

ARTYKUŁY [Articles]

LEWINIAN LESSONS FOR ACTION RESEARCHERS TRAVELING THE SECOND PATH

Richard A. Schmuck
University of Oregon, USA

“... Social research concerns itself with two... different... questions, namely the study of general laws of group life and the diagnosis of a specific situation”.

Kurt Lewin (1948)

Summary. I explain how the early American Lewinians (1939-1947) took one of two overlapping intellectual paths. Those, on the first path, were theory-centred, hypothesis-testing experimental social psychologists. Those, on the second path, used action research in fostering planned change to build healthy communities. I summarize the profound lessons for action research taught by the second group.

Adhering to Lewin's maxim, “No action without research, no research without action”, second path Lewinians designed interventions to alter concrete group structures, leadership patterns, and cultural norms with the aim of solving actual social problems. They understood planned change to be an integration research, training, and action; and they taught that the management of actual change would depend on: data-based diagnosis, social-skill training, and action plans with measurable outcomes in specific social situations.

I elaborate on: (1) the research methods they developed and used; (2) their belief in cooperative teamwork and democratic relations; (3) the bridges they build to link social psychologist, and educators, and community-action leaders; (4) the regional and local social systems they created to carry out action research; (5) the restraining forces they faced inside university academy and the communities in which they worked; the action research steps and cycles they designed; and (6) the complex three-step design they used for training local action researchers.

I finish by applying the Lewinian lessons from their Connecticut training in community relations of 60 years ago to contemporary Poland. I describe some suggestions for the *Kurt Lewin Center for Psychological Research* in Bydgoszcz about action research in Poland today.

Adres do korespondencji: patschmuc@ad.com

Introduction

I have drawn lessons for action researchers from applied social psychologists, adult educators, and community leaders, who I call, "Lewinians traveling the second path".

They collaborated in the late 1930s, through the war years and the late 1940s, and into the early 1950s. I was not one of them. From 1936 to 1951, during some of Poland's darkest hours, I was only a boy growing up in Chicago, when they, the second-path Lewinians, created action research and taught one another profound lessons about it.

Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) was the group's prime mover, energetic initiator, inspirational teacher, and democratic leader. From 1933 to 1947, he mentored young American intellectuals in the nuances of his special version of social psychology, and although he was productive with scores of publications of scientific papers during those 14 years, Lewin published only one about action research. He died too young. That 15 page, single article was printed in a 1946 number of the *Journal of Social Issues*, just a few months before his untimely death. It was not until a year after his massive and fatal heart attack, at age 56 (February 12, 1947) that his spouse, Gertrud Weiss Lewin, published Lewin's most recent, applied papers in an edited collection, *Resolving Social Conflicts* (Lewin, 1948), and brought his creative thoughts about action research into public consciousness.

No one of Lewin's outstanding students was more central to the development of action research than Ronald Lippitt (1914-1986), who published seminal ideas about it in *Training in Community Relations* (Lippitt, 1949), and later in his co-authored, *Dynamics of Planned Change*, (Lippitt, J. Watson, and Westley, 1958). Lippitt became my principal mentor, when I studied and implemented action research, as a neophyte, at the University of Michigan from 1959-1965. Other key Lewinians who helped in my education about action research were the adult educator, Leland (Lee) Bradford, the educational philosopher, Kenneth (Ken) Benne, the activist-psychologist, Goodwin Watson, and an array of young social psychologists, including Morton (Mort) Deutsch, Jeanne Frankel, Gordon Hearn, and Murray Horowitz.

After Lewin, a Jewish refugee and a target of Nazi hatred, emigrated from Central Europe to Ithaca, NY, Iowa City, IA, and Cambridge, MA, he became intensely preoccupied with ways to use social psychology to facilitate worthwhile social change. In remembering her husband in the preface to the 1948 applied collection, Gertrud Lewin wrote, Kurt Lewin was so constantly and predominately preoccupied with the task of advancing the conceptual representation of the social psychological world, and at the same time he was so filled with the urgent desire to make use of his theoretical insight for the building of a better world, that it is difficult to decide which of these two sources of motivation flowed with greater energy or vigor.

After his sudden death, Lewin's legacy divided into two distinct but overlapping intellectual paths: one, the longer path, dating back to Lewin's European years, entailed his innovative scientific studies on Gestalt Psychology, Field Theory, Hodology, and his creative experimental social research. On the first path the primary professional activities concerned building logical theory, testing hypotheses, and establish-

ing scientific laws. The second and shorter, less-traveled, action-research path commenced at Iowa City, only a few years before Lewin's death, and involved applying social theory and research to designs for planned social change and community improvement. Regardless of the path his students would choose, however, all believed in Lewin's fundamental theorem that the groups in which individuals interact constitute the basic ground of their personal perceptions, feelings, and behaviors.

Lewinians traveling the first path were theory-centered, experimental social psychologists, such as Dorwin (Doc) Cartwright, John (Jack) French, Leon (Lee) Festinger, Albert (Al) Pepitone, and Alvin (Al) Zander. They produced a very large repository of scientific research on group dynamics with imaginative theories, creative hypotheses, and careful laboratory research. In their journal articles, they demonstrated that what Lewin (1939) wrote was true: "I am persuaded that it is possible to undertake experiments in sociology, which have as much right to be called scientific experiments as those in physics and chemistry".

Lewinians traveling the second path were applied social psychologists, such as Isidor (Is) Chein, Stuart (Stu) Cook, Ronald (Ron) Lippitt, Alfred (Al) Marrow, and Goodwin Watson. Along with dozens of others, they got caught up in what the noted, Harvard psychologist, Gordon Allport in Lewin (1948) labeled, within his Foreword, "the maelstrom of action research", and together or individually chased passionately their shared dream of using social psychology to build a better world.

Although during my doctoral studies I was thoroughly educated by Lewinians traveling both paths, I chose to focus my career on the second path. I sought primarily to create interventions to upgrade educational procedures in public K-12 schools. I used Lewinian action research to improve classroom group processes, school-organizational functioning of staffs, and the instructional leadership of school administrators. The heart of my social research centered on developing problem-solving procedures for students, parents, teachers, and administrators to engage in cooperatively. In this paper I use primarily the lessons taught by G. Watson (1947), Lewin (1948), Lippitt (1949), Lippitt, J. Watson, Westley (1958) and Marrow (1969).

A strategy of planned change

"No action without research, no research without action".
Lewin-Lippitt conversation (1946)

Adhering to Lewin's maxim about the interdependence of social action and social research, second-path Lewinians saw action research as planned change in concrete, social situations. Action research, they thought, should initiate interventions to alter group structures, leadership patterns, and cultural norms with the aim of solving actual social problems. In contrast, first path Lewinians were concerned with establishing scientific laws, theory, and hypotheses to create explanations of general social realities.

Although action research should be as scientific as first-path research, in its methods and procedures, it always has been local and single-case, never universal. Even

though the change designs of early action research were guided and informed by laws, theory, and experimentation, they took place in local social contexts, at specific times, and involved the actual “life-spaces” of real individuals, not the reactions of research subjects.

With those important differences clearly in mind, Lewin and Lippitt still hoped that action research could contribute to general theory by demonstrating causal sequences, and showing that certain features of the interventions had led to predictable outcomes. They thought that when the same causal sequences occur in action research done in several diverse social contexts, then there would be reason to establish a generalized explanation for the events that had taken place.

In any case, Lewin strongly hoped that his students, however different they might be, would ultimately travel the two paths, side by side, and exchange insights and wisdom to the benefit of both traditional and action research. Gertrud Lewin remembered her husband commenting that, in his mind, theory and reality have to be linked. He compared that linkage, she said, to building a bridge across a gorge separating theory from the concrete reality of the individual case. She recalled that the connection of theory to the disturbing social issues of the 1930s and 40s led him to feel “an intense and persistent tension”.

Later, Alfred Marrow (1969), Lewin’s biographer, reported that Lewin frequently counseled his students that, “There is nothing so practical as a good theory”.

The process of planned change

“... We should consider action, research, and training as a triangle”.
Kurt Lewin (1948)

Lewin saw the planned change process as an integration of research, training, and action. He argued that the triangle “should be kept together for the sake of any of its corners and that it is seldom possible to improve social action without training personnel... and without... social scientists forming into teams to do research with the personnel...” (Lewin, 1948, p. 211).

In talking about the research corner, Lewin combined an understanding of the general laws of social psychology with tailored, data-based diagnoses of specific social situations. To distinguish planned-change research from the university research he had done in Europe, Lewin said that action research should use “fact-finding reconnaissance” to build, in his words, “social eyes and ears” into the repertoire of groups carrying out planned change.

To execute diagnostic research so that the data would be both scientific and helpful in steering toward desirable social change, Lippitt (1949) thought that the project-leadership team, itself, should receive training in the social skills of communication, goal setting, problem solving, and decision making. Furthermore, Lippitt, Bradford, and Benne, the cofounders of the National Training Laboratories, similarly argued that effective social-skills training should also be designed for back-home, change-agent groups engaged in local, action research projects. Goodwin Watson (1947) warned that

the skill training had to accomplish more than “the warm glow of participation”. He argued it should teach group members to achieve objective results by truly implementing a data-based project cooperatively. And Lewin reminded his students that a focus on the intact group as the target of social-skill training necessarily differed from current visions of how to engineer community change. Currently, he told them, we see either the individual, cognitive focus of traditional schooling, or the more recent focus on the mass-media transmissions of community opinion leaders.

In the 1946 *Journal of Social Issues* article, Lewin (1948, p. 201-206) used the metaphor of a captain steering a boat through the fog. Lewin’s caveat was that without diagnostic data, group coordination, and an action plan, the captain and crew would likely steer the boat in circles. They would not have sufficient information to steer the boat toward desirable objectives. Lewin went on to point out that action research should remove community teams from the fog by helping them understand their present situation, become more aware of the dangers and pitfalls in it, and direct their concerted actions toward what should be done. Lewin explained that “If we cannot judge whether an action has led forward or backward, if we have no criterion for evaluating the relation between effort and achievement, there is nothing to prevent us from making the wrong conclusions... Realistic fact-finding and evaluation are prerequisites for any learning”.

In the Spring of 1947, after Lewin’s death, while they planned for the first training groups at Bethel, Maine, second-path Lewinians reminded one another about the prime importance of reaching stable, social outcomes as a result of action research. They believed that the engineering of stable change would depend on: (1) valid, data based diagnosis, fact-finding, and evaluation, (2) effective social-skills training for change-agent groups, and (3) an action plan with measurable, objective outcomes. Lewin would have concurred.

The process of action research

“Rational social management proceeds
in a spiral of steps
each of which is composed of a circle of planning, acting,
and fact finding about the results of the action”.
Kurt Lewin (1948)

Lewin believed that action research should start with a period of reflection on the current state of a specific social situation. An individual leader might think about a current leadership situation that he or she is in, or a change-agent group might brainstorm about a social situation in which it functions currently. In time, their reflections lead to a mental sketch of a plan to reach a few measurable objectives, and an image of the initial steps of a planned-change design. After taking the first steps, Lewin thought that the change agents should carry out reconnaissance to see if their actions helped them move toward their objectives.

Lewin thought that reconnaissance should recur again and again as the action research unfolds. He believed that it should have four functions: (1) to evaluate results of their actions, so that (2) the change agents could obtain insight and understanding,

so that (3) they could design the next step, in order to (4) modify their overall plan to keep the change agent effort on a successful course.

As Lewin's students learned to visualize it, those four steps should assume the form of recurring circles that recycle until the planned changes results in permanent outcomes.

In 1945 Lewin thought that the research methods to use during reconnaissance should be questionnaires (or surveys as he called them), and interviews. He preferred interviews, because to paraphrase what he wrote, interviews, more than surveys, give greater insight into motivations behind people's feelings, private thoughts, and attitudes. In subsequent conversations with Lippitt, he agreed that interviews and surveys can be used fruitfully in tandem as the action research unfolds, and during later cycles of reconnaissance and evaluation. As we have seen, both Lewin and Lippitt believed that rationally planned change should proceed in a spiral of steps, each of which is made up of a circle of planning, action, and fact finding about results of the action. It is important to note that even though Lewin believed that reconnaissance is inevitably local and specific to concrete social contexts, he hoped that with comparative field studies, social psychologists would one day be capable of generalizing about effective techniques of planned change.

Along with interviews and questionnaires, second-path Lewinians added a powerful third research tool, that of observation, the summer before Lewin's death. Lippitt (1949) brought that to light several years later. After Lewin and his closest students founded the Massachusetts-based Research Center for Group Dynamics (Fall, 1945) to "integrate research, action, and training in fostering social change", they designed a major action-research project with the American Jewish Congress (AJC) to help members of the Connecticut Interracial Commission (CIC) improve its attempts to reduce prejudice and discrimination.

During a two-week workshop in New Haven, CT (Summer, 1946), the leadership-team of second-path Lewinian trainers met privately in the evenings to share observations of that day's events, and to design specific activities for the next day. On the second evening four CIC trainees asked if they could sit in as an audience to listen to the experts' debriefing. Lewin, as leader, said, "Yes, of course you may!" Afterwards, the visiting trainees said that they had learned a great deal about their own group processes just by listening to the professional analysis. The next evening 15 CIC trainees showed up to listen passively to the trainers' observations of that day's activities, also finding the content of the analyses illuminating and helpful to learning about themselves. By the end of the first week of the workshop, more than half of the CIC trainees had listened in as audience to the trainers' observations. In its revised plan for the second workshop week, the leadership team of trainers made trainee audiences a regular feature of its nightly debriefings, intensified its use of external, research observers of training events, and introduced the new role of internal process observer into the trainees' back-home action-planning teams. Observations for applied social psychologists had come of age.

A year later, as they planned for their initial Training groups (or T-Groups as they became), for the first summer at the Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine, the second-path

Lewinians had made open-face-to-face observations their most powerful research method. Unfortunately, Lewin's death took place before his students started to plan in earnest for that NTL startup. During the decade after Lewin's death, second-path Lewinians continued to fine tune all three of their preferred scientific methods for action research. Today, we have information about observations, interviews, and questionnaires handed down to us. I shall review a few high points about them here (for details, see Schmuck, 2006, Chapter 4).

Observations occur when observers attentively watch and record what they see and hear in a specific setting. They make either direct or mediated observations. To make direct observations, observers are present to see, hear, and record what takes place, such as that which the external research observers and the internal process observers did in the Connecticut workshops. With mediated observations, observers listen to audiotapes of recorded group conversations, as occurred in the T-groups of the 1950s at NTL, or they look at videotapes, which takes place often today.

Interviews are oral conversations in which interviewers pose questions to interviewees. They take place with individuals, one-on-one, or in, what we call today, focus groups, in which a small face-to-face group, such as a back-home community team, is asked to discuss specific topics. Interviews vary in how informal or formal they are. Often, formal interviews are recorded. In workshops, such as in Connecticut in 1946, informal interviews went on most the time.

At times called inventories, opinionnaires, post-meeting reactions, or Lewin's surveys, questionnaires are printed lists of statements that individuals respond to in writing, on the telephone, or via a computer. They normally fill out questionnaires privately and in anonymity, but groups can respond to questionnaires using discussion and polling. Questionnaires ask for facts, feelings, thoughts, or behaviors; they may be simple or complex; they are open ended or have rating scales.

The social system of action research

"At least of equal importance to the content of
the research on inter-group
relations is its proper placement with social life. When, Where, and by
whom should action research be done?"

Kurt Lewin (1948)

To integrate research, training, and action as they sought to do it in Connecticut and Bethel, the second-path Lewinians thought it necessary to nurture cooperative teamwork in which social influence would be shared democratically. Since the late 1930s in Iowa City, with heartfelt confrontation to the extreme authoritarianism in the Europe from which Lewin had fled, the value of fostering democracy in groups and communities was of supreme importance to Lewin and his students. They were principally concerned with democracy as a way of everyday life, whereby people could participate equally and skillfully in managing their family, organizational, and community lives. The second-path Lewinian's designs for establishing democratic and cooperative action-research teams turned out to be complex and multi-faced.

To make concrete plans for the Connecticut workshop, Lewin and his students decided early in 1945, to bring together three categories of actors into a democratic leadership team. First, were social psychologists with expertise in group dynamics and the research methods I described before, e.g., Kurt Lewin (the leader of leaders), Ron Lippitt, Morton Deutsch, and Murray Horowitz were key members. Second were adult educators with knowledge of community relations, group-skill training, and adult learning. Key members were Lee Bradford and Ken Benne. Third were action-community leaders with an understanding of inter-group problems, and legitimate social power in community organizations, such as the Connecticut Interracial Commission (Frank Simpson and Joseph Maguire), and the American Jewish Congress (Stu Cook and Is Cheln).

After membership in the tripartite leadership team was established, Lewin, Lippitt, Bradford, and Benne led it through a series of team building activities, such as:

- sharing personal information to foster feelings of inclusion and membership,
- agreeing that all would lead in taking task and social-emotional roles in the group,
- sharing information democratically about the project budget,
- agreeing to develop the workshop design together,
- mapping out procedures for preparing oral and written reports.

The leadership team also agreed that its members would teach one another about the scientific research methods and action research, the content and process of inter-group relations, and action strategies for intervening into local communities.

Through cooperative problem solving and by using Lewin's Force-Field Analysis, the leadership team sought to overcome what Lewin defined as the three social threats to successful integration of research, training, and action:

- (1) Low public trust and confidence in social-psychological research,
- (2) Fears among community power elites of losing local influence, and
- (3) Public concern for the unrealistic liberalism of university scholars.

The second-path Lewinians accepted, however reluctantly, that they, themselves, represented an elite group of applied social psychologists in passionate pursuit of a better society. They understood their predicament to be no simple matter; in effect they came across to some as a group of naive "do-gooders". Furthermore, while they felt at home in research universities, they certainly were marginal academy members, lacking social power in their own academically conservative universities. As perceived by community members outside the university, they were academic elites, insulated from community realities. As perceived by their academic colleagues inside the university, they were marginal to the university's traditional, scientific research interests.

They believed that they would have to construct bridges; those achievements of engineering skill that Lewin loved so much. Gertrud Lewin wrote, "I recall the intense joy, when he drove his car across American bridges, across the Hudson River, across San Francisco Bay. He never tired of admiring these..." And, he understood that the second-path Lewinians would have to construct bridges between themselves and their university colleagues. Lewin told his students as they prepared to leave the University of Iowa to move east that he would take that on as a primary task during his first year

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The second-pathers also were aware that they would have to construct bridges between themselves and the action leaders of community organizations. Lippitt took that on as his primary task, and asked Isidor Chein and Stuart Cook of the American Jewish Congress to help him do that in Connecticut. I can find no record to help us understand what Lewin and Lippitt did to build bridges, but I do know that both were quite adept at building partnerships with colleagues and other professionals.

Training local action researchers

“Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice”.
Kurt Lewin (1948)

As they converged on Cambridge, Massachusetts, a mecca for American intellectuals, the second pathers were well aware of the serious difficulties of overcoming the prejudices they faced, and their marginality in universities and local communities. They were not golden in any public sense. Still the war was almost over, and America would be looking for a period of social progress. Social psychology held a special promise; democracy could become real. So setting aside their own lack of recognition and status, they defined their most serious challenge to be putting together the 1946 CIC workshop so that their training design would result in effective action-research projects in local Connecticut communities. Lewinianism had matured to where it could create lower-case democracy in local communities. Their most formidable task would be to help the trainees transfer research knowledge and skills to their concrete action settings back home; it would be the penultimate challenge of Lewinian bridge building.

In what has now become the most significant Lewinian lesson, they created a complex, three-stage design that was made up of:

- (1) strategic actions before the workshop,
- (2) an intensive sequence of training episodes during the course of the two-week “cultural island” workshop, and
- (3) a carefully constructed social-support network, to put in place after the formal workshop was over, to help trainees implement action research back home.

The tripartite leadership team decided to start with the development of a research-based taxonomy of inter group relations’ problems in Connecticut communities, to be done before the workshop. In that research, the tripartite team also sought to map the social-influence structure of each community to reveal its power hierarchies and its cultural dynamics. The team was enacting Lewin’s dream that applied social psychology would become an integration of the best of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. In particular, the tripartite team set out to determine the influence of prospective workshop participants on local inter-group relations, by collecting data on their work and family circumstances, and on their social bases of power in the community. With those data, the team would proactively recruit trainees with back-home social power, and a genuine willingness to cooperate with others to solve inter-group problems.

At the workshop, which Lewin called, “the cultural island phase”, the leadership team would offer a curriculum of research methods and action-research procedures, as well as intensive training in communication, goal setting, and problem solving about inter-group relations. But, the local team, itself, would have to zero in on particular local inter-group problems to work on. Only local diagnoses and local problem solving would be acceptable.

Finally, the leadership team would round out its design by establishing a social network of support and follow-up consultants to facilitate back-home use of action research in solving inter-group problems.

As the leadership team actually recruited the influential community members to be trainees, it urged them to attend the workshop, not as individuals, but as members of a cooperative local team, to collect community data about inter-group problems, and to view their community’s improvement as feasible. With the diagnostic, community data in hand, the leadership team and the trainees set the workshop agenda in line with local inter-group problems. The leadership team also lead the trainees in setting workshop goals, procedures, and timelines.

At the workshop, the leadership team used the back-home homogeneous teams for local problems solving, and the heterogeneous clusters that cut across the teams to broaden perspectives and to stimulate creativity. They started the workshop with a focus on team building skills and working cooperatively before they refocused on action research about inter-group relations. After all, Kurt Lewin might have been thinking, if you cannot work well with your closest neighbors, why would you think that you can convince your more distant neighbors that cooperation works? The leadership team tried, especially, to be open to trainee feedback, and to gather data regularly about the reactions of trainees on their feelings and morale. After all, Lewin might have been thinking, if we, the leaders, are not open, we are not modeling what we believe in; the trainees will soon see through that. As I mentioned before, the tripartite leadership team debriefed about its observations of the day’s workshop activities, in front of an audience of trainees after the second evening. That became the badge of insight of the trainers, never to be forgotten in the annals of second-path Lewinianism; expert observations of trainee group processes should be shared with the trainees to maximize learning and development. for both the trainers and the trainees.

The leadership team looked for ways to provide team self assessment, and trainee, personal help as the workshop developed. It sought to teach the back-home teams about how to implement diagnostic interviews in their communities, and ways to convert diagnostic discoveries about inter-group problems into new community actions. The leadership team offered brief lectures and panel presentations on research methods, and on how to retrieve knowledge about inter-group relations from the social-science literature. It often used role-playing episodes to help the trainees practice their actions as researchers, trainers, and local change agents.

It is noteworthy that Lewin strongly advocated the “cultural island” concept for the Connecticut workshop. He argued that both the trainees and the leadership team should reside at the workshop site, away from their homes. He strongly urged all participants against commuting, no matter how close their homes, and not to take

a weekend break at home in the middle of the two-week workshop. Instead, he offered that the workshop leaders, including himself, would give consultation to the back-home teams during the in-between weekend. Lewin and Lippitt also strongly advocated their offering continued training, in the form of follow-up consultation for every trainee team following the workshop.

Although Lewin fully participated in the workshop and reported being pleased with its process and results, he died before the leadership team had collected all of the research data and well before the final-report writing had commenced. In 1947, Lippitt (1949) assumed the duty of writing about the workshop plan, process, and outcomes. The glow of Connecticut ended abruptly with Lewin's death. Moreover, by the early 1950s, the second-path Lewinians saw that too few social psychologists would have the motivation to perform scientific procedures, while also practicing the practical group skills needed to build local action-research teams.

Rapidly developing universities had become hungry for social scientists with Ph.D.s; they were rich with research contracts and needed young scholars to carry out the scientific work. The University of Michigan became well known internationally for its Institute for Social Research, which housed both the Survey Research Center and The Research Center For Group Dynamics. When I studied in the later Center during the late 50s, there were over 255 psychologists in Ann Arbor, a town of about 75,000 people, and that did not count the 75 or so graduate students in my master's cohort. Lippitt recognized the challenge of finding specially skilled social psychologists, who knew how to develop and implement their own change projects in Michigan towns like Battle Creek, Flint, and Wayne. Now, a half century later, the need for second-path Lewinians to carry out action research in local town and cities is even greater.

Action research steps and cycles

"It does not suffice...if the engineer or the surgeon knows
the general laws of physics or physiology. He has to
understand the specific character of the situation at hand".
Kurt Lewin (1948)

I learned about the details of action research, in the spirit of Kurt Lewin, at the Center he started, but that he did not know. The Research Center for Group Dynamics had moved, 18 months after his death, from Massachusetts to Michigan. It was in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where Ron Lippitt, my bridge to Lewin, finished composing his book on the Connecticut workshop. Ten years later, in his 1959 seminar on planned change, I was introduced to how Lippitt then conceived of action research. His view was that Lewinian action research, as he still referred to it, is "responsive to diagnostic data because data collection necessarily precedes action." When Lippitt referred to community diagnosis, he used Lewin's synonyms, fact finding, reconnaissance, and evaluation.

Holding up his brand-new book on planned change, Lippitt told the small class of eight students that Lewinians assume that social engineers, such as attorneys, community leaders, consultants, physicians, psychologists, and teachers must "diagnose"

their clients in order to tailor their actions toward them. They believe their professional responsibility is to understand their clients' situation before intervening.

He reminded us of Lewin's statement: "Research needed for social practice or action research can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It should proceed in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, acting, and fact finding about the results of the action". Using my memories of that seminar and subsequent conversations with Lippitt, I believe the steps of Lewinian responsive action research to be as below.

The steps of Lewinian responsive action research

Step 1. Reflect on the situation to which the action research will be applied.

Step 2. Search literature on research methods to become familiar with questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

Step 3. Collect research data to diagnose the situation.

Step 4. Analyze the data for themes and action ideas.

Step 5. Search literature on interventions and planned change to obtain action ideas.

Step 6. Present data themes and action ideas as feedback to clients in the situation.

Step 7. Announce the design for changes that will be tried.

Step 8. List the goals and restraining forces for the planned change.

Step 9. Try the planned changes to bring about improved conditions and positive outcomes.

Step 10. Collect reconnaissance data to assess effects of the planned change, and to see if the goals are being achieved.

The responsive action research recycles by returning to Step 4 and can recycle over and over again.

I have been teaching and consulting about Lewinian, responsive action research in one way or another since 1965. Over that span of more than 40 years, I have discovered the need for a second model of action research, which I call proactive action research. The steps are as below.

The steps of proactive action research

Step 1. Reflect on the situation to which the action research will be applied.

Step 2. Search literature on interventions and planned change to obtain action ideas.

Step 3. List the goals and restraining forces for the planned change.

Step 4. Try a new practice or new planned changes to bring about improved conditions and positive outcomes.

Step 5. Collect reconnaissance data to assess effects of the planned change, and to see if the goals are being achieved.

Step 6. Analyze the data for additional information about alternative new practices.

- Step 7. Reflect on alternative ways to behave or on alternative planned changes.
Step 8. Fine-tune the new practice and planned change.
Step 9. Collect data again to evaluate how the changes are affecting our goals.
Step 10. Analyze data to judge effects of the new practice.

In this proactive action research, the process recycles by returning to Step 4.

I believe that both those models of action research would have been acceptable to Kurt Lewin and Ron Lippitt. Indeed, at times I think that both of them used both models. The models differ primarily at startup. The responsive model, which Lippitt described in his 1958 book, starts with diagnosis; the proactive model, which Lewin might have been alluding to in his 1946 article, starts with a new practice. Once a continuous cycle is underway, however, both modes call for revised action and new research, followed by more new action and more new research.

Modern applications of the Lewinian lessons

“The picture I have been able to paint of the progress of research and particularly of the progress that the organization of social research has made during the last five years, makes me feel that we have learned much”.

Kurt Lewin (1948)

Lewinian lessons for action researchers are applicable today, 50 years since I first studied them, and more than 60 years since Lewin's death. To help us conceive a coherent picture of the lessons, I shall strive to apply them to contemporary Poland. I do this with a great deal of humility and hesitation, because I do not know Poland well; still the lessons are very powerful and could teach us about one path that applied social psychology could take in the 21st Century. In my analysis, I use five organizing categories, purposes, contexts, contents, social systems, and processes.

Purposes. Action research in Poland today should pursue the same purposes that second-path Lewinians spelled out years ago. It should pursue local social development and improvement through research, training, and action. It should spawn planned change to make specific community situations better. It should build bridges between social psychological theory and the concrete reality of the individual case. It should sweep young Polish social scientists into the maelstrom of passionately chasing the dream of a better world.

Contexts. The Kurt Lewin Center for Psychological Research (Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland) must be the prime initiator and creative, organizational leader for action research in Poland. Within itself, it should create what I shall call a “Program on Action Research to Resolve Social Problems”. Remember that when Lewin, Lippitt, and others founded the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, its original mission was “to join theory, action, and research to address social problems”. Now, the contemporary Kurt Lewin Center should create its own, special action-research program.

The initial steps the new action-research program should take are to build bridges: first with adult educators with skills in group training, and second with action leaders in regional or national community-service organizations. While the selection of the particular adult educators and action leaders must be tailored to Polish social structure and culture, it will be critical to have the corners of Lewin's triangle (research, training, and action) covered by someone in the new program. Let us call this new tripartite group the "Action Research Leadership Team".

Contents. The contents are social problems where there are clear gaps between the real and the ideal. The new Action Research Leadership Team should choose the most prominent social problems in the local communities from which it recruits the first cohort of trainees. Examples could be:

- (1) prejudice and discrimination regarding age, ethnicity, learning disabilities, race, religion, rural-urban lifestyles, sex, or sexual orientation,
- (2) destructive or unproductive inter-group aggression and conflict,
- (3) low morale or effectiveness in government, hospitals, schools, industrial settings, and small businesses,
- (4) poor adult mental health, child development, or student learning, or
- (5) weaknesses in democratic participation and community group processes.

Social systems. Within the Polish contexts of the Kurt Lewin Center and its Program on Action Research to Resolve Social Problems, the Action Research Leadership Team (ARLT) will be charged with developing several social systems in order to deliver local action research. Initially, the ARLT must attend to developing itself into a cohesive group. That will constitute a significant challenge because its members will be living and working in different social situations. The social psychological researchers are in the university. The action leaders, in contrast, are in human-service community organizations. In between, adult educators are in pedagogical colleges, or educational programs of school or community organizations. Wherever its members spend their time, building themselves into a cooperative team will be a major challenge.

The next task will be for the ARLT to analyze demographic data about Poland. Reflecting upon parallels between the 1946 Connecticut workshop, and what the Polish Program on Action Research to Resolve Social Problems might be capable of sponsoring today, one is struck with the demographic contrasts. For example, Poland is about the size of New Mexico in the USA in total land area. Consider that New Mexico is the fifth largest American state, while Connecticut ranks 48th in land area, just two above the smallest states. Poland and New Mexico are each 24 times larger than Connecticut in square kilometers. Consider, too, the very different population numbers between 1946 Connecticut and 2008 Poland; I estimate that Poland of today is about 16 times larger in population compared with 1946 Connecticut. And, remember that compared to most of the United States in those days, Connecticut was as the New Englanders say, "very thickly settled".

Since contemporary Poland has 16 provinces, some of which still are 50% rural, we might assume that it has some provinces today with similar demographics to Connecticut in 1946.

I believe that the ARLT should design a feasible Polish action-research effort that focuses upon one of its 16 provinces. For practical efficiencies, I would think that the city of Bydgoszcz could become the capital for such a geographic focus, perhaps spanning an area from the towns of Mogilno (Lewin's boyhood town) in the south to Tleń in the north. Alternatively, the towns of Pila to the west, or Torun to the east, or the more urban Poznan to the southwest could be the capitals for other focused action-research efforts. Obviously I am only brainstorming possibilities.

To emulate the early second-path Lewinians' Connecticut project further, the ARLT should select roughly 10 local teams, based in 10 different town, with about five members each. In recruiting the local teams, the ARLT would want to consider governmental officials, heads of industrial workplaces, school administrators, hospital directors, and the like. With a total of 50 trainees for an action-research workshop, the ARLT should form a Workshop Training Staff (WTS) of between 5 and 10 trainers, so that effective social systems can be formed to cover all three angles of Lewin's triangle, and to insure the follow-up consultation after the workshop that Lippitt argued for so strongly.

Processes. To round out this presentation about Polish applications, I will reiterate a few Lewinian lessons about the processes of action research. As the WTS designs the workshop, it builds in an "each one teach one" phase, whereby the social psychologists teach about group theory and research methods, the adult educators teach about adult development and social skill training, and the action leaders teach about their taxonomy of community social problems. Together, WTS members incorporate the most important contents learned from one another into their workshop design.

In arranging for the social setting of the workshop the WTS tries to realize Lewin's idea of a cultural island. At the workshop, the WTS trainers lead the local teams-as-teams through team building activities, including the value of each member carrying out task and social-emotional roles during group meetings. The WTS also organizes heterogeneous clusters that cut across local teams to stimulate creativity, and it teaches the trainees about the taxonomy of community problems. It puts emphasis on the scientific research methods for diagnosis, fact finding, reconnaissance, and evaluation, and gives special attention to observation, as well as to the important social skill of group problem solving. The WTS remains receptive to feedback, is attentive to trainee morale, and offers personal consultations for back-home groups and individuals in need of guidance. The WTS encourages the local teams to prepare their communities for action research, and asks each team to present its back-home plan to the other teams for critical feedback.

Near the close of the workshop the WTS makes plans for the followup with the local teams. The WTS meets regularly for the next six months to share information about the community projects, and to explore how the action research might be carried out in other towns, another province, or with other European partners.

Postscript

Only a few months before his death, Lewin wrote, "I would like to mention the relation between the local, national, and international scenes. No one working in the field of inter-group relations can be blind to the fact that we live today in one world.

Whether it will become one world or two worlds, there is no doubt that so far as interdependence of events is concerned, we live in one world... The development of intergroup relations is... full of danger, and the development of social science faces many obstacles... A large scale effort of social research on inter-group relations doubtless would be able to have a lasting effect on the history of this »country«. And I add now, »of this world«. Lewin's gift of expecting the best outcomes from social psychology, and his preoccupation with the most hopeful aspects of action research have inspired me to write this paper.

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