

Understanding Systems Theory

How do you make a complex and abstract theoretical corpus accessible for a wide audience? Theodor M. Bardmann and Alexander Lamprecht try to answer this question by means of a multimedia CD-Rom for teaching and learning, which shows the user various ways to systemic thinking with the help of illustrations, animations, exercises, definitions of terms, video-sequences, interviews and accompanying comments.

A first approach leads straight to contemporary representatives of the constructivistic and systemic thinking, among others Niklas Luhmann, Heinz v. Foerster, Michel Serres and Zygmunt Baumann. The detailed interviews are written in German and can partly be followed audio-visually, sometimes even in English and French. Together they give an impression of what it means to say goodbye to reality as an objective fact and instead look upon its variety of constructions. Concisely and outstandingly written accompanying texts inform the user about the biographies and work of the above experts.

A second approach makes possible an unprecedentedly easy lead-in to the demanding theoretical language of Systems Theory. Here the hypertext format of the CD-Rom overcomes those typical problems of presentation which will arise, if you try to present the circularly fashioned constructivistic-systemic field of concepts sentence by sentence in a book. The user himself chooses the starting point and course of his journey through Systems Theory, navigating through 13 main and 200 further interlinked terms and their explanations. Furthermore, an Internet link offers the possibility of joining virtual seminars and of discussing the included exercises via the World Wide Web.

This CD-Rom addresses people interested in social sciences, especially those who have thus far felt a lack of self-confidence in regard to understanding the complexity of Systems Theory. Despite some weaknesses in its programming (the program doesn't run in the background, the quality of sound and the videos could be better and the Internet links could be improved), one can only hope for more CD-Roms of this kind.

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