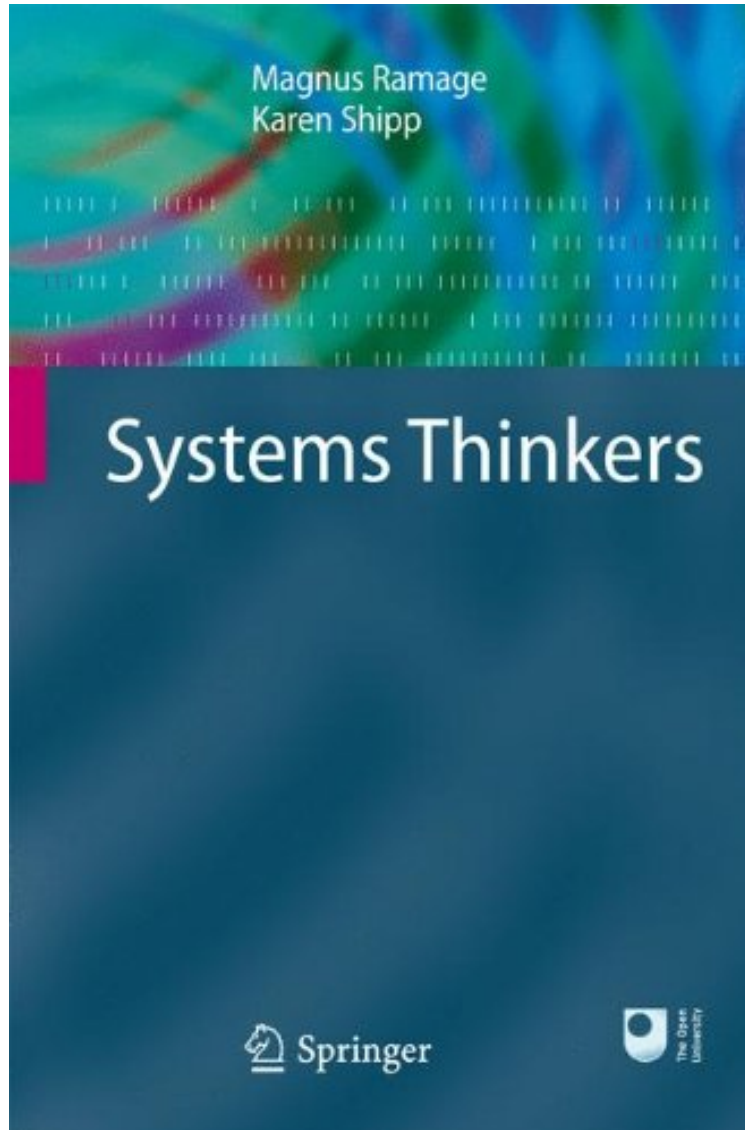


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## Systems Thinkers

*Magnus Ramage, Karen Shipp*

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**Magnus Ramage, Karen Shipp : Systems Thinkers** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Systems Thinkers:

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. An Instant Education in "Second-Level Laws" and their apps....By Beyond-Is-Within Also This is one of those invaluable books, like Posner and Rudnitsky's "Course Design" or Campbell and Stanley's "Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research", that lays out the foundations of a whole field for your education and delectation in one relatively brief yet comprehensive volume. Unlike those

classics, this one is a collection of survey pieces on the major contributors to the transdisciplinary field of General Systems "Thinking" (as distinguished from its somewhat more technical parent field, General Systems "Theory"). I'm writing an endless systems-related dissertation, and have acquired and studied dozens of classic works by most of the reviewed authors. Having recently perused this 2009 title at the local university library, I have to recommend it heartily to anyone who is either unfamiliar with the broad notion of "system" or thinks of it as a construct primarily applicable within his or her field of activity alone. Gerald M. Weinberg, in his must-read classic "Introduction To General Systems Thinking", described the Systems movement (and it is one) as the search for: 1) "second-level laws", or common principles underlying the foundational structures of the various traditional disciplines, and 2) their applications within and among said disciplines. As a practical bonus of the field's broad scope, its applications are not limited to academia or science and technology, but have potentially \*huge\* cash value in everyday life as well. It's all about the primordial complementarity of "whole" and "part" as it applies to "open systems", those pieces-of-interest of the universe-as-a-whole (e.g. atom; metabolic pathway; family budget; judicial branch), as structured within themselves and as interacting with the remainder of reality (the "environment") across a Janus-faced "system boundary". General or Open Systems' founder, the 1920's-era polymath biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, effectively refuted claims that abstracting to this near-ultimate level was either a vacuous exercise or a restatement of the obvious. On the contrary, he demonstrated that the "open system" model provided a powerful conceptual framework within which to gain and articulate far-reaching insights into the possibilities -- and limitations -- inherent in the problem-solving, a.k.a. solution design, process. Anyone interested in the wellsprings (often unacknowledged) of many streams of modern thought will find here an instant survey course in the main tenets, issues and evolutionary stages of this exciting and ongoing intellectual adventure. All that plus an invaluable bibliography - basically a compilation of the superb titles in my decades-in-the-discovering reference library! In sum, just grab this one -- you'll enjoy and benefit immensely, whatever your field(s) of interest...4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A very useful panoramic overview of a sprawling field

By Philippe Vandenbroeck  
This book is a laudable effort to provide a panoramic overview of a sprawling field that is difficult to systematize. "Systems Thinkers" offers a gallery of 30 brief but engaging portraits of scholars-practitioners-activists who have played a decisive role in systems science and systems thinking. Each portrait is complemented with a short but telling extract from their writings. Taken together, portrait and text provide a rounded and accessible introduction to their intellectual background, career, personality and key contributions to the field. Each section is followed by a list of references which is a great resource for those wanting to read onwards (but also a sad reminder of how many classic systems book are out of print). This book seems to be particularly useful to people who have already some experience with systems thinking but want to expand their horizon. People completely new to the subject may, perhaps, be confused by the profusion of approaches and ideas that fits under the generic label of 'systems thinking'. In any case, this book is very helpful for orientation purposes but obviously provides a too slender basis for readers wanting to put these ideas into practice. It is essentially impossible to capture in a few pages even the main ideas (let alone the often important subtleties) in systems approaches such as Soft Systems Methodology or the Viable Systems Model (to name just two examples). I do have some minor quibbles with the book. Inevitably, given the wide scope of the systems discipline, the choice of a limited number of key representatives is bound to be slightly controversial. The focus on people who published in English inevitably excludes important and difficult thinkers from particularly French background who have not or barely been translated (Edgar Morin, Henri Atlan). Even acknowledging the overwhelming contribution of the Anglo-Saxon intellectual sphere in shaping the field of cybernetics and systems thinking, there are some sad omissions. I would have liked to see Gordon Pask, George Spencer-Brown, Bela Banathy, Karl Deutsch, Luc Hoebeke, C.S. Holling and Michel Serres included in this gallery. So why not 35 or 40 thinkers rather than 30? The portraits are sensibly grouped into seven categories, including 1) general systems theory, 2) early cybernetics, 3) late cybernetics, 4) system dynamics, 5) soft and critical systems, 6) complexity theory and 7) learning systems. Despite the authors' assertion that there is no 'true' map of the systems discipline, I think it would have been very helpful to visualize the historical and intellectual cross-linkages between these areas and personalities. Finally, as seems to be very often the case with publications in this field, the price is outrageous. But as there is not really an alternative, I'm still happy to recommend this book.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A superficial introduction to systems thinkers

By Sunshine  
The book bases each chapter on a different systems thinker said to have contributed greatly to the field. However, it only provides about 4 or 5 pages summarizing the life of each and generally focuses more upon the conferences attended, awards received, or relationship status of these thinkers; it only discusses what their actual contributions were in a paragraph or two per chapter. It does provide a writing sample of each, but even that is fairly superficial. The idea of the book was great, but the execution is very much flawed.

This book presents a biographical history of the field of systems thinking, by examining the life and work of thirty of its major thinkers. It discusses each thinkers key contributions, the way this contribution was expressed in practice and the relationship between their life and ideas. This discussion is supported by an extract from the thinkers own writing, to give a flavour of their work and to give readers a sense of which thinkers are most relevant to their own interests.

From the reviews: Ramage and Shipp wrote this book as a textbook for a course in the UK's Open University. This work examines 30 major figures from all disciplines. The authors describe each figure in terms of how their work fits the systems thinking pattern. This book is suitable for its stated purpose as a resource tool for a course in a specialized academic discipline. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, researchers, and faculty. (C. G. Wood, Choice, Vol. 47 (9), May, 2010)

From the Back Cover: Systems Thinkers presents a biographical history of the field of systems thinking, by examining the life and work of thirty of its major thinkers. It discusses each thinker's key contributions, the way this contribution was expressed in practice and the relationship between their life and ideas. This discussion is supported by an extract from the thinker's own writing, to give a flavour of their work and to give readers a sense of which thinkers are most relevant to their own interests. Systems thinking is necessarily interdisciplinary, so that the thinkers selected come from a wide range of areas: biology, management, physiology, anthropology, chemistry, public policy, sociology and environmental studies among others. Some are core innovators in systems ideas; some have been primarily practitioners who also advanced and popularised systems ideas; others are well-known figures who drew heavily upon systems thinking although it was not their primary discipline. A significant aim of the book is to broaden and deepen the reader's interest in systems writers, providing an appetising taster for each of the 30 thinkers, so that the reader is encouraged to go on to study the published works of the thinkers themselves.