



# Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity - A Platform for Designing Business Architecture

*Jamshid Gharajedaghi*

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# **Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity - A Platform for Designing Business Architecture**

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This book is a direct result of the author's work with the systems methodology first introduced by the author's partner, Russell Ackoff.

It's a holistic approach to systems methodology. It deals with all dimensions of a system: structure, function and process. Peter Senge introduced Systems Thinking/practice. Interact clients asked the author to write a book to take them "further down the Senge trail". This book does that by taking the reader into "real world" stories. It is based on experiences in five real companies using systems practice.

It is about a new mode of seeing, doing and being in the world; a way of thinking through chaos and complexity. It speaks to those thinkers and practitioners who have come to realize that learning "to be" is as much a necessary part of a successful professional life as is the learning "to do."

Natural science has discovered "chaos". Social science has encountered "complexity." But chaos and complexity are features of our perceptions and understanding. We see the world as increasingly more complex and chaotic because we use inadequate concepts to explain it. When we understand something, we no longer see it as chaotic or complex. It seems that playing the new game requires learning a new language. A language of interaction and design that will allow us to see through chaos and understand complexity.

In a nutshell, this book is about systems. However, it goes beyond the simple declaration of desirability of systems thinking. With a practical orientation and yet a profound theoretical depth, the book offers an operational handle on the whole by introducing an elaborate scheme called iterative design. The iterative design explicitly recognizes that choice is at the heart of human development.

Development is the capacity to choose; design is a vehicle for enhancement of choice and holistic thinking. Designers, in this book, seek to choose rather than predict the future. They try to understand rational, emotional, and cultural dimensions of choice and to produce a design that satisfies a multitude of functions. They learn how to use what they already know and also about how to learn what they need to know.

## **Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity - A Platform for Designing Business Architecture Details**

Date : Published December 1st 2005 by Butterworth-Heinemann (first published May 10th 1999)

ISBN : 9780750679732

Author : Jamshid Gharajedaghi

Format : Paperback 333 pages

Genre : Business, Nonfiction, Management

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# **From Reader Review Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity - A Platform for Designing Business Architecture for online ebook**

## **Jeroen says**

Difficult to read, concepts not applicable for all types of organisations

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## **Rena says**

Have to read this for my class. . . and I love it. It is an amazing way of thinking. It is slow reading for me but I want everyone to read it now that I know about it.

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## **Gernot says**

The first part about systems and systems thinking describes some kind of method how to analyse systems.

- 1 - formulate the "mess" - that is the name for the current situation
- 2 - create target structures in iterations.

The second part with the examples were somehow "dry" but nevertheless valuable examples.

I will come back to the examples and will read the book a second time, so I can recommend it!

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## **Annie Constantinescu says**

I wouldn't necessarily turn to this book if you're looking for a thrilling read - BUT, Gharajedaghi's work on organizational management and systems thinking is among some of the best work in the field (similar to Ackoff). Gharajedaghi manages to convey complex system analysis principles in digestible ways - which if you've ever studied systems, is REALLY helpful.

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## **Roberto says**

Unlike the Fifth Discipline, this is a book about systems thinking that is quite difficult to read, for mainly two reasons: the brief discussion that is made by very important principles (the principles that guide a system, for example), without further examples, and the apparent lack of organization on writing it. Some of the important points:

- A system is influenced by 5 "building blocks": openness (the size of its transactional environmental, or

place that we can influence), purposefulness (the interaction among the three most important categories for an individual: reason, emotion, and culture), multidimensionality (the use of matrixes of results, instead of dichotomies, due to interpretation of the context), emergent properties (properties that appear due to the interactions of the components, and cannot appear on the components working by themselves), and counter-intuitiveness (as the relations in a system are circular and not linear, to improve it notably we need to take counter-intuitive measures)

## Peter House says

"Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity - A Platform for Designing Business Architecture" is a powerful whirlwind tour through a number of essential topics in systems thinking, such as holist thinking, design thinking, and operational thinking. Jamshid Gharajedaghi starts the book off with a bang, taking the reader through dealing with concepts such as complexity and emergent system properties. As the book progresses, the focus shifts from explanation to teaching the reader modes of thought and action to build organization designs that will optimized to operate in a complex environment.

The last few chapters of the book focus on case studies such as the Marriot hotel franchise chain and the Oneida Nation. These prescriptions show what a successful design for an organization might look like to the reader. The only complaint I might have regarding the book is that it goes out with a meow in contrast to the way it entered. With a mighty roar. Despite the tapering off at the end of the book, I would recommend it for any reader with an interest in why organizations, in general, are unsuccessful in remaining viable in a world where black swan events ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_sw...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_sw...)) seem to occur with greater frequency than before.

## Denis Vasilev says

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**Amanda says**

This was very philosophical. It had some good quotes and graphics, but overall, I was hoping for something more practical, discussing how we can use systems in our organization to help structure them better.

**Hashem says**

**Denis Romanovsky says**

This book was really great to me. Such a deep look at the sociocultural systems, connections between design, operations and holistic thinking helped to improve my understanding of organizations. Very good explanation on concepts of chaos, complexity and interdependency in systems that lead to emergent development. What I really did not like was business architecture - reasoning on concepts, diagrams and case studies seemed a bit shallow, outdated. Design thinking was also somehow kind of outdated. Anyway, after this book I definitely want to read more about complexity, chaos and systems thinking...

**David says**

Unbelievably insightful book on how we do, can, and should think when it comes to ANYTHING organizational (work, friendships, family, software that interacts with other software, ANYTHING!).

Not a super-simple read, but SO worth it! I have already used various insights and examples from the first four chapters in my consulting.

So good. I just finished buying it online!

## TK Keanini says

This book was written in ~1999 and is a good read if you are interested in the business applications of systems thinking. Complex logistics and supply chain come to mind if I had to pick an application.

## **Vicktor Michael Kemechedzhiev says**

## **Ian Fleischmann says**

My only issue with Gharajedaghi's book is his tendency to subdivide systems and processes, describe them in detail as slight variations on each other, and then fail to integrate those subdivisions as an integral part of some greater level of understanding. To me, it seemed like splitting hairs for page counts. Like most books

on complexity and systems theory, it's difficult to critique because the subject matter is generally the same but its presentation is unique (different vocabulary, ordering, etc.). Having already read or studied some of the background material helped; not sure I would have wanted to tackle this as my introduction to the literature.

The second half of the book is application, and is interesting, but my learning curve (and interest) tapered off pretty drastically after chapter 7.

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### **Chris Waddle says**

Nice book about the critical need to architect companies in a way that attends to the individuals that make up the company as purposeful actors who act in the system as voluntary actors who have a need for personal agency. Organisation who do well need to constitute themselves using systems thinking like presented in this book.

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