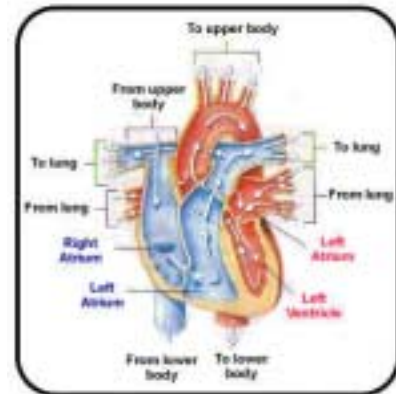


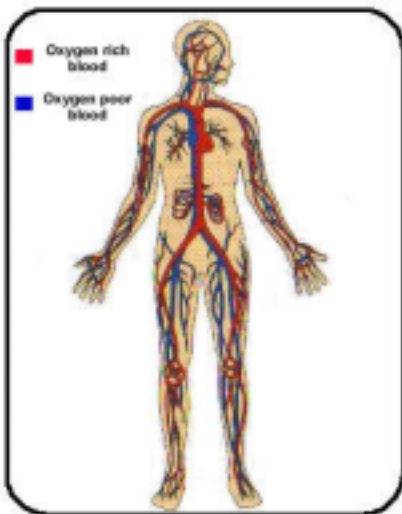


THE

CONCEPT



OF



SYSTEMS

THEORY



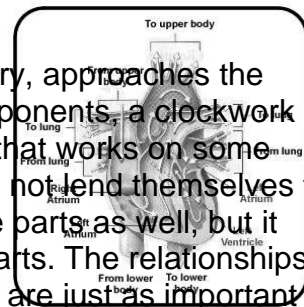
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# The Concept of Systems Theory

There are thousands of books on Systems Theory. The concept, as it applies to business has been around for probably 20 years. While some books make it difficult, it is a relatively easy concept to understand. Peter Senge, in his book "The Fifth Discipline", described what he called a "learning organization". Much of his philosophy is based on Systems Theory.

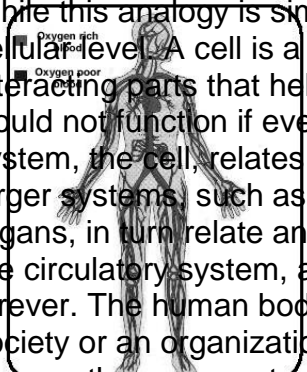
As I said, there is much information out there. There are sophisticated mathematics, charts and graphs that can be studied. My approach to everything is to start out simple and, preferably, stay simple. Sometimes staying simple is more difficult. For our purposes we will start simple. Our interest is in the concept not the specifics, at least for now.

Cartesian theory, arguably the opposite of Systems Theory, approaches the world by breaking everything down into its individual components, a clockwork approach, and then focusing primarily on the parts. Now that works on some things. However, often things, including organizations, do not lend themselves to dealing with only the parts. Systems theory deals with the parts as well, but it also deals with the relationships and interactions of the parts. The relationships between the parts of an organization or any other system are just as important as the constituent parts.

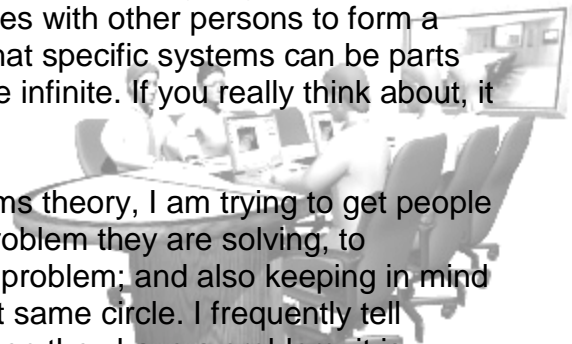


You should note that systems contain other systems; and systems are part of other systems. I use the analogy of the human body to explain this.

While this analogy is simplistic, I believe it gets across the point. We start at the cellular level. A cell is a system unto itself, being comprised of individual interacting parts that help it perform the functions of a cell. The cell, as a system would not function if even 1 of the parts stopped performing its task. Now this system, the cell, relates and interacts with other systems, other cells, to create larger systems, such as organs (I.E. brain, heart and liver etc.). These systems, organs, in turn relate and interact to perform the functions of the body, such as the circulatory system, another system. Now you can keep going with this forever. The human body is a person that relates with other persons to form a society or an organization. You can also see that specific systems can be parts of more than one system. The relationships are infinite. If you really think about, it can be pretty mind-boggling.



The good news is that when I talk about systems theory, I am trying to get people to look beyond the circle that represents the problem they are solving, to examine the relationship of things causing the problem; and also keeping in mind the impact the solution might have beyond that same circle. I frequently tell clients, "**It's never one thing.**" That means when they have a problem, it is always several things working together that cause the problem within the system(s) of which their problem is a part, not just "one thing." Keeping this



# The Concept of Systems Theory

concept in mind will help you perform more effectively and efficiently within your organization, whether that organization is work, family, or anything else you do.

I hope this dissertation helps define the basic idea behind “Systems Theory” for you. If we were to continue this discussion, our next step would be the concept of “Self Organization.” We will save that for another time.

