



Andreas Fryszer / Rainer Schwing

Handbook of Systemic Psychotherapy



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Preface

Some 20 years ago a few colleagues active in social education asked Winiger Beuse about obtaining training in systemics that would not be limited to simple therapeutic know-how, but rather concentrate on imparting the knowledge necessary for working professionally in social welfare and in healthcare. At that time there were few opportunities of this nature, at least not in that particular geographic area. Most courses in continuing education were more of a clinical nature – even if they did contain the word “counseling” in their title. The methods taught there tended to stem from therapeutic settings and were designated solely for therapeutic situations. Our observations both as therapists and as teachers of various training courses in family therapy had led us to the conclusion that systemic approaches could be very enlightening when reflecting on psychosocial work, the more clinical approaches failing to be particularly relevant in such contexts.

From this original inquiry arose the idea of creating just such a curriculum. To this end, four teaching therapists (Winiger Beuse, Erika Lützner-Lay, Artur Goerke-Hengst, Rainer Schwing), up to that point only a loose-fitting network, sat down together to draw up a 2-year course in continuing education. The course was based on the needs of the original group and on their own experiences during training courses. The goal was to create specialized systemic know-how for the field of social work, for experts in the field of healthcare, and for educational institutions. From this interaction – and from the growing pool of teaching experiences – arose the “praxis – institut für systemische beratung” (“praxis – institute for systemic counseling”).

Today we can look back on 18 years of experience with this curriculum and on 40 different training groups. We now have a wealth of literature available on systemic approaches in many different disciplines. There are also excellent basic works available on the market outlining systemic practice and describing various methods. Yet few methodological textbooks exist that describe the whole complexity of psychosocial practice and the practical methods available for the various fields.

That is why we decided to draw from our own materials, which arose in part through our interaction with participants in supervision and training courses and have been thoroughly tested and fine-tuned in the course of their participation. Our goal was to prepare a collection of methods to be put again at their disposal. We were very pragmatic: We wanted our colleagues in these courses to have a collection of tools they themselves could employ when working with groups from all sorts of fields (inpatient, outpatient, semi-residential). The participants of these courses tend to come from many different areas, such as caretaking, coun-

seling, or support of both individuals and groups: They are the ideal recipients of our package of systemic tools. And, not least, we want to address the needs of students and trainees in the social, educational and therapeutic professions who need practical depictions to prepare them for the daily work ahead of them.

Of course, not every method is appropriate for every situation. Anyone attempting to put the methods presented here into practice stringently will encounter be met with above all one reaction: resistance. The better choice is to pick the methods wisely and narrowly to fit the client in question. An interview does not automatically become systemic, or, for that matter, good, simply by asking a copious amount of questions. Rather, the method must be adapted to one's own role and to the circumstances.

A further reason for writing this volume was to demonstrate the diverse tools that have emerged from the various different systemic traditions. In our opinion, the conscious combination of diverse approaches – under consideration of the respective theoretical background – will be the future method of choice. The latter conviction has largely determined the structure of this book, as detailed explicitly in the first chapter. We sometimes wander back and forth between male and female designations in an attempt to include both sexes in our remarks.

The most important thing, however, is the following: No thought, and certainly no book, is the work of single individual or even two. Many different people participated directly or indirectly in the development of this volume: Our families, who have accompanied our work with patience and support; trainers and colleagues at our institute, from whom we have learned so much – and who make our work so pleasurable; the scientific board of our institute, which has contributed many suggestions and much support particularly in difficult times; our readers, who have provided critical thoughts, both positive and negative; our clients, colleagues, and customers with their valuable feedback.

In particular we thank Inge Liebel-Fryszner, Franca, Lina and Leon Fryszner, Eugenia Schwing, Erika Lützner-Lay, Winiger Beuse, Artur Goerke-Hengst, Verena Krähenbühl, Dr. Margarete Hecker, Prof. Dr. Nossrat Peseschkian, Ruth Heise, Ingrid Sorge-Wiederspahn, Marika Eidmann, Heike Schwarz, Hans-Werner Eggemann-Dann, Cordula Alfes, Irma Schnocks, Anja Deger, Carole Gammer, Rainer Bosselmann, Antony Williams, Jürg Hartmann, Carl Wörner, Dr. Fritz Glasl, the Caritasverband Frankfurt and the team at the Eltern- und Jugendberatungsstelle Stadtmitte, the team at our own praxis institut, the former Psychologisch-Pädagogisches Zentrum (PPZ e.V.) and its employees as well as our clients, colleagues and customers from whom we have learned so much.

A comment regarding the English translation of our book: literature which has previously been published in English is quoted following the original translation. Excerpts taken from literature which has only been published in other languages have been translated by us into English. For some interviews, we were unable to find some of the original English versions of the German translations and thus used our own English translations. These may deviate from the English original, even though the interviews were originally conducted in English.

We would like to express special thanks to our translator, Joseph A. Smith, for his competence and dedication – and his patience with our many questions. We also thank Emily Falkenberg for her efforts and for the many discussions we had with her to clear up questions surrounding English and American technical terms. Günter Presting at our publisher, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, is also due many thanks for supporting this project so heartily and with great commitment and for encouraging us all the way.

Special thanks go to our parents for the foundations they laid that have made this book possible.

Andreas Fryszler and Rainer Schwing

Foreword

This is the book I would liked to have written myself from my own experience in the teaching and continuing education of social workers and social educators. Unfortunately, because of other personal and professional commitments, that was not possible. All the more I would like to congratulate Rainer Schwing and Andreas Fryszer, who have drawn on their own wealth of experiences in the supervision of helpers of all sorts to compose this handbook containing a plethora of practical approaches to comprehending and reacting to even the most complicated and problematic situations. They show how systemic theory and systemic practice can impart to professionals from various fields a pragmatic and helpful approach to both solving concrete problems and understanding the general theory of social work.

How often have we, as university instructors, been told that the therapeutic concepts and the many case histories provided in our courses were interesting, albeit of little practical use under real-world circumstances. That can be a very frustrating experience, to say the least. This book employs an abundance of case histories that, like the systemic concepts originally developed in clinical surroundings, can be transferred to all sorts of areas where helpers are employed. A rather gloomy mood ensues among social workers and social educators when they get together and discover how very little they can actually effect in their professions, how overworked they all are, and how little solidarity they experience from others. This volume, on the other hand, often speaks of resource orientation and how new approaches and new concepts can provide both satisfaction and pleasure at work – all the while strengthening one's competence.

Colleagues react particularly positively to the simplification gained through the use of the legendary "Philadelphia Map," where one enters the various hierarchies, relationships, and the systemic structures experienced. This map is meant to be understood as a provisional, experimental diagnosis – not a final one – that may change in the course of the helping process: The client is not labeled or reduced to some scheme. A further example: Finding a diagnosis and initiating an intervention are not treated as separate entities; there is no need for a long preparation for the exploration – the process of change commences immediately after the "joining" begins, i.e., the first contact between counselor and client. This approach bolsters one's courage to attack even more complex, perhaps even stalemated client systems.

This book offers its readers many pragmatic suggestions and imaginative ways to induce change, such as reinterpretation, positive connotation, telling stories or inserting rituals in systems with aberrant behavior. That is not to say that the

reader is presented with a magical grab bag of solutions to choose from. Rather, the “how” of systemic therapy always lies at the forefront; systemic thought and action patterns are presented as concrete events emerging from theoretical foundations, thus preserving the close relationship between theory and practice.

We know from the many comparative studies the question of why various types and schools of intervention succeed (or don't) that success depends greatly on the personality and the credibility of the respective counselor – and on that person's emotional identification with his or her own method. *The hand that holds the tool is decisive*. This book does not have a chapter devoted exclusively to the personality of the counselor, but the many case examples highlight how important the esteem of the counselor for the client is in an emotional emergency; and how carefully and cautiously the proper type of intervention must be chosen. A practitioner wanting to become better qualified in systemic concepts and the systemic approach will find many references to the fact that the “map” one constructs to better understand the client is not the same as the actual situation itself, which in fact may be very different from the construction used to help understand that person's situation. However intensely one may choose to apply previously unknown or unusual intervention methods, when observing the client system it is imperative to ask oneself the following: What type of feedback am I getting from the client and how sensitive am I toward those signals?

The German-speaking countries have had at their disposal a number of good and proven theoretical textbooks on systemic therapy and counseling. We learned a great deal from the American pioneers, who in the 1950s and 1960s began to look beyond the individual and expanded their view to clients in their respective contexts. Andreas Fryszner and Rainer Schwing have written a handbook that deals, in depth, with the current social, legal and institutional situation readers face throughout their lives and work in Germany today. The case studies comprise all social strata, from the unstructured poor family relying on help from a social caseworker, to the middle-class family seeking help from a counseling center, to a dysfunctional team from a highly structured administrative setting.

The need for more experienced practitioners is becoming ever stronger because of the social precariousness now found in the poorest areas of large cities. I hope this book will be widely read by colleagues from social work and social education, by psychologists and psychiatrists alike, indeed by everyone working in the business of caretaking. I hope they can integrate the help, suggestions, and options provided here to manage their daily tasks. By strengthening their skills and competence they can contribute to furthering an appreciation for their professions – something that is sorely needed in light of the increasing social fracturing occurring in broad parts of the population.

Margarete Hecker

1 Peeking Inside the Box: What's There and What's Where

1.1 An Outline

Anything we do – and thus of course anything we do professionally – begins with a series of things we see, organize, and decide upon. Ideally, that process would look like the one depicted in Figure 1.

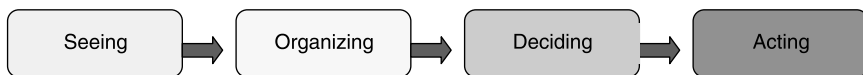


Figure 1: The (ideal) linear course of seeing, organizing, deciding, and acting.

In fact, however, action often takes place first, before we've even seen and understood why we acted in such a way. And, alas, the same is true for professional dealings. The reverse order is often necessary because of the way the situation unfolds. And sometimes seeing, organizing, deciding, and acting can all occur simultaneously.

Systemically speaking, this course may be considered a circular one that compresses the four steps into ever-shorter cycles. Circular in this regard means the opposite of linear – which introduces us to an important pair of opposites in the systemic way of viewing things: Linear means a temporal succession – first seeing, then organizing, then deciding, and finally acting. Every step is the result of the previous one: Seeing is the prerequisite for organizing, organizing is the prerequisite for deciding and so on.

Circular, on the other hand, means mutual dependency, an interconnectedness. Seeing can arise from organizing, deciding can follow action. The order in which things occur does not necessarily adhere to the causal context; rather, the various elements mutually influence each other. Every beginning and thus every end, every form of punctuation in such a circular process is arbitrary (see Figure 2 as well as the Background Text in Chapter 5.3). In this respect, the quote by Heinz von Foerster is valid: "If you desire to see, learn how to act" (1984, p. 61).

This book deals with the conscious reflection, organization and planning of these steps when working with families, groups and individuals. It depicts the ideal phases of an intervention process, the goal being to show how this order of things works from a systemic point of view:

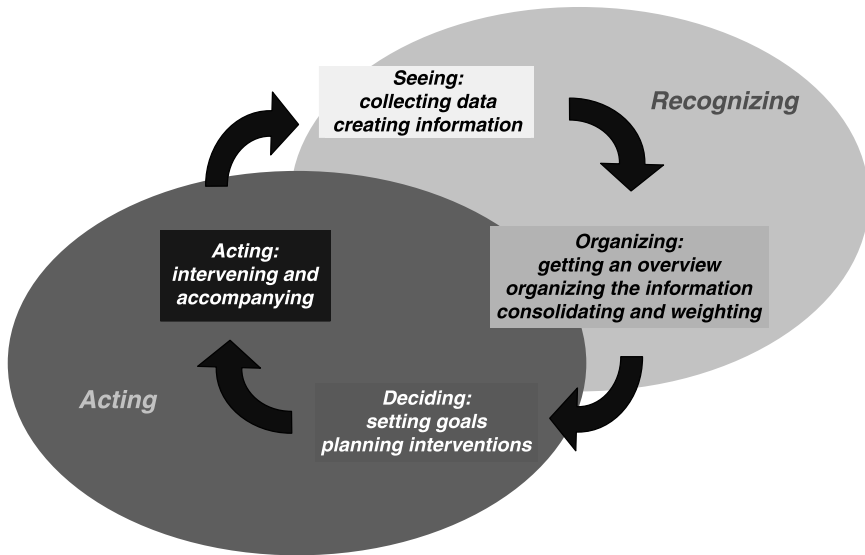


Figure 2: The circular approach to seeing, acting, organizing and deciding.

- *Seeing*: exploration, diagnostics, initial interview (Chapter 2),
- *Organizing*: data analysis and documentation (Chapter 3),
- *Deciding*: devising hypotheses, setting goals, planning interventions (Chapter 4),
- *Acting*: intervening and accompanying (Chapter 5).

1.2 The Formal Layout of the Texts – Notes for the Reader

It is our goal to present the tools of systemic therapy so that any practitioner can follow and implement them. We describe the individual methods in detail and provide additional extensive notes and instructions that have proved to be useful in practice. To this we add many examples drawn from practical experience. All examples have been modified to prevent any reference to actual persons or situations.

The use of certain tools is inherently connected to the systemic perspectives behind the methods set forth. Thus, employing these tools simultaneously supplies the user with an introduction to systemic perspectives, basic approaches and theoretical considerations. Only the repeated use of such a skill will turn it into one's very own skill – something true of therapists and craftsmen alike. In addition, we emphasize these skills by putting them in special sections titled "Background Texts," which serve to present basic systemic tenets and theoretical concepts to the reader as well as to show the connection between the practical application and the ideal or historical background of systemic work.

Conversations with students of systemic thought often yield a number of main

questions: What exactly makes a method systemic? And what are the ideas behind this approach? These questions further the discovery one's own identity as a systemic-oriented helper.

Methods and techniques enable us to carry out specific actions, much as hammers, pliers, and welding equipment do. Glasses, microscopes, telescopes, and infrared cameras all help us to perceive our environment. Theoretical positions train our vision of the world around us – they are as it were the glasses that allow us to focus on the various levels of social systems. In this sense not only methods and techniques, but also theoretical constructs are tools of perception and should be treated as such. Their usefulness depends on the situation, the persons in question and the goals at hand. Their usefulness, in turn, determines whether a particular concept, a method or a technique should be employed or not (see Herwig-Lempp, 2012, p. 44). Thus, in the “Background Texts” we introduce various, not necessarily compatible theoretical positions and invite the readers to choose for themselves, depending on the respective situation.

Yet, what we do not provide is a complete and self-contained presentation of the theory of systemic principles. To that end there are a number of very good and competently written publications (e.g., von Schlippe & Schweitzer, 2007).

One central matter is of utmost importance to us: We want to support students in the application and use of systemic thought in their daily work and provide more experienced practitioners with a handbook of useful suggestions. The “Background Texts” can be skipped by the more skilled and practice-oriented readers already familiar with the various theoretical viewpoints.

Nevertheless, we consider it important that the reader be aware of his or her own implicit assumptions about how the insight these tools yield, where their true value lies and how they work. We encourage readers to combine different methods while consciously dealing with their implicit assumptions (the so-called shish kebab principle: putting anything you like and anything that fits on a skewer), but are opposed to the generous use of tools without a clear notion of their theoretical background (the goulash principle: put everything into one big pot and stir).

1.3 Our Position: Shish Kebab Yes, Goulash No

A look at the articles, books and the curricula available for continuing education concerning systemic topics may create the impression that systemic therapy or counseling refers solely to a set of methods and nothing else. Aren't systemic therapists the ones who pose circular questions, explore narratives and want nothing to do with real problems? Aren't they always interested first and foremost in exceptions and miracles?

Every systemic theory, like the theories of other therapeutic schools, wants to develop its own methodology. Yet such a restrictive approach tends to hinder more than help us to benefit from the cornucopia of methods, techniques and

theories that have arisen throughout the history of systemic thought. Moreover, it is inadequate for the broad range of demands of the diverse people we meet in psychosocial work.

We understand the systemic pursuit to be primarily one of action; it provides us with the orientation necessary to form hypotheses and to plan interventions. This perspective encompasses many ways and methods of understanding the situation garnered from systemic and other traditions. Working with colleagues from various disciplines and with very diverse backgrounds has enlightened and encouraged us. The psychoanalytic approach of understanding events as “scenes” can enrich systemic work enormously; exercises from behavioral therapy can be integrated into systemic intervention quite well. In the appropriate dosage, methods from psychodrama and gestalt psychology can lead to a better understanding on a nonverbal level and can help to implement change. The common denominator remains the systemic perspective: always viewing the entire field and determining the impulses that a certain intervention creates or obtains in a specific context.

Our previous 20-year experience in supervision, training, and in organizations from diverse fields has showed us that it is rarely possible to implement the theories of any one school of systemic thought in its purest possible form – and that this, in fact, is not even attempted. A situation is usually characterized by a combination of various forms of therapy and counseling – something we consider both appropriate and adequate. In school one should learn for life – and not learn how spend life playing school!

In our opinion, the future of therapy and counseling lies in the combination of the various schools, methods and techniques. Especially more recent publications point in that direction, such as the development of the “generic principles” by Schiepek and others (see Introduction to Chapter 5 on intervention). These resemble the principles formulated by physicists which initiate processes of change in self-organizing systems (see Haken & Schiepek, 2010). Chapter 5 also discusses the determinants of change set forth by Grawe. In his work, Grawe compares different types of therapy which are now found in many modern approaches. The results of Schiepek and Grawe are amazingly similar in nature and confirm our own experiences in therapy and counseling with social systems.

We take this as encouragement for combining the various approaches, methods, and views from the different schools of thought both within and outside of systemic theory. Thus, we choose the shish kebab: picking and choosing the best and most tasty morsels that fit together on one single skewer.¹

We do, however, think it is still necessary to understand the background of the respective tools, that is, to know *why* this method or that method should produce some particular change. Any user of such methods will want to know just how the respective theory defines things such as “knowledge” or “truth,” and how that affects the relationship between the client and the therapist:

1 Our thanks to our colleague and teacher Dr. Rainer Bosselmann for this metaphor.

- How much respect does the therapist have for the framings and viewpoints of his or her clients?
- How sure is the therapist about possessing a valid norm or truth – how systems function – so that life may be successful?
- How sure is the therapist that “reality” and “system structures” can be recognized as something real?

These points should be kept in mind when employing the methods of the various approaches. The answers to these questions may differ considerably from school to school – and indeed sometimes differ even within approaches to systemic thought, especially in the newer approaches. But they are all relevant to the way the client-therapist relationship is structured. If this point is not heeded, one effectively puts the tools and views of many different schools of thought indiscriminately into one pot. That would be the goulash method of consultation.

Thus, we prefer shish kebab over goulash! Even though we realize that one cannot resolve all the contradictions between the different approaches. A normative approach, such as that of Salvador Minuchin, and a narrative approach, such as that of Steve de Shazer, are and always will be opposites and mutually exclusive. But here, too, we can learn from physics: Whether light consists of an electromagnetic wave or particles of material is not completely known, although the two opinions are mutually exclusive. Yet some phenomena can best be explained with the one theory, others with the other theory. Physicists thus tend to change their views on the explanation depending on the respective situation! We like this pragmatic strategy regarding various schools and opinions. In our own practice, we apply a theory as long as it proves to be profitable. We would rather change our theoretical frame of reference during counseling than doubt the ability of our clients to develop and to change, just because we have failed to achieve change with our previous viewpoint.

2 Exploring, Observing, Beginning

2.1 What to Expect: The Initial Phase

The initial phase is concerned with building up trust among the persons involved, establishing relationships, and gathering information in order to reach an agreement about the type of help to be offered and the goals of that cooperation. The best term to describe this process is “exploration,” which comprises both investigating and examining. In this phase the counselor first looks, listens and observes (in a passive-receptive way), but then also approaches the client – to question, investigate and examine the situation. It is especially important to establish contact with the client: open doors, build bridges, gain trust and provide confidence.

The following matters are of primary concern:

- Who belongs to the client’s system?
- Who is in need of help? Who is most motivated?
- What resources are available?
- What are the problems and deficits? How are they – and their causes – seen by the various persons involved?
- What does one learn from the conversations about the structure, rules and internal communication of the system?
- What are the first (nonverbal) impressions of the client’s system and the client’s extended environment?

Only after having answered these questions can we formulate possible ways to help the client and, together with the persons involved, determine whether and how their expectations can be met by our offer.

There are situations in which the exploration phase will go on for a long time and require multiple meetings both with the persons involved and with other potential helpers. The themes of such meetings may be centered around conversations or any other activities such as playing, hobbies or taking long walks. In other situations a single interview of an hour or so may suffice to reach a conclusion of whether and how to proceed.

Depending on the institution involved, the recipient of the offer for help may not be the actual person footing the bill. This creates triangular relationships consisting of the recipient of the support efforts, the actual contractor, and the person or institution providing the support. That may make several discussions necessary – with all three parties, with only the recipient, or with only the contractor. The contractor and the provider must reach an agreement about how to proceed, for

example, when the family's bills are being paid by a welfare agency or when the head of an institution is looking for a team supervisor.

Some activities demand very intensive preparations with the client's system to ensure that it is ready and willing to make a contract with the counselor. With clients who have multiple problem areas, the counselor may need a long time to judge how best to offer such help.

Regardless whether the initial contact takes only a single meeting or a six-month period of preparation, the contents of this phase is basically always the same.

2.2 What Is a System and Who Belongs to the System?

Whenever we want to observe a system, a number of questions arise: How do I recognize a system when I see one? Who belongs to the system and who doesn't? What am I actually observing when I observe a system?

Does the biological father belong to the system when he has had no contact with his son for over 5 years? What about the deceased grandmother whose influence is still very much palpable within the family? How to classify the teacher who has been so intensely active on behalf of the family the past couple of years? How does one recognize the boundaries of the system? What should be taken into consideration if we are to understand and observe a group of persons as a system?

Background Text: The Term "System" and Its Constructions

How can I really know who belongs to a system and who doesn't? How do I recognize a system? What is a system anyway?

First, the bad news for all systemic counselors: There are no such things as systems! And now for the good news: That is why we can conceive of an unlimited number of systems, the only requirement being that a system is – in the end – meaningful! Our definition of who belongs to a specific system must enable us to work successfully on that case. Otherwise, we need to change our view of the system and create a new approach. The criterion for determining the boundaries of a system is not that our definition somehow corresponds to a particular truth, but rather that it is pragmatically useful. The idea behind this thought is: *Like any another term the term system is a willful construction.*

Viewing the world through glasses that see only systems is in fact a conscious decision on our part. It is a way of interpreting the world around us, one that appears to us to be helpful in understanding the world and in developing ideas about how to successfully deal with that world. There are no clear boundaries to systems or subsystems. One family therapist said it very succinctly: "You cannot kiss a system!" Differentiating systems rather serves

our own orientation; we prepare maps of our experience. Of course, one could draw a particular mountain on the horizon differently. And we have to remember that our drawing of a mountain – no matter how we draw it – is not the mountain itself and never will be. The map is not the same as the landscape itself. And a map is only as good as the orientation it offers us.

This approach stems from constructivism (see von Glasersfeld, 2002; Watzlawick, 1977, 1984), an epistemology that assumes that our theories and conceptions of the world are based on our cognitions and can thus never be viewed independently of them. An infrared picture of the earth is not the same as a normal picture, although the object – the earth – is the same in each. *What* we perceive is very much a product of *how* we perceive it. We process perceptions and develop from that knowledge our own view of the world – our theories. All of which is dependent on the way our nervous system functions and thus determines how to interpret the information. The “construct” in “constructivism” means that our theories are dependent on our perceptual and cognitive apparatus – and are not necessarily reproductions of an external reality.

Maturana and Varela (1992, p. 149) drew the following analogy: “Imagine someone who has spent his entire life in a submarine, has never left it, and was trained to command it. Now from the beach we see the submarine coming closer and gliding to the surface. We radio to the Captain: ‘Congratulations, you’ve avoided all the reefs and have elegantly reached the surface; you’ve maneuvered your submarine excellently.’ The Captain retorts from within: ‘What are reefs and what is surfacing? All I did was pull some levers and turn some switches to achieve certain relationships between the displays and my moving the controls – all in a certain order I am used to. I didn’t do any maneuvering and I don’t know what you mean by submarine.’

“The captain of the submarine sees only the displays of the instruments before him, their actions, and the way in which certain relationships arise. For us, outside the submarine, observing how the relationships between the submarine and its surroundings change, the submarine displays a certain ‘behavior’ that is, depending on the consequences, more or less appropriate. If we stick to our logical approach, we should not mistake the way the submarine works and the dynamics of its conditions with its shifts and movements in the water.

“The situation of a submarine with a captain at the helm who is unaware of the outside world is not consistent with what the external observer sees: There are no ‘beaches,’ no ‘reefs’ and no ‘surfaces,’ rather only correlations between displays within certain boundaries. Things such as beaches, reefs and surfaces are valid only for the external observer, not for the submarine and its captain, who is part of that world. What is true for the submarine in our example is also true for all living systems: for the frog with its skewed eye, for Wolf Boy and for every human being alive.”

Constructivism is not concerned with whether there is a reality beyond our perception. Nor does it dispute the existence of such a reality. The material theories of epistemology, on the other hand, assume a certain material reality beyond our perception and thus do not speak of constructions but of representations of reality. In this sense these representations are either true or false, and they tend to become ever more exact and correct over time, since we continually improve upon how they represent the world.

Constructionists, however, do not say whether a construction is true or false. But if we cannot make a statement about the actual existence of reality, how can we judge whether our constructions are correct or incorrect? The main criterion of the constructionist, when judging a theory, is not whether it is true or correct, but whether it is useful and pragmatic.

Thus, we can determine who belongs to a system and who does not. It is useless to discuss whether our definition of this system is correct or incorrect. But it is sensible to discuss whether the system we have defined is meaningful, whether it furthers the goals we have set, and whether the boundaries of that system could be set differently to optimize our work.

But what does the term *system* mean? The meaning of *system*, and *social system* in particular, may become clearer once one has looked at the following assumptions concerning the characteristics and features of social systems:

- *Wholeness*: “A change in one part of a system necessarily affects the whole system” (de Shazer, 1980, p. 21). All elements of the system are bound together like those of a mobile: The movement of one element defines the movement of all others – and individual movements are transferred to the whole.
- *Summativity*: “The whole is different from the sum of its parts” (de Shazer, 1980, p. 21). There is a different quality to the whole, it is “more”: Music is more than an accumulation of notes; a team can do more and different things than a collection of individuals.
- *Circular causality, nonlinearity*: “The relationship of the progression of cause is such that the initial cause is also affected by the progression itself” (Simon & Stierlin, 2004, p. 393; de Shazer, 1980, p. 21). Events that take place in systems are best described as processes of circular interaction and less as linear processes, which assume a one-way street between cause and effect (see later Chapter 5.3).
- *Open system*: “Organic systems at the level of the cell, complex organism, and population of organisms exists in a continuous exchange with their environment. This exchange is crucial for sustaining the life and form of the system, since environmental interaction is the basis of self-maintenance. (...) The idea of openness emphasizes the key relationships between the environment and the internal functioning of the system. Environment and system are to be understood as being in a state of interaction and mutual dependence. The open nature of biological and social systems

contrasts with the ‘closed’ nature of many physical and mechanical systems, though the degree of openness can vary, since some open systems may only be responsive to a relatively narrow range of inputs from the environment. Towers, bridges, or even clockwork toys with predetermined motions are closed systems. A machine is able to regulate its internal operation in accordance with variations in the environment may be considered a partially open system. A living organism, organization, or social group is a fully open system” (Morgan, 2006, p. 46).

- *Homeostasis*: “The concept of homeostasis refers to self-regulation and the ability to maintain a steady state. Biological organisms seek a regularity of form and distinctness from the environment while maintaining a continuous exchange with that environment. This form and distinctness is achieved through homeostatic processes that regulate and control system operation on the basis of what is now called ‘negative feedback,’ where deviations from some standard or norm initiate actions to correct the deviation. Thus when our body temperature rises above normal limits, certain bodily functions operate to try and counteract the rise, e.g., we begin to perspire and breathe heavily. Social systems also require such homeostatic control processes if they are to acquire enduring form” (Morgan, 2006, p. 46).
- *Diversity demands*: This principle “means that the internal regulatory mechanisms of a system must be as diverse as the environment with which one is trying to deal. For only by incorporating required variety into internal controls can a system deal with the variety and challenge posed by its environment. Any system that insulates itself from diversity of the environment tends to atrophy and lose its complexity and distinctive nature. Thus requisite variety is an important feature of living systems of all kinds” (Morgan, 2006, p. 47).
- *System evolution*: This principle describes the ability of systems to develop and to change, to “move to more complex forms of differentiation and integration, greater variety in the system facilitating its ability to deal with challenges and opportunities posed by the environment. (. . .) This involves a cyclical process of variation, selection, and retention of the selected characteristics” (Morgan, 2006, p. 47).
- *Observance systems*: From the above comments on constructivism results that there is no such thing as an unobserved system. A system is always the invention of an observer. Thus, the observer is always part of the system (see Background Text on p. 22).

Thinking and acting systemically means contextualizing events (see the Background Text on p. 63 and p. 85). A systemic approach sees both the problem and the human being dealing with that problem, both within that person’s context and independent thereof. In this respect, we consider the idea of system as outlined above to be expressly useful and helpful.

This book is addressed to systemic practitioners from all psychosocial fields. It provides a set of practical everyday tools as well as being a reference book presenting specific and helpful information – of particular importance to anyone learning the trade or in their first years of practice. The authors, experienced in training, consultation, therapy and supervising, take the reader step by step through the various phases of systemic work: observation, understanding, recording of information, clarification, forming hypothesis, defining aims, planning and application.

The Authors

Andreas Fryszer is a psychologist, psychological psychotherapist and child and adolescent psychotherapist. He works as a freelance trainer, supervisor, management consultant and coach.

Rainer Schwing is a psychologist and certified psychotherapist who teaches systemic therapy and supervision. He is Director of »Praxis – Institut für Systemische Beratung« in Hanau (Germany). He is also active as a freelance psychotherapist, supervisor, organizational consultant and coach.

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