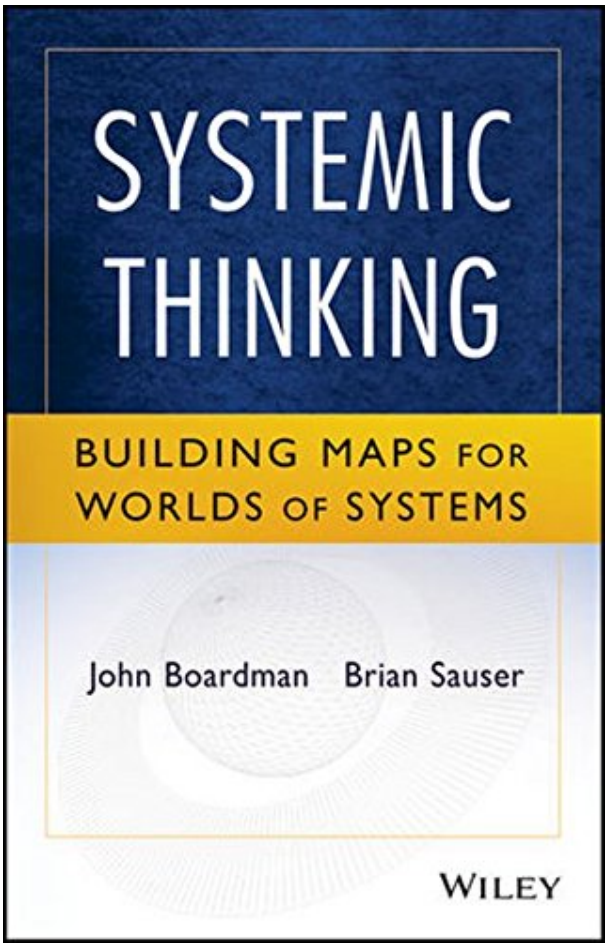
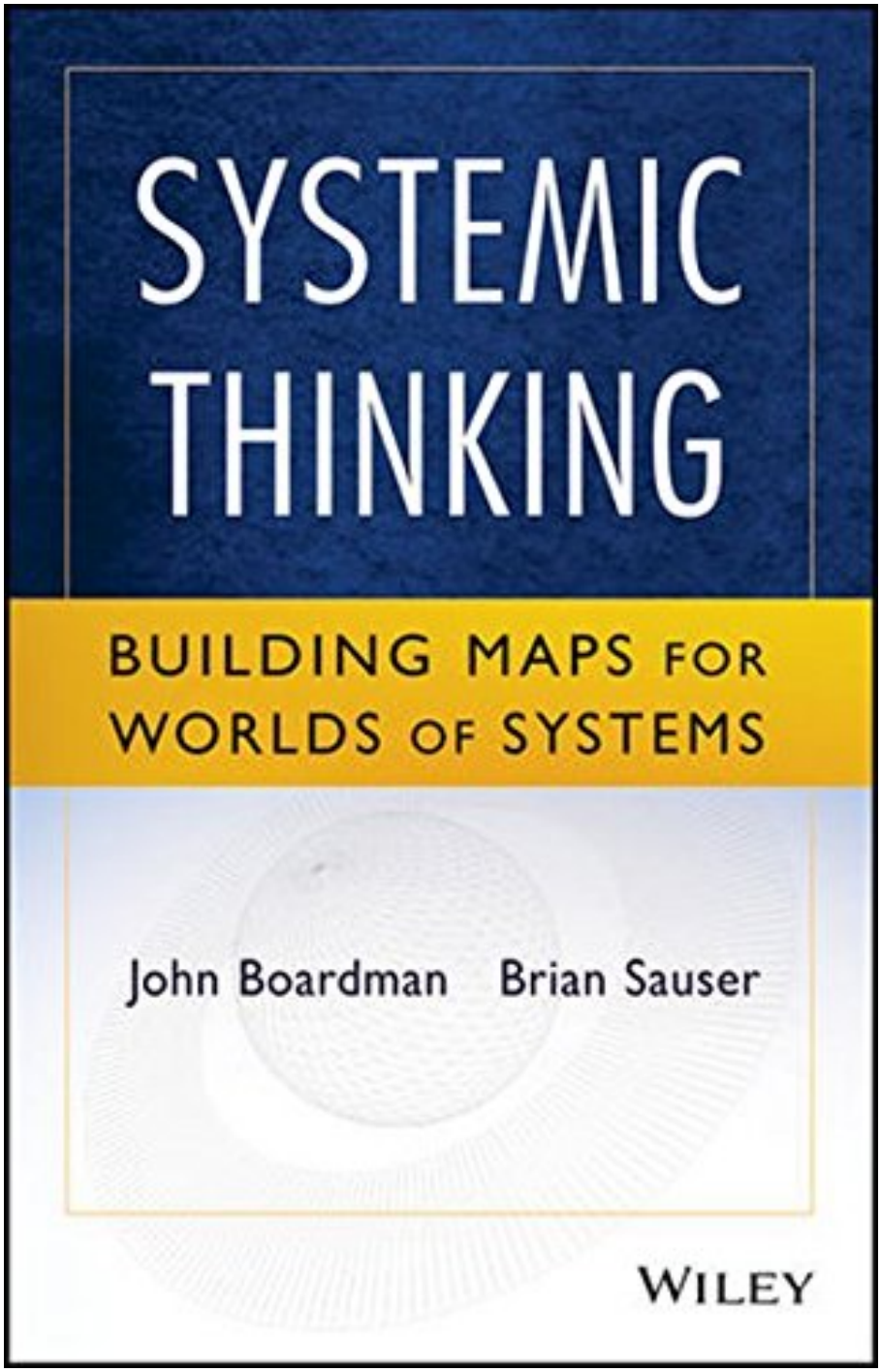
SYSTEMIC THINKING: BUILDING MAPS FOR WORLDS OF SYSTEMS BY JOHN BOARDMAN, BRIAN SAUSER





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From the Back Cover

"Systemic thinking" is the process of understanding how systems influence one another within a world of systems and has been defined as an approach to problem solving by viewing "problems" as parts of an overall system, rather than reacting to a specific part, outcome, or event.

This book provides a complete overview of systemic thinking, exploring a framework and graphical technique for understanding and identifying new ways to more efficiently solve problems and create solutions. Demystifying the conjunction of systems concepts and systemic diagramming techniques, this comprehensive pocket guide introduces and explains the basis of systemigrams, how to create a systemigram and a SystemiShow, illuminates multiple complex problems, and provides an overview of what purpose they serve for today's industry professionals.

Systemic Thinking: Building Maps for Worlds of Systems:

- Includes illustrative systemigrams and case studies
- Includes the SystemiTool software, developed by the authors
- Provides an overview of systemic thinking, particularly with regard to systemigrams
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- Instructs how and when to implement a systemigram when a problem arises

An invaluable book for industry professionals—specifically, technical leaders in industry and business trying to confront complex problems—Systemic Thinking is also ideal for postgraduate students in engineering and business management.

About the Author

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Most helpful customer reviews

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.
Good for the Author's Clients
By Tom D
Two stars because it's largely a limited treatment of non-original material better covered elsewhere.

This book is probably a good choice for clients or students of the authors. It naturally offers the author’s approach to solving complex problems. It would be difficult though, for someone unfamiliar with the concepts to read the book and apply the concepts. With perhaps a few minor exceptions, such as the use of the terms “Conceptigon” triad, “harmony, variety and parsimony” there is nothing new. For a far more comprehensive coverage of the material see Peter Checkland’s 1999 book, “Systems Thinking, Systems Practice.”

Basically, this is offered as a book about solving complex or existing “systemic” problems, where “systemic” goes beyond “system” by including such as owners. The assumption is, and it is a big and common one, that by breaking an existing system down into its component parts, the “real” problems and solutions to problems will be clear. This book is about the author’s approach to decomposing systems. It does not cover developing, testing or implementing solutions. It does not cover “evaluation or analysis of alternatives,” a classic part of system problem solving. It does not cover “system design.” It does not describe the advantages and disadvantages of the author’s preferred techniques compared to others.

Systemic Thinking offers two “concepts,” the “Conceptigon” and the “Systemigram.”

The Conceptigon consists of seven sets of three related terms that should be used to think about any “system.” “So why 3,7, 21? Why not?” (p 36) They are: communications, command, control; emergence, hierarchy, openness; transformations, inputs, outputs; function, structure, process; boundary, interior, exterior; harmony, variety, parsimony; and relationships, wholes, parts. People with prior exposure to system concepts will recognize either the exact terms or the concepts.

The “Systemigram” is pretty much an entity relationship diagram (ER) without the rich notation and formality. (check Wikipedia) The tool is useful, even powerful, just not original and the author’s “Rules and Principles” description is confusing: “The principles that govern the architecture of a systemigram are identically those that govern inspection of an SoI [System of Interest] using well founded system concepts…With each of these concepts, we can, via the notion of equilibrium, associate tow more, thereby making seven sets of triples…Thus, when we browse the SoI description prior to designing a relevant systemigram, we cannot but notice, for example, parts, relationships, and wholes, and inputs, outputs, and transformations. ..But we cannot also fail to observe the forces of variety and parsimony at work to produce harmony, and indeed haierarchy, openness and emergence. ..First, the nodes in the systemigram are always nouns or noun phrases. Naturally not every noun in the SoI description appears as a node. Parsimony helsp us choose only those entities tha appear to be most significant. However, once a node, that noun phrase is unique in the systemigram and cannot be replicated. So therefore, everything that semantically attaches itself to that noun phrase in accordance with the text must be accommodated in that single appearance. However, not everything that could be said is chosen; only those most significant expressions and relationships with other noun phrases, so chosen as nodes, are present in the diagram. Attaching significance is a matter of sound judgment by th e systemigram creator, aided and abetted by the sound writing of the author of the SoI description. The arrows must not cross one another…Some nodes can be made to include other nodes…This kind of convexity supports, for example…on occasion, an arrow can pass through a containment node, thereby circumventing a crossover…. (pages 162 and 163).

All this being written, understand that the authors may be excellent, even exceptional at working with clients to break down their complex systems and gain useful new insights. If you’re going to work with the authors, it would be good to read the book. Otherwise, pass.

If you’re really interested in a comprehensive academic treatise, Checkland’s previously mentioned text is outstanding. If you’re interested in a classic “systems thinking” overview, try Weingberg’s very readable, “An Introduction to General Systems Thinking.”

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.
Bit dry but informative
By AmazonJavaJunki
Ever wonder what Freddie Mercury of the rock band Queen, the Arab Spring, body systems (ie, heart, lungs etc) have in common? To begin with each is used as a superb example in this book on building maps for worlds of systems and systemic thinking. For many years the world has been flooded with specialization, niche marketing or this and that segmentation...and at first, it makes sense because the amount of information created now tends to exceed the ability of the average human to keep pace and make sense of it all. Unfortunately, as anyone who has been to a doctor with a complex medical problem knows all so very well, there are very real limits associated with specializations. The inability to "see the forest for the trees" is now creating its very own risk factor as evidenced by the most recent financial melt-down where even the so called 'experts' were unable to predict...or even understand...the complex relationships between financial instruments being traded etc....

Enter the world of systemic thinking - it's sweeping many fields including finance, medicine, eco systems and more. This book does a great job introducing the reader to many of the fundamental concepts in a clear, concise and surprisingly enjoyable manner. Ample examples throughout are both engaging and informative. Excellent!

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.
Cliff notes on systemic thinking
By Epilady
While very academic in it's approach, Systemic Thinking gives Boardman's philosophy on how to solve a complex (systemic) problem. It talks about breaking the problem up into its parts - by understanding the components, the problem will be revealed and a solution will present itself.

To me, it falls short in considering other alternative solutions, evaluating which one might be more effective, nor does it talk about system design, which is an important part of understanding how the components are developed. It's a Cliff Notes version of the systemic thinking approach.

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