

Vlad I. ROȘCA

Kurt Lewin
His life and his approach to change management

Editura ASE
București
2020



Academia de Studii Economice din București

Copyright © 2020, Editura ASE

Toate drepturile asupra acestei ediții sunt rezervate editurii.

Editura ASE

Piața Romană nr. 6, sector 1, București, România

cod 010374

www.ase.ro

www.editura.ase.ro

editura@ase.ro

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

ROȘCA, VLAD I.

Kurt Lewin : his life and his approach to change management / Vlad I. Roșca. - București : Editura ASE, 2020

Conține bibliografie

ISBN 978-606-34-0321-7

005

Editura ASE

Redactare: Livia Radu

Tehnoredactare: Violeta Rogojan

Copertă: Violeta Rogojan

Imagine coperta: <https://www.shutterstock.com/es/image-vector/kurt-lewin-vector-sketch-illustration-1368915038>, accesat la 14.02.2020

Autorul își asumă întreaga responsabilitate pentru: ideile exprimate, corectitudinea științifică, originalitatea materialului și sursele bibliografice menționate.

To my parents.

To Daniel.

Contents

List of figures	8
Introduction	9
Biography of Kurt Lewin (including details of his close relatives)	10
1. Kurt Lewin – His Life	21
2. Kurt Lewin – His Work	39
2.1 Phenomenology	41
2.2 Holism	46
2.3 Early Life Influences and Egalitarianism	51
3. The German Years	54
3.1 Field Theory	54
3.2 Unified Whole	58
3.3 Gestalt Psychology and Social Psychology.	61
4. Action Research	70
4.1 Action Research regarding Dietary Habits of American Housewives	74
4.2 Conclusive Thoughts on Lewin’s Action Research	76
5. Organizational Development	77
5.1 The Harwood Research Studies	79
6. Organizational Change	82
7. Group Dynamics and the Force-Field Model	86
7.1 Group Dynamics	87
7.2 The Force-Field Model	88
7.3 Field	90
7.4 Resistance to Change	93
8. Three-Step Change Model	94
8.1 Unfreezing.....	97
8.2 Moving.....	101
8.3 Refreezing	103
Conclusions	105
Bibliography	109

List of figures

Figure 3.1 The Geographical and Behavioral Dimensions of Space	56
Figure 3.2 Lewin's Concept of Life Space	57
Figure 3.3 Comfort Zone and Danger Zone.....	60
Figure 3.4 The Influence of External Factors on Individual Behavior	62
Figure 3.5 Gestalt Psychology Filters to Perception and Behavior	62
Figure 3.6 Existence As a Result of Perception.....	63
Figure 3.7 Attributing Meaning to Objects.....	64
Figure 3.8 Moving an Object From Illusion to Reality.....	65
Figure 3.9 The Spaces in the World According to Dwyer (1990: 23)	67
Figure 5.1 The Building Blocks of Organizational Development	81
Figure 7.1 The Termination of a Field.....	91
Figure 7.2 The Extensive Morphology of a Field.....	92

Introduction

For academic researchers and scientists, Kurt Lewin is probably best remembered due to his 3-step change model, which represents a solid foundation of modern change management. Lewin started work on the model towards the end of his life as a synopsis of earlier scientific discoveries, suggesting that any successful change has to undergo three stages: unfreezing (breaking away from the status quo), movement (or the actual change; the abolition of the initial state of being towards a new condition) and refreezing (the consolidation of the change). Thanks to its simplicity, the model has been used by change management professionals ever since. However, in incidental conditions, Lewin never really intended the model to represent that what it later came to be known for. The model was first presented in “*Frontiers in Group Dynamics: I. Concept, method and reality in social science; social equilibria and social change*”, a research paper published in *Human Relations* in June 1947, so after Lewin had passed away on February, 11th of the same year. In the article, Lewin presented some of his main ideas on social change, without actually looking at the model as the change management tool that it later became. One can only wonder what might have happened had Lewin not suffered the heart attack that caused his early death: What clarifications might he have further brought?; How would have Change Management looked nowadays had Lewin added more of his comments? Instead, what happened was that fellow scientists took Lewin’s model and, in a *folkloresque*-like approach to science, each of them added some of their own ideas to Lewin’s own’s, thus resulting the “*Lewin change model*”, yet, odd enough, not as Lewin himself originally thought about it.

The aim of this change management book is to inspect the 3-step model, however not in isolation, but connected to Lewin’s life, in order to understand what shaped Lewin’s thoughts to make him tackle the subject of social change, which business economics later seized upon. What results is a biographic work that looks into Kurt Lewin’s life, both from a very intimate perspective (his private life and family relationships), as well as from a public context (his scientific career and professional track). How Lewin worked and how he thought cannot be fully grasped without knowing the impactful and mostly adverse experiences he has made during his very short life: the First World War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, Nazism, Holocaust and the Second World War all left their marks on Lewin’s thoughts. This book is also available as a translation in German and Romanian languages.