.” Lewin’s views add up to the simple proposition that people must have a hand in saving themselves; they cannot and will not be saved from the “outside.” Interestingly enough, the same principle explains one of the basic rules of psychoanalysis: it does no good for the therapist to deduce the relevant facts and explain them to his patient; the patient must discover them for himself. When people are themselves involved in the findings, they cannot challenge them as inadequate or the collector as biased.

Lewin believed that the social scientists may serve principally as consultants or guides, so that the inquiry can be carried on with a high degree of technical competence. But the work must be done by the citizens themselves. Any group of people must help cure itself of its sickness on the basis of its own diagnosis and treatment. Self-help of this kind involves personal pride, trust, and feelings of self-growth. These tend to nullify and ultimately to dissipate the emotional blocks to change which sustain prejudice.

A research program tied to an action program can tell why one action is successful and another is not. When this is known, procedures can be designed to improve the successful action and replace the unsuccessful one. The tie-up with action, Lewin observed, keeps the research worker’s feet firmly on the ground and serves to keep him sensitive to the real function of his findings as well as alert to their scientific reliability. The tie-up with research keeps the action-centered citizen alert to the dangers of operating in the dark without scientific instruments to guide him in assessing his accomplishment.

Despite the heavy responsibilities of C.C.I. and the Center at M.I.T., Lewin involved himself in yet another project in the last year of his life. This concerned the organizing of a research foundation to aid in the psychological rehabilitation of former residents of displaced-persons camps following World War II. Dr. Jacob Fine, a surgeon at the Harvard Medical School, had drawn Lewin’s attention to the exigencies of camp life during the war and afterward which had made social (as well as, in many cases, physical) misfits of the displaced persons. Lewin, who responded immediately, pro-
posed the establishment of an International Jewish Research Foundation on Human Relations with units in the United States and Palestine. The Foundation would conduct cooperative research with existing university institutes and international agencies. Dr. Fine began to seek the necessary funds.

In addition to his concern with this project, Lewin became deeply interested in the work of London's Tavistock Institute. It will be remembered that in 1933, on his visit to Cambridge, he had first met Eric Trist. In 1936 the two had met again at Yale, where Lewin took part in a seminar led by C. L. Hull. Trist had been deeply impressed by what he has described as the "poetic imagination" with which Lewin formulated his theoretical approaches. Trist subsequently used Lewinian theory in a number of studies during World War II. When the war ended he joined forces with the British psychologist A. T. M. Wilson in setting up programs for returned British prisoners of war.

Trist and Wilson prepared a proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation which led to the establishment of the Tavistock Institute in London. One of the Institute's first decisions was to put out an international journal for studies toward the integration of the social sciences. They wrote to Lewin asking whether he would consider establishing the journal in partnership between Tavistock and his group at M.I.T. Trist remembers their excitement when they received Lewin's letter saying that he would.

The partnership was first expressed formally in the founding of the journal Human Relations, and the Tavistock staff was happy when Lewin sent over the first two papers on "Frontiers in Group Dynamics." In the articles Lewin indicated his growing interest in the processes of social change. He said that he viewed group experimentation as a form of social management and that its practical task was to gain insight into people's desire for or resistance to specific changes. The attempt to change people's conduct, he observed, should be looked at as a quasi-stationary process. He cited, as an example, the level of discrimination in a community. There are usually social forces driving toward more discrimination. These include the interest of certain segments of the white population in protect-
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ing their jobs, as well as the ideas of biased white people about what is “proper” or “not proper” for Negroes. Opposed to these social forces were those resisting increased discriminatory practices, either out of fear of a black revolt or as a moral recognition that the existing practices were unfair. “It, therefore, becomes a matter of major importance,” said Lewin, “for understanding and planning changes, to analyze carefully the opposing forces. Levels of conduct can be changed either by adding forces in the desired direction or by diminishing opposing forces.” But Lewin cautioned, the effects can be very different between situations where the new level is brought about by increasing the forces which demand equality for the Negro and situations where the forces which oppose it are diminished. For, in the first situation, the new level would be accompanied by a state of relatively high tension and in the second by low tension. Since increase of tension above a certain degree goes parallel with greater fatigue, higher aggressiveness, higher emotionality, and lower constructiveness, it is clear that the second method is preferable to the high-pressure method.

Lewin considered the change process as having three steps: unfreezing, moving to the new level, and freezing at the new level. These could be achieved with existing techniques, but Lewin recognized that the problems of inducing change would require considerably more research than had yet been carried out. He expressed his optimism about the possibility of developing promising techniques for producing social changes that would be superior to the conventional methods and showed, by citing a number of action-research experiments, how this could be achieved.

Trist deeply laments that Lewin never spent the academic year 1947–1948 at Tavistock. But Lewin’s influence on Tavistock has continued through the years. His field theory was used to shape the research design of the “Glacier Project,” a pioneering study of group relations in a giant industrial organization—in this case, the newly nationalized British coal industry. Among the younger generation of British behavioral scientists, Trist believes, Lewin has been particularly important. “In the analysis of the environment and its causal texture; in research design and in following the course
of a social process in detail; in his notion of the psychological time perspective, Lewin has profoundly affected the whole development of social psychology in the British Commonwealth, in Australia, and in India."

For Lewin, ever striving beyond his strength, the pace and demands of his activities began to take their toll. In the summer of 1946, when the Lewins spent a week at Martha's Vineyard with their friends Fritz and Grace Heider, the effect on him was evident. Both could see the building tension—and the onset of exhaustion.Brief as was the time they were together that summer, Grace Heider speaks of it as "frustration." The last years got "more and more frantic," she recalled. "More and more he was doing ten things at once."

Fritz urged his friend to slow down, and Lewin agreed, saying that he longed "to have again the old times." But even during that week at the Vineyard, the friends could hardly talk together because Lewin had a number of articles to finish. He was working on all of them at once—proofreading, writing through all hours of the night, coming for meals and then rushing away. The pressure seemed to crush his natural gaiety. Grace Heider recalls: "During this last period his playfulness was lost—you felt he was no longer capable of it, because he'd let himself get pulled in so many different directions that he was never inwardly at peace."

His friends were concerned but of two minds as to what ought to be done. There were those who wanted him to go on with bigger and better projects and those who wanted him to drop many of them and sit down and think more because they felt that he still was going to explore important new theoretical depths.

The change in Lewin impressed another friend from the old Berlin days. When MacKinnon saw him at the last meeting of the American Psychological Association which Lewin attended, he sensed that his ex-teacher's "ability to shift his energies and focus wasn't as clear as it had been before. He seemed to be preoccupied. You'd talk with him, but something would come to mind and he'd write it down or talk about something else. He was distracted by all these
pressures and demands upon him. Lewin took on much more than any human being should have taken on; he was too generous of his time and energy, too busy, too involved with too many projects, too many people. It is almost surprising that he lived as long as he did.”

On Monday, February 10, 1947, Lewin spent a typically busy day at the Center. After a hurried dinner at home he left for a meeting at the residence of Dr. Jacob Fine in Boston, where he was to speak. He told the small group of invited guests his reasons for supporting the proposal for the establishment of an International Jewish Research Foundation and the importance which he attached to a systematic program of social research for the rehabilitation of European Jewry. The audience responded to the idea with considerable enthusiasm.

Lewin had invited M.I.T. Research Fellow Simon Herman to accompany him to the meeting. Lewin had already asked Herman to consider a full-time position with the Foundation, to serve as liaison officer between interested groups in the United States and Palestine. Lewin had told Herman that he felt so certain that the project would materialize that he had personally refused an invitation from the University of California for the 1947 summer session so that he would be free to visit Israel and work on this new project.

On Tuesday morning, February 11—the last day of his life—Lewin met briefly with Herman again. He expressed considerable elation at the outcome of the previous night’s meeting and asked Herman to write up the minutes of the proceedings and to join him for a further talk at five o’clock. Herman explained that he had set up a conference with some students for that hour and promised to phone Lewin that evening instead.

The rest of Tuesday was especially busy for Lewin. His agenda was overloaded with items that had to be taken care of before he left for New York the following day. His visit to New York involved meetings with important people on a number of pressing issues, and he hurriedly put together the ideas he planned to present. He also spent some time talking with Lippitt, who remembers that Lewin spoke about the mistaken notions of the therapist who perceives the challenge of creating persons who perceive themselves as ready and
expected to stand on their own feet once proper transference has been achieved. "The American culture ideal of the 'self-made man,' of everyone 'standing on his own feet,'" Lewin said, "was as tragic a picture as the initiative-destroying dependence on a benevolent despot. We all need continuous help from each other. This type of interdependence is the greatest challenge to the maturity of individual and group functioning."

During the late afternoon Lewin telephoned me. I was leaving for Florida the next day for a week's holiday. We talked for almost thirty minutes about matters at M.I.T. and C.C.I., and at the end of the conversation Lewin apologized for the long talk and whimsically promised that he would not interrupt the vacation with shop talk for "at least one day."

Probably because it was the day before Lincoln's Birthday, Lewin and Gordon Hearn were the only staff members at the Center late in the afternoon. At five-thirty, Hearn, preparing to leave, stopped by Lewin's office and saw him slouched in his chair, his head on his arms. Lewin looked up at him as he passed, asked him about his family (Hearn had been forced to leave them in Canada because of the postwar housing shortage in the Boston area), and deplored the continued lack of housing. They gossiped a bit and finally Hearn said good night. Lewin left for home a short time later.

That evening was "unusually peaceful and quiet," Mrs. Lewin relates. Late in the evening he complained of feeling ill. Mrs. Lewin phoned the family physician, who came immediately and after an examination expressed the belief that Lewin had suffered a heart attack. He planned to hospitalize Lewin early the following morning, but shortly after the doctor's departure, Lewin suffered another—and fatal—seizure.

In keeping with Jewish tradition, the funeral services were held as soon as family and intimates could assemble. Rabbi Maurice Pekarsky of the Hillel Foundation, a close friend, delivered the eulogy to the hastily assembled group of family, friends, colleagues, and students.
EPILOGUE

AN ENDURING INFLUENCE

Lewin's life was a marked sequence of ironic contrasts. As a scientist he achieved notable success and international fame. He was the center of a wide circle of enthusiastic friends and collaborators who had the highest respect for him. He was invited to join in some of the most distinguished research projects as much for his qualities of human concern as for the brilliance of his mind.

Nevertheless, the psychology "establishment" always kept him on the periphery. No prestigious university offered him an appointment. (His significant work was done in odd settings, such as the Cornell School of Home Economics and the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station.) The American Psychological Association never selected him for any assignment or appointed him to any important committee, though he was a founder and president (1942–1943) of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

Lewin's associates and students found him gay and congenial. His personal life, however, was a series of crises: the hardships of World War I, the struggle to establish his academic career in the 1920's, his troubled first marriage, the catastrophe of the Third Reich in the
1930's, the murder of his mother and other members of his family by the Nazis. Yet these ordeals never shook his faith in a better future. He met them as they came with characteristic fortitude, courage, and inextinguishable hope.

He was as gracious in his sufferings as he was silent about them. His pursuit of the truth about the hearts and minds of men caused him to subordinate his own pain to the service of other sufferers. Indeed, even after his death Lewin continued to inspire and renew the study of men's psyches. As Robert B. MacLeod states, "It is a tribute to the fertility of Lewin's ideas and to his genius for attracting colleagues of the highest caliber that after his death the group at M.I.T. did not dissolve. In accordance with the principles of group dynamics, the Research Center for Group Dynamics at M.I.T. generated their own leadership, loaded their covered wagon, and ventured west to the wilds of Michigan. Now, many years later, they are still young, vigorous, and productive." 1

The first official recognition of his spreading influence was the setting up of an annual Kurt Lewin Memorial by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. The organization also held a memorial meeting for Lewin during the 1947 convention of the American Psychological Association at which three of his close associates—Gordon Allport of Harvard University, Edward C. Tolman of the University of California, and I—were invited to speak of his life and work in psychology.

Tolman, who spoke first, described "Lewin's emphasis on the ahistorical, contemporaneous, systematic determiners of behavior as an expression of a new and tremendously fruitful intellectual insight. . . . This emphasis on the importance of the contemporaneous signified that in order to mitigate the horrors of our world we can in large measure do so by inducing the appropriate field forces. We do not have to wait and start all over again with our infants and our infants' infants. We can begin here and now with ourselves, how-

1 Robert B. MacLeod, presentation on behalf of the Kurt Lewin Memorial Committee, September 1, 1958.
ever unfortunate our personal histories may have been.” Concerning the sharp criticisms of Lewin’s postulations, Tolman spoke as he believed Lewin himself would have: “Far more important than any final precise evaluation of the details of Lewin’s theoretical system was its extraordinary fruitfulness.” Tolman reminded his audience of the excitement many had felt when they first learned of “Lewin’s originality and courage in carrying out experiments under precisely controlled conditions on such problems as the effects of different types of leadership, of war morale, of eating habits, of worker productivity, and of intergroup conflict and community tensions.” These experiments were, to Tolman, “one bright hope in an otherwise desperate social picture.”

Gordon W. Allport offered additional testimony to the excitement that surrounded Lewin’s work: “Genius and greatness seem always to generate controversy. Psychology is no exception and hence Lewin’s was a most controversial figure. But Lewin had the advantage of rising with the floodtide of configuration and an awakening social conscience. The work of a genius seems always marked by a certain intellectual solitude. It sounds strange to say that Kurt Lewin was in any respect solitary. Nevertheless, his avoidance of the well-known paths of psychological science and his compulsion to strike off by himself were signs of a certain intellectual solitude. It was not that Lewin was asocial. On the contrary, more than most original thinkers, he exposed himself to the benefits of social facilitation—and inevitably won a circle of followers. As his own interests branched out to industrial psychology and public service, and his students took up important positions in war research, in clinics, and in community life, we heard less about an ‘inner circle’ and felt more widely in our national and professional life the wholesome impact of their work.”

Allport pointed out that many Lewinian concepts that at first had seemed esoteric soon came to saturate the discourse of standard psychology. Among them Allport listed the dynamic power of unfinished tasks, escape from the field, the level of aspiration, differentiation, detour, time perspective, cognitive structure, levels of reality,
barrier, rigidity, satiation, life space, marginal affiliation, group decision, change experiment. These are just some of the concepts that general psychology today has widely adopted. In the fields of personality and social behavior, there are no concepts as useful and as embracing as Lewin’s twofold representation of the person as a differentiation region and as a point region in his life space.

In my turn, I described Lewin’s aim as discovery of what determines changes in human relations. Such an aim, he had declared, is ideal for a scientist who integrates his role as scientist with his responsibilities as a citizen of a democratic society that must keep bettering its works and ways. The patterns of action research were developed primarily as ways of realizing this ideal, developed because Lewin was a socially conscious individual who believed that only science provides dependable guides to effective action and wanted his labors to be of maximum social usefulness as well as theoretical significance. I described the three areas of action which seemed to me to have shaped Lewin’s career. The first was his interdependent style of life, his constant involvement in cooperative enterprises, and his continued collaboration with former students. The second was his persistent integration of theory and practical action, his uniting theory to ingenious experimentation, and even more his close coordination of seemingly abstruse hypotheses with the affairs of everyday life—something achieved by few other scientists. The third was his successful combination of scientific with personal and civic concerns, a combination Lewin brought to its highest point by his design and development of the method of action research.

When the memorial addresses were concluded, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues announced the establishment of the Kurt Lewin Award, which would be given each year to the psychologist who made the outstanding contribution in at least one of the fields Lewin had created. The award was to be given at the annual meeting of the Society and the recipient would deliver the Kurt Lewin Memorial Lecture. The award and lecture have been annual events since 1947, and the award has come to be recognized as the nation’s highest honor in social psychology. Of the
distinguished social scientists who have won it, some are theorists, others experimenters, and still others pioneers in action research. Some are psychologists; some are not. But all are involved in the scientific study of social problems, as can be seen from the roster of the recipients and the work for which they were honored.

1948 George Brock Chisholm  
1949 Edward Chace Tolman  
1950 Gordon W. Allport  
1951 A.T. M. Wilson (for Tavistock Institute of Human Relations)  
1952 Gunnar Myrdal  
1953 Gardner Murphy  
1954 Margaret Mead  
1955 None awarded  
1956 Otto Klineberg  
1957 Lawrence K. Frank  
1958 Dorwin Cartwright (for the Research Center for Group Dynamics, University of Michigan)  
1959 Fritz Heider  
1960 Stuart Cook  
1961 Robert Maclver  
1962 Theodore M. Newcomb  
1963 Roger Barker  
1964 Alfred J. Marrow  
1965 Kenneth B. Clark  
1966 Daniel Katz

"Social Responsibility"  
"The Psychology of Social Learning"  
"Prejudice: A Problem in Psychological and Social Causation"  
"Some Aspects of Social Process"  
"Psychological Impediments to Effective International Cooperation"  
"Human Potentialities"  
"Cultural Discontinuities and Personality Transformation"  
"The Role of the Psychologist in International Affairs"  
"Research for What?"  
"Some Things Learned: An Evaluative History of the Research Center for Group Dynamics"  
"On Lewin's Methods and Theory"  
"The Systematic Analysis of Socially Significant Events: A Strategy for Social Research"  
"Disturbed Youth and the Agencies"  
"Persistence and Regression of Changed Attitudes: Long-Range Studies"  
"On the Nature of the Environment"  
"Risks and Uncertainties in Action Research"  
"Problems of Social Power and Social Change: A Relevant Social Psychology"  
"Group Process and Social Integration: A System Analysis of Two Movements of Social Protest"
Lewin left his mark on the thinking of a whole generation of social scientists. He put his stamp on a whole discipline, giving it a name (group dynamics), a scope (action research), and a purpose that transcended psychology itself by setting as its goal not only the study of man but the betterment of society. Indeed, in an age of Black Power, urban decay, campus turbulence, bitter political turmoil, and talk of "participatory democracy," today's change seekers have a great deal to learn from Lewin's concepts and experiments.

So have today's psychiatrists. For as Cartwright points out, too, Lewin in his brief lifetime greatly advanced our understanding of the behavior and development of children, the nature of learning, the dynamics of social interaction, the determinants of effective leadership, and the requirements for social change.

It is for these reasons, too, that George Mandler has written that "social psychology, developmental psychology, and experimental psychology all changed significantly because Kurt Lewin wrote, because Kurt Lewin taught, and because Kurt Lewin was in the United States." Mason Haire points out that "no aspect of the field, whether it be social psychology in general, personality theory, or whatever, is the same for Lewin's having been there." In the years since his death, as we saw earlier, Lewin's varied contributions have continued to influence the work of his students and colleagues. Festinger comments that "95 per cent of today's social psychology is Kurt Lewin's and the research he inspired in group dynamics." MacKinnon remarks, "Group dynamics is today's culture and this all stems from Lewin." Gordon Allport discloses that "of all the psychologists I have known in person Lewin is most alive and prominent in my thinking." Sears voices the opinion that "Lewin was
An Enduring Influence

more responsible than anyone else, more than everybody else, for bringing the social and emotional behavior of children into the field of science.” Margaret Mead adds that “Lewin and his group represented something wholly alive and significant for the whole country, for the whole of social science.” Murphy writes, “Lewin had everything that went into the making of a great psychologist.”

Lewin’s influence continues to be felt in the generation of psychologists that followed and who did not know him during his lifetime. One of this group, typical of others, is Chris Argyris, who has written: “Lewin’s work inspired me because it suggested a model that combined theory, empirical research, and relevance to reality. I vowed to work toward that goal. Today’s students and younger faculty are striving to make their disciplines more relevant to critical life issues. All have much to learn from Lewin. For Lewin had the skill to integrate scientific rigor with reality and for this reason became the first major model of social scientist-activist of the highest quality. If more Lewins existed, we would not have to wonder if psychology had forgotten the humanness of human beings. I do not know of a better model for us to emulate. I am always bolstered, and my motivation is rekindled, by reading Lewin, the theoretician, researcher, and activist par excellence.”

Another member of the group in the generation that followed is Warren G. Bennis. He writes: “I was never a student of Lewin’s. I had known only colleagues and students of Lewin as my teachers and senior colleagues. I was always surprised when I actually read his work. Always a significant question, innocently explored with diagrams out of St. Exupery, and restlessly leading to such subjects as friendship, cultural differences in child rearing, leadership and its consequences, social change, and the origins of the philosophy of science. I thought that, like most charismatic men, his spirit would predominate rather than his mind. Only recently have I changed my mind about that. In putting together the revision of a book of mine, I rediscovered the extent to which I internalized his ideas and some of his methods. Several of the sections dealt with change and resistance to change: their intellectual forefather was Lewin. Several other
sections cover subjects like power, authority, and social influence. Here, also, the intellectual legacy is Lewin. The sections on knowledge utilization similarly owe an enormous debt to Lewin. I used to think that Kurt Lewin was a giant metaphor with terrific influence on the family but with no, or little, substantive grasp over the activities of his inheritors. Now I have come to believe that we have so carefully disguised our identification to ourselves that we forget we are all Lewinians.”

Allport once wrote: “Although Lewin never met John Dewey there was a community of spirit between the German-born psychologist and the American-born philosopher. Both were deeply concerned with the workings of democracy. Both recognized that each generation must learn democracy anew; both saw the dynamic relation between democracy and social science and the importance to social science of freedom of inquiry, freedom that only a democratic environment could assure. If Dewey could be termed the outstanding philosopher of democracy, Lewin was surely the major theoretician and researcher of democracy among the psychologists.”

To his colleagues, too, Lewin was the archetypal innovator. Always most relevant for him was his conviction that psychology should never be divorced from life. Perhaps this is why Lewin so strongly stimulated the creativity of those who worked with him. Debates and disagreements were plentiful, as they must be where thought is free and advanced, but rarely did acrimony develop over the issues. Solving problems together called for the spirit of sportsmanship. What John Stuart Mill called the “morality of public discussion” was habit with Lewin and controversy never degenerated into attacks on personalities.

Perhaps the word that describes Lewin more realistically than any other is “playful”—in the most significant sense of the word. That is, work was most fun for him when it was hardest. He had a zest for searching and seeking—working a problem this way, working it that, turning it upside down, inside out, left to right, right to left. He communicated a sense of enjoyment, in the spirit of one wanting freely to share his “play” with others.
Lewin had no strong desire to publish. He seldom put his own name on the studies he did with students. Sears pointed out that even though there are more references in the literature to research by Lewin and his primary students than to any comparable group in the fields of child personality and social psychology, Lewin's own name appears infrequently.

French puts Lewin in another perspective: "Somehow he seemed to be able to transmit to others a little of his own enormous creativity. I think those who worked most closely with him were not just carrying out his ideas; they were also stimulated to create new ideas and methods which then became part of Kurt's thinking."

Festinger believes that Lewin's greatest contribution "on the abstract level may have been the idea of studying things through changing them and seeing the effect. This theme—that in order to gain insight into a process one must create a change and then observe its variable effects and new dynamics—runs through all Lewin's work. To Lewin life was not static; it was changing, dynamic, fluid. Lewin's unfreezing-stabilizing-refreezing concept of change continues to be highly relevant today. His understanding of the importance of change was part of his philosophical approach to science and a basic ingredient of his 'metatheory.' As such, it helped change much of social psychology from art into science."

Dorwin Cartwright believes that the most dramatic development of Lewin's theory and method is "the response of society... to group dynamics. The strong influence of group dynamics is evident in education, industry, government, and in almost every aspect of group living-social work, religion, industry, public health, psychiatry, nursing, group therapy, the military establishment."

According to Adams, Lewin's paramount concern—the one which suffused many others—was "vergleichenden Wissenschaftslehre." Adams asked Lewin one day during the last year of his life, "When are you going to get back to the comparative science of sciences?" "I must do that," Lewin answered very soberly. "These things we are finding out will be discovered in five or ten years anyway, but this other might be fifty years away." The answer
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suggested to Adams that Lewin's real business in life was the comparative science of sciences.

But psychologists concerned with social practice and social theory in organizational life find paramount the seminal work of Lewin in laying the foundation for much of their conceptual framework. Likert, Maier, and McGregor have emphasized the enormous influence of Lewin on their studies in industry. Clearly, Lewin's influence on the formation of theory was parallel. Heider's theory of interpersonal relations, Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, Cartwright and Harary's work on graph theory, all were in some degree shaped by their authors' association with Lewin. Tolman, himself a noted theoretician, expressed his debt by acknowledging that he "borrowed time and again from Lewin and absorbed his ideas into my very blood."

There are, of course, various alternatives to Lewin's concepts and methods. As Murphy observed, "One of the most common objections to Lewin's work was that he was concerned with present cross-sections of behavior, not with the history of how they came into being. The other main objections were that he had not really shown the non-utility of the reduction of wholes into definable units, that he had neglected individual differences, and that he had not shown that the topological (or any kind of graphic) portrayal of functions was more serviceable than the current verbal and conventional mathematical methods."

Murphy believes that Lewin could certainly have replied to all this: "Look at the new experiments and results which in point of fact did come from the new approach. And to this the observer can only add, not the new method alone, and not the specific individual alone, but the field relation of these two—and indeed their relations to the twentieth-century world and to the psychology prevalent in the world—is what gave field theory the vitality and the productiveness it achieved."

Heider, reviewing Lewin's contributions, remarks, "I get an impression whenever I try to understand Lewin's basic notions that they are, so to speak, visions not at all completely formulated and explicated, that they have a wealth of implicit meaning which has
not yet been exhausted and that they are therefore still full of promise of further development."

Perhaps this is why Tolman wrote that in the future history of our psychological era Freud will be revered for his first unraveling of the complexities of the individual history and Lewin for his envisioning of the dynamic laws according to which individuals behave as they do.