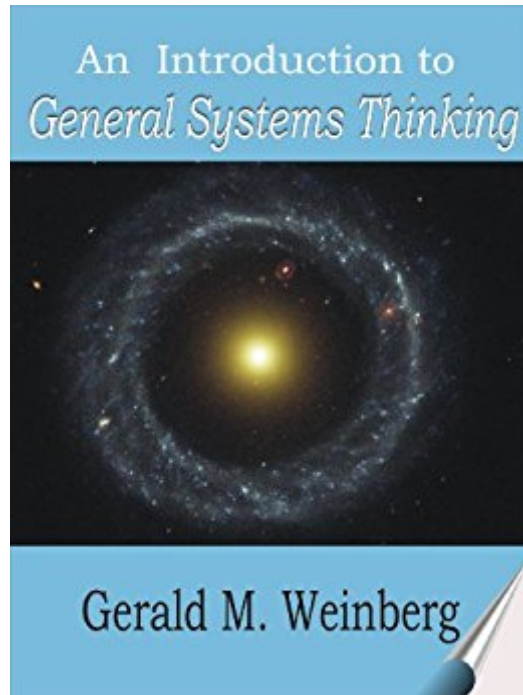


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An Introduction To General Systems Thinking



Synopsis

For more than thirty-five years, *An Introduction to General Systems Thinking* has been hailed as an innovative introduction to systems theory, with applications in software development and testing, medicine, engineering, social sciences, architecture, and beyond. Used in university courses and professional seminars all over the world, the text has proven its ability to open minds and sharpen thinking. Originally published in 1975 and reprinted more than twenty times, the book uses clear writing to explore new approaches to projects, products, organizations, and virtually any kind of system. Scientists, engineers, organization leaders, managers, doctors, students, and thinkers of all disciplines can use this book to dispel the mental fog that clouds problem-solving. As author Gerald M. Weinberg writes, "I haven't changed my conviction that most people don't think nearly as well as they could had they been taught some principles of thinking." With more than 50 helpful illustrations and 80 examples from two dozen fields, and an appendix on a mathematical notation used in problem-solving, *An Introduction to General Systems Thinking* may be your most powerful tool in working with problems, systems, and solutions. John D. Richards said, ". . . this is one of the classics of systems or science of computing. I recommend it to all; it will cause both scientists and nonscientists to examine their world and their thinking. This book will appear on my reading table at regular intervals, and one day I hope to update to the golden anniversary edition." He continues, "I've found myself returning to *An Introduction to General Systems Thinking* again and again in the twenty-plus years since I first stumbled across it. I know no better spark to revive a mind that's stuck in dead-end thinking than to open this book, dive into one of Gerald Weinberg's wonderful open-ended questions, and rediscover how one looks at the world." "This is a book that is a true classic, not in computing but in the broad area of scholarship. It is partly about the philosophy and mechanisms of science; partly about designing things so they work but mostly it is about how humans view the world and create things that match that view. This book will still be worth reading for a long time to come ..." - Charles Ashbacher

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Customer Reviews

Weinberg distills the essence from von Bertalanffy's classic and manages to present it in a very accessible fashion. The book has been out of print for quite a while so it is great to see a new edition. The message and information contained in here, although originally published in 1975, is now more relevant than ever. Weinberg covers many aspects of systems theory beginning with the main stumbling block with the present scientific paradigm: the idea that the universe is mechanistic. His treatment is much more general than Robert Rosen's in "Life Itself" but still conveys why the mechanistic notion is flawed. He then outlines the general systems theory approach before leading into the idea that a system is simply a way of looking at the world. He then outlines the principle of indifference. This leads straight into two sections outlining various aspects of making observations. Finally he discusses behaviour and then some general systems questions. Throughout the book he uses many examples from disparate fields in conjunction with questions for further research. It is great to see someone who doesn't preach systems but actually uses the ideas. Definitely a must-read as we decided how to solve the myriad of issues before us.

This book is a quiet little masterpiece, where its author shares his observations of his world in a personal way. With the same light touch, he also delves into the thought structures behind these observations. This is practical scientific philosophy with a folksy, conversational, almost homespun, style that never gets lost in abstractions or strays far from living examples in everyday life. Its lack of academic bluster and techno-pomposity is refreshing and informal, yet the insights have a power that cannot help but affect your own thought processes. An example (for me) is the classification of all

systems into three types: Determinate, Medium-number, and Statistical. This notion has proven to be fantastically useful over the years. Several other observations took some nerve to put into print. The net effect of the book is, at its end, also inspirational. Here is someone showing all of us how we can deal with the big, bad world in a friendly, humourous, courageous, and empowered way.

If I had to select a book that has influenced my thinking most, it would be this one. This book alone spurred my interest in Systems Research, and is one that I have gone back to re-read many times. Gerald Weinberg has taken the essence of General Systems Theory and formatted it for the masses. His insight into the methodology, and his ability to combine humor with explanation makes this a must-read in the field. While many of the examples are programming-based, that does not detract from the usefulness of this work. The publisher needs to understand the importance of this work, and put it back into print!

Weinberg's book will not teach you how to be a systems thinker. It will, however, provide a stimulating discussion and thoughtful examination of an alternative approach to problem analysis and solution. The book is not so much about how the systems approach works or how it can be applied to complex problems as it is an invitation to his readers to explore their perceptions of what they think they know versus what they really do know. Throughout the book, Weinberg follows the strategy of leading the reader through a series of logical discussions designed to bring them face to face with their biases and misconceptions about systems vs. reductionist thinking. In doing so, Weinberg exposes the shortcomings of the reductionist approach to problem solving by demonstrating to his readers that the real solutions to some familiar and apparently simple problems are very complex. Through his examples, Weinberg shows that by viewing a system holistically within its environment, we may be able to discern patterns of behavior/actions and recognize interactions, interrelationships, and interdependencies among the components that will be missed in a reductionist approach. From that view, we can better understand the system and, perhaps, better predict how it will evolve over time. The success of his approach is demonstrated by the fact that people are still reading and quoting his book 25+ years after it was written. One facet of this book which I found beneficial may be a drawback for some readers. Weinberg wrote from the viewpoint of a computer programmer and a scientist. A person not versed in either field might have difficulty understanding his examples.

"Systems thinking" is a straight forward concept that concerns an understanding of a system by

examining the linkages and interactions between the elements that compose the entirety of the system. The reader looking to this book for an exposition of this concept and perhaps examples of its application will be very disappointed. The operative word in the title of this book is "Introduction." What Weinberg provides is not a discussion of systems thinking as such, but an elegant and well thought out set of proofs that demonstrate why systems thinking actually works and provide the foundation of an underlying theory of systems thinking. This is quite different from most of the literature on systems analysis and systems research, but this book provides a foundation for both of these disciplines. As such it has a unique place in the literature of this subject.

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