

Book summary

Group 8: E. Wegelius, E. Nieminen, M. Buchta, O. Poropudas & T. Kauppinen

The book *Learning for Action: A Short Definitive Account of Soft Systems Methodology and Its Use for Practitioners, Teachers and Students* (2006) by Peter Checkland and John Poulter discusses a methodology called Soft Systems Methodology, or SSM in short. Soft System Methodology is concerned with improving, or changing, a problematic situation present in a human context. SSM tries to make the discussion about the situation better and so get closer to the actions that improve the situation. Unlike other methodologies that have their origin in systems-thinking, the very core of SSM is the importance of considering aspects which the human context brings, e.g. unpredictability, situational uniqueness and complexity. One way the human context is considered is by giving space to different worldviews in the mapping of a problematic situation and considering how they influence the system.

One of the most important concepts in the book was the acknowledgement that there is no one single truth, but that everyone has a different truth based on their worldview and this will affect their way of acting and thinking. Furthermore, Checkland and Poulter emphasize the cyclical nature of SSM. Learning is a never-ending process, which means that the methodological steps in SSM cannot necessarily be thought of in a linear order but should be viewed as a cycle dependent on the learning process. Lastly, using SSM in practice is important in order to get a full understanding of its potential since it is a very practice oriented methodology.

Overall, the consideration of different worldviews and the use of visual tools in SSM are great strengths of the methodology. However, we found that some aspects of the methodology could be easily misunderstood and that a very large terminology and complicated models creates a high threshold for practitioners to start using SSM, especially since it seems that outside facilitators are often needed to implement SSM.

Checkland and Poulter seem to have written the book in order to correct common misunderstandings regarding SSM and to provide a coherent handbook/framework which scholars, teachers, students and SSM practitioners can turn to for understanding of SSM in theory and practice.