

# Systemic Coaching - Theory

## Origin

Systemic counseling concepts have their roots in the family therapy tradition of the 1950s. Since then, the systemic approach to counseling has continued to evolve in many places and in many minds. The so-called Milan Group (Selvini, Boscolo, Cecchin, Prata), which began working with families and couples in the 1960s and developed new forms of systemic intervention, and the representatives of the Heidelberg School (Stierlin, Retzer, Schmidt, Simon, Weber) have played an enormous role in this development.

Today, systemic concepts are used not only for counseling and therapy of families, but also for counseling other social systems, such as teams, companies or even individuals. Likewise, systemic counseling concepts are used more and more in areas such as social work, administration and politics.

In the development of systemic concepts many borrowings from different branches of science have been incorporated, e.g. from biology, medicine, cybernetics, communication theory, information theory, game theory, general systems theory, chaos theory and constructivism.

## Description of the systemic approach

The basis of the systemic approach to consulting is a system-theoretical worldview. The term "system" is derived from the Greek and in the original sense of the word means "put together".

A common definition for system is: "a set of elements or objects together with the relationships between these objects and their characteristics" (Hall & Fagen, 1956).

As can be seen in the ecosystem, for example, if just one link in the food chain is wiped out, there are serious consequences for the whole system. That is, almost any intervention in a system has an impact on the whole system. So it is always a matter of interactions between the various elements of the system in question.

The systemic approach to consulting makes use of this idea of interactions by applying it to persons, groups, organizations, situations, processes, problems or conflicts. The individual is therefore not considered in isolation, but always in the context of his environment/system.

The epistemological basis of systemic thinking is constructivist philosophy. It is connected with names like Heinz von Foerster, Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana and others.

The core question of constructivism is in which way people actively participate in the construction of their own world of experience. Since we as humans are dependent on developing concepts or "maps" about the world that make it easier for us to find our way around, it can always happen that we confuse these concepts/maps with reality.

Systemic counseling tries to do justice to the fact that in addition to different maps and constructions of reality, people also have different needs, desires, character traits, fears, likes, dislikes, abilities, limitations, visions, memories - in short, perspectives. Consequently, people can perceive something completely different in the same situation and therefore derive different conclusions and decisions.

By using the so-called "multi-glasses principle", the systemic approach to consulting makes use of these different perspectives to make those involved more aware of the situation. More awareness, in turn, expands the possibility space. The possibilities of choice increase and thus the condition for change arises.

Systemic counseling techniques thus arise from the question of how people in social systems create reality together, what premises underlie their thinking and experience, and what possibilities there are to question and disturb these premises. In the counseling situation, it is important to note that people are almost always "biased" and see themselves or their own mental constructs and projections everywhere first. Since this is also true for the consultant, it is useful for the consultant to be aware of his own reality constructions again and again, as well as of the fact that the consultant's attempts at explanation, theses and impulses are part of the systemic events.

## Important aspects of the systemic-oriented consulting work

- Circularity - Every behavior of every participant is at the same time cause and effect of the behavior of the other participants
- Communication - How does communication take place or not take place?
- Context - In which context are phenomena, problems, situations considered? Who determines this context?
- Constructed reality - What reality does the client construct? What reality does his environment construct?
- Patterns and rules - What rules exist in the system and how are phenomena described in this system, i.e. how are they given meaning through explanations, evaluations, conclusions and what conclusions are drawn from them?

## Goals of the systemic coaching

The goal of systemic coaching is to work out the individual plans as well as the personal competencies of the client, to reflect them in a professional or private context and to lead them to integration.

Further goals of systemic coaching are to open the client to alternative patterns of thinking, perception and interaction in order to enable new behavioral options as well as to initiate and accompany learning and renewal processes in order



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to make people in systems and/or systems more survivable, successful and efficient. Ideally, systemic interventions can promote more mutual understanding, tolerance and mindfulness.

# References

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