

Werner Erhard and Associates

Werner Erhard and Associates, also known as **WE&A** or as **WEA**, operated as a commercial entity from February 1981 until early 1991. It replaced Erhard Seminars Training, Inc. as the vehicle for delivering the *est* training, and offered what some people refer to as personal^[2] and professional development programs. Initially WE&A marketed and staged the *est* training (in the form of the *est* seminars and workshops), but in 1984 the *est* training was replaced by WE&A with a more modern, briefer, more rigorous and more philosophical program - based on Werner Erhard's teachings and called "The Forum".^{[3][4]}

In 1991 Erhard sold the assets of WE&A to a group of employees, who later formed Landmark Education. Erhard then retired^[5] and left the United States.^[6]

Timeline

- February 1981: Werner Erhard and Associates (WE&A) set up.^[5]
- 1984: WE&A replaces the *est* training with "The Forum".^[3]
- 1991: Erhard sold the assets of WE&A to a group of employees who later formed Landmark Education.

The Forum

Evaluations

Objective studies

A scientific study conducted by a team of psychology professors concluded that attending the Forum had minimal lasting effects — positive or negative — on participants.^[7] The research won an American Psychological Association "National Psychological Consultants to Management Award" in 1989.^[8]

The results of the research study appeared in two articles in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* in 1989^[9] and in 1990,^[10] and in 1990 in a book titled *Evaluating a Large Group Awareness Training*.^[11]

Subjective surveys

Werner Erhard and Associates

Type	<u>Private sole proprietorship</u> ^[1] (defunct)
Industry	<u>Personal development</u> , <u>Large Group Awareness Training</u>
Founded	February 1981
Defunct	1991
Headquarters	<u>San Francisco, California, USA</u>
Key people	<u>Werner Erhard</u> (Founder)
Products	Seminars, workshops



Werner Erhard

The abstract of Charles Denison's PhD dissertation for the College of Education (University of Denver), "The Children of est: A Study of the Experience and Perceived Effects of a Large Group Awareness Training (the Forum)", reported that the Forum had a definite structure, curriculum, and pedagogical approach. Denison's study identified the primary concepts of The Forum, called "distinctions". Denison's data indicate that qualitatively significant results were produced in participants' self-assessed functioning in cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. Most participants attributed significant life effects to their experience.^[12]

Public-opinion analyst Daniel Yankelovich did an investigation of the response of participants to their experience of the Forum. Yankelovich reported that "more than seven out of ten participants found the Forum to be one of their life's most rewarding experiences". The study reported that 95 percent of Forum graduates believe the Forum had "specific, practical value" for many aspects of their lives, and 86 percent of those surveyed said that it helped them "cope with a particular challenge or problem".^{[13][14]}

Conceptual evaluations

Professor of Communication Studies, Bruce R. Hyde, in his paper "Saying the Clearing: A Heideggerian Analysis of the Ontological Rhetoric of Werner Erhard", discusses the Forum as the beginnings of Erhard's work in developing transformational education utilizing an ontological approach rather than an epistemological approach.^[15]

Impact

One of the more common alleged results of the Forum was the healing of relationships with parents. One facet of this course was to urge participants to stop blaming their parents for their problems and begin to express their natural love for them that was often buried under accumulated resentments.^[16]

Many projects to come out of WE&A involved working to foster value, camaraderie and opportunities to serve the community. As an example of this a group of participants in a "High performance" seminar threw a Christmas party at a homeless shelter by planning, preparing, cooking and participating with the people in the shelter. As a result, they came "away with the gift of knowing we are them and they are us, homeless or sheltered, employed or out of work, broke or salaried; we recognize ourselves in their eyes and in their plight."^[17]

See also

- List of large-group awareness training organizations

References

1. "Accordingly, Werner Erhard and Associates ("WEA") was established as a sole proprietorship in February 1981." Erhard v. IRS, 1995. <http://www.assetprotectionbook.com/erhard.htm> Retrieved 2007-10-05

2. Gastil, John (2010). "Learning and Growing". *The Group in Society* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=a7twxBPEwzwC>). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE. p. 228. ISBN 9781412924689. Retrieved 11 March 2023. "Skepticism about therapeutic groups as a means of personal development may be warranted. [...] More direct evidence comes from a careful study of Large Group Awareness Training programs, variously known as Erhard Seminars training (est), Lifespring, or simply the Forum. The basic procedure of these courses parallels the group training workshops described earlier, but the emphasis shifts from group effectiveness to personal development. [...] In the most rigorous independent study to date, a team of researchers led by psychologist Jeffrey Fisher obtained permission to study the impact of participation in a training process sponsored by Werner Erhard and Associates. The investigators assembled a sample of eighty-three people who took part in the Forum, along with fifty-two comparison groups of non-participants with comparable baseline characteristics. Fisher and his team assessed the Forum participants' traits and beliefs four to six weeks before taking part in the Forum, four to six weeks afterward, and eighteen months later. Based on the wide range of the Forum's purported benefits, Fisher's surveys measured life satisfaction, social competence, self-esteem, physical and emotional health, and a variety of character traits. In the short term, average Forum participants experienced a small but significant increase that the course of their life was under their own control [...]. In the eighteen-month follow-up, however, [...]."
3. Gottlieb, Anthony (1990-01-07). "HEIDEGGER FOR FUN AND PROFIT" (<https://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/07/books/heidegger-for-fun-and-profit.html>). *The New York Times*. ISSN 0362-4331 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0362-4331>). Retrieved 2023-02-07. "Mr. Erhard's est encounter sessions - which, by some estimates, had as many as 500,000 takers between 1971 and 1984 - attracted plenty of criticism for their authoritarian form of indoctrination. But they also produced hundreds of obsessively eager acolytes: enough for him to set up a watered-down and more marketable organization, known as the Forum, which replaced est in 1984. The Forum offers a series of two *transformational* weekends for \$625. The thinking behind them is often Heideggerian - or at least very similar to Heidegger's - with a few of its own twists and turns. Professor Dreyfus was hired to help give it a more Heideggerian slant (though he is certainly not responsible for its current form). [...] Heidegger's critics will derive some satisfaction from the fact that he has ended up, half-understood, on the lips of followers many of whom are white-collar cranks. Theirs, certainly, are not the most interesting thoughts of the century."
4. Wakefield, Dan (1999). "Six Days of Hell". *How Do We Know when It's God?: A Spiritual Memoir* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=CW4sPXTM3MkC>). Center Ossipee, New Hampshire: Beech River Books (published 2010). p. 98. ISBN 9780982521458. Retrieved 7 June 2020. "The est training is replaced by a modernized, briefer, less confrontational, more Socratic sort of program called 'the Forum' [...]."
5. "Site by Former Associates committed to providing accurate and reliable information about Werner Erhard" (<http://www.wernererhard.info/career.html>). Retrieved 2007-09-09.
6. Goldwag, Arthur (11 August 2009). "Cults: What Makes a Cult Cultish?". *Cults, Conspiracies, and Secret Societies: The Straight Scoop on Freemasons, The Illuminati, Skull and Bones, Black Helicopters, The New World Order, and many, many more* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=88ZvDwAAQBAJ>). New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. p. 29. ISBN 9780307390677. Retrieved 11 March 2023. "In 1991, after twenty years and seven hundred thousand customers, Erhard retired and sold his intellectual property to his brother Harry Rosenberg. Investigated by the IRS and hounded by lawsuits from his children and ex-employees alleging abuse and exploitation, he left the country soon after."

7. Fisher, Jeffrey D.; Cohen Silver, Roxane; Chinsky, Jack M.; Goff, Barry; Klar, Yechiel (1990). *Evaluating a Large Group Awareness Training: A Longitudinal Study of Psychosocial Effects* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=WNjVBQAAQBAJ>). Recent Research in Psychology. New York: Springer Science & Business Media (published 2012). ISBN 9781461234289. Retrieved 2017-04-09. "[...] with the exception of one univariate effect, no evidence of negative effects was found on any of the measures [...] Many of the potential favorable outcomes of the Forum were assessed on constructs represented in the multivariate analyses (i.e., Positive and Negative Affect, Health, Perceived Control, Social Functioning, Life Satisfaction, Self-Esteem, and Daily Coping). On seven of these eight dimensions, there were no significant short- or long-term multivariate treatment effects. On one, Perceived Control, the short- but not the long-term multivariate comparison with nominees revealed that Forum participants became more internally oriented."
8. Fisher, Jeffrey D.; Cohen Silver, Roxane; Chinsky, Jack M.; Goff, Barry; Klar, Yechiel (1990). *Evaluating a Large Group Awareness Training: A Longitudinal Study of Psychosocial Effects*. Springer-Verlag. p. 142. ISBN 978-0-387-97320-3.
Page. vii. – "The research reported in this volume was awarded the American Psychological Association, Division 13, National Consultants to Management Award, August 13, 1989."
9. Fisher, Jeffrey D.; Silver, Roxane Cohen; Chinsky, Jack M.; Goff, Barry; Klar, Yechiel; Zagieboylo, Cyndi (1989). "Psychological effects of participation in a large group awareness training". *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. **57** (6): 747–755. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.57.6.747 (<https://doi.org/10.1037%2F0022-006X.57.6.747>). ISSN 0022-006X (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0022-006X>).
10. Klar, Yechiel; et al. (February 1990). "Characteristics of Participants in a Large Group Awareness Training". *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. **58** (1): 99–108. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.58.1.99 (<https://doi.org/10.1037%2F0022-006X.58.1.99>). ISSN 0022-006X (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0022-006X>). PMID 2319051 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/2319051/>).
11. J.D. Fisher, R. C. Silver, J. M. Chinsky, B. Goff and Y. Klar, *Evaluating a Large Group Awareness Training: A Longitudinal Study of Psychosocial Effects*, Published by Springer-Verlag, October 1990, ISBN 0-387-97320-6.
12. Denison, Charles W. (1994). "The Children of est: A Study of the Perceived Effects of Large Group Awareness Training (the Forum)" (<https://www.scribd.com/document/77184337/The-Children-of-Est-A-Study-of-the-experience-and-percieved-effects-of-a-large-group-awareness-training-The-Forum>). "This study analyzed what happens in a training, and documented the outcome that participants attribute to the experience. [...] The researcher completed multiple observations of the training, and conducted in-depth interviews with 20 research subjects. [...] The Forum was found to have a definite structure, curriculum, and pedagogical approach. The primary concepts of The Forum, called 'distinctions,' were identified. The data indicate that qualitatively significant results were produced in participants' cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of functioning. Most participants attributed significant life effects to their experience.)"
13. "Erhard's Life After Est" (<https://dialogueireland.wordpress.com/2009/02/10/erhards-life-after-est/>). *Dialogue Ireland*. 2009-02-10. Retrieved 2023-02-07.
14. Wakefield, Dan (1994). "*Outrageous Betrayal[:] The Dark Journey of Werner Erhard from est to Exile*" (<https://tricycle.org/magazine/outrageous-betrayal/>). *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. Vol. 3, no. Spring. New York: Tricycle Foundation. Retrieved 2017-04-09. "[...] according to a study by opinion analyst Daniel Yankelovich, seven out of ten participants in The Forum found it to be 'one of their life's most rewarding experiences,' while 94 percent felt the program had 'practical' and 'enduring' value."
15. Hyde, R. B., *Saying the Clearing: A Heideggerian Analysis of the Ontological Rhetoric of Werner Erhard*, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1991.

16. Compare: Wakefield, Dan (2010) [1999]. "Six Days of Hell". *How Do We Know when It's God?: A Spiritual Memoir* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=CW4sPXTM3MkC>). Center Ossipee, New Hampshire: Beech River Books. p. 99. ISBN 9780982521458. Retrieved 15 October 2021. "One of the most common and positive results of the est training as well as the Forum, the program that succeeds it, is the healing of relationships with parents. Countering the current vogue of seeing oneself as 'victim,' this program urges participants to stop blaming their parents for their woes, and express the natural love for them that is buried beneath the layers of resentments accumulated over the years."
17. Wakefield, Dan (2010) [1999]. "Six Days of Hell". *How Do We Know when It's God?: A Spiritual Memoir* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=CW4sPXTM3MkC>). Center Ossipee, New Hampshire: Beech River Books. p. 99. ISBN 9780982521458. Retrieved 15 October 2021. "Theresa and I take the Forum and other seminars, and continue to find value and uplift and camaraderie in 'the work,' which rather than the cliché criticisms of it as 'selfish' and 'aggressive' opens us to opportunities for service. The high point of our 'High Performance' seminar comes when our group of eight people plans, prepares, cooks, and entertains at a Christmas party and dinner for a homeless shelter in Cambridge. We come away with the gift of knowing we are them and they are us, homeless or sheltered, employed or out of work, broke or salaried; we recognize ourselves in their eyes and in their plight."

External links

- Werner Erhard and Associates (<http://www.wernererhard.com/wea.html>)
 - est and Werner Erhard (<http://www.skeptdic.com/est.html>), *The Skeptic's Dictionary*
 - Werner Erhard, *Wikiquote*
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