

## Systemic Coaching

Systemic work without the constellation

Systemic Coaching – *Systemic work without the constellation*

Jan Jacob Stam & Bibi Schreuder

Translation by: Barbara Piper

Originally published under title: Systemisch coachen – systemisch  
werk zonder opstellingen

© 2017, Systemic Books Publishing

ISBN 978-1544224190

All rights reserved. For copying please contact:

**[contact@systemicbooks.com](mailto:contact@systemicbooks.com)**

# Contents

<b>1. The art and science of systemic coaching</b>	<b>1</b>
The art of asking questions . . . . .	2
The art of letting the client lead the way . . . . .	2
The art of following . . . . .	3
1.1. Origin and development . . . . .	4
1.2. Systemic terminology . . . . .	5
Systemic awareness . . . . .	5
Systemic intelligence . . . . .	6
Systemic wisdom . . . . .	6
1.3. What is specific to systemic coaching? . . . . .	7
Access to systemic information . . . . .	8
The systemic coach works for the entire system . . . . .	9
The systemic coaches' starting point, are the principles of the conscience . . . . .	9
Systemic coaching is about positions . . . . .	10
Over and out . . . . .	11
<b>2. Principles and basic knowledge</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1. Systems . . . . .	14
The whole has different characteristics than the sum of parts . . . . .	15
A system is always part of a larger system . . . . .	16
2.2. Observing in a phenomenological way . . . . .	18
2.3. Change starts by acknowledging the world as it is . . . . .	21
Acknowledging is one of the most healing movements in systems . . . . .	21
You become what you try to avoid . . . . .	23
The empty centre . . . . .	25
2.4. Problems are solutions . . . . .	27
2.5. Three survival mechanisms . . . . .	30
The Group-conscience: the survival of the individual . . . . .	30
<i>Belonging</i> . . . . .	30
<i>Taking your Place</i> . . . . .	32
<i>Position and person</i> . . . . .	32
<i>Loyalty conflicts</i> . . . . .	33

<i>Terrible things</i> . . . . .	33
<i>No and yes</i> . . . . .	33
<i>Origin</i> . . . . .	34
<i>Roots</i> . . . . .	35
<i>Exchange</i> . . . . .	36
<i>Order</i> . . . . .	39
The system-conscience: survival of the group or the system . . . . .	42
<i>Gaps in Existence</i> . . . . .	44
<i>Debt-gaps</i> . . . . .	46
The evolutionary conscience . . . . .	47
<i>Destination and finiteness</i> . . . . .	48
<i>The evolutionary conscience and the emerging future</i> . . . . .	49
<b>3. The systemic coaching process</b>	<b>51</b>
3.1. Phases . . . . .	52
Phase 1: which systems? . . . . .	52
Phase 2: which relations? . . . . .	54
Phase 3: which patterns and dynamics? . . . . .	56
Phase 4: interventions . . . . .	57
3.2. Constellations in the imagination . . . . .	58
Indications constellation in imagination . . . . .	58
<i>Place</i> . . . . .	59
<i>Distance</i> . . . . .	59
<i>Focus</i> . . . . .	60
<i>Phrasing</i> . . . . .	60
<i>Clarity</i> . . . . .	60
<i>Looking at the ground</i> . . . . .	61
<i>Past</i> . . . . .	61
<i>Outside of the system</i> . . . . .	61
The structure of a constellation in the imagination . . . . .	61
3.3. Working your magic with language and images . . . . .	62
The process of unravelling and re-connecting . . . . .	62
A process with systemic sentences: working magic with language . . . . .	63
3.4. Leaving a system: systemic division of property . . . . .	64
<b>4. Patterns</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1. Patterns and habits . . . . .	70
4.2. How patterns are created in systems . . . . .	70
4.3. The function of patterns . . . . .	71

4.4. Patterns attract patterns . . . . .	72
4.5. Ridding yourself of patterns . . . . .	72
Awareness . . . . .	73
Unravelling of patterns . . . . .	74
Growing beyond the pattern . . . . .	74
Disrupting patterns . . . . .	75
4.6. Commonly found patterns . . . . .	75
Triangulation . . . . .	76
<i>Mother's sons</i> . . . . .	77
<i>Father's daughters</i> . . . . .	77
<i>Glass ceiling</i> . . . . .	78
<i>Midlife crisis</i> . . . . .	78
Suggestion for questions to track down triangulation . . . . .	78
Parentification . . . . .	79
Suggestions for questions to find parentification . . . . .	81
<i>Realising someone else's assignment</i> . . . . .	83
<i>Feeling someone else isn't strong enough or didn't had the opportunity</i> . . . . .	84
<i>When an inner, unconscious promise was made</i> . . . . .	85
<i>In service of the Spirit-mind</i> . . . . .	85
Suggestions for questions on some else's assignment . . . . .	86
Double image . . . . .	89
Suggestions for questions to find "double images" . . . . .	91
Identifications . . . . .	92
<i>Resistance as an indicator of identification</i> . . . . .	93
Polarities . . . . .	96
<i>Between people or parts of a system</i> . . . . .	97
<i>(With)in a person</i> . . . . .	98
<i>Double binds</i> . . . . .	99
<b>5. Advanced coaching: the art of helping</b>	<b>105</b>
5.1. The inner attitude of the coach . . . . .	106
In contact with system-energy . . . . .	107
The coach's own system-energy . . . . .	107
The client's system-energy . . . . .	107
System-energy during coaching . . . . .	107
Robust in leadership . . . . .	108
Allowing each his own fate . . . . .	109
Allowing yourself not to know . . . . .	109
In harmony with life and death . . . . .	109

Knowing your own issues . . . . .	110
Knowing your own patterns . . . . .	110
5.2. Four kinds of emotions . . . . .	110
Primary emotions . . . . .	110
Secondary emotions . . . . .	111
System-emotions . . . . .	112
Meta-feelings . . . . .	113
5.3. The orders of helping . . . . .	114
First order of helping: parent position . . . . .	114
Second order of helping: systemic empathy . . . . .	117
Third order of helping: beyond good and bad . . . . .	118
Fourth order of helping: the intention . . . . .	120
<b>6. Trauma in organisations</b>	<b>123</b>
6.1. Definitions and features of trauma . . . . .	126
6.2. Authorities in the systemic approach to trauma's . . . . .	127
Anngwyn StJust . . . . .	127
Peter Levine . . . . .	128
Franz Rupert . . . . .	129
Anne-Encelin Schützenberger . . . . .	130
6.3. Symptoms of trauma-reactions . . . . .	130
Reactivations . . . . .	131
Freeze . . . . .	131
No flow . . . . .	132
Repetition . . . . .	132
6.4. Processes that are helpful in coaching . . . . .	132
Connecting to parts that were split off . . . . .	134
Finding the original trauma . . . . .	135
<i>Permission from the part that were split off or the victims</i> . . . . .	136
<i>Acknowledging the survival strategy was the only thing possible</i> . . . . .	137
<i>Facing the events and growing beyond</i> . . . . .	137
<i>Finishing clotted responses</i> . . . . .	138
6.5. Prevent reactivation . . . . .	138
<b>7. Deepening the process</b>	<b>141</b>
7.1. Minimal coaching . . . . .	142
7.2. Observing at the "crime scene" . . . . .	143
Inner attitude of the coach . . . . .	143
The assignment and limitations . . . . .	144

Information you need as a coach . . . . .	144
What you see and hear the client doing . . . . .	144
Observing . . . . .	145
7.3. Genogram and system energy . . . . .	149
Genogram . . . . .	149
Organogram . . . . .	150
Orgenogram . . . . .	151
7.4. The client's integration process . . . . .	152
<b>8. Systemic symptoms</b>	<b>157</b>
Abortion . . . . .	158
Addiction . . . . .	158
Adoption . . . . .	158
Anorexia . . . . .	159
Authority and authoritarian . . . . .	159
Being adopted . . . . .	159
Being adoptive parents . . . . .	160
Broken contact with family members . . . . .	160
Brother and sisters . . . . .	161
Commitment . . . . .	162
Criminal behaviour . . . . .	162
Cynicism . . . . .	162
Education . . . . .	162
Ego . . . . .	163
Emigration . . . . .	163
Father . . . . .	163
Fear of success . . . . .	164
Feeling a victim of everything . . . . .	164
Fraud . . . . .	164
Friend of the family . . . . .	165
Glass ceiling . . . . .	165
Growth . . . . .	166
Illness . . . . .	166
Immigration . . . . .	167
Judgment . . . . .	167
Loyalty . . . . .	167
Making yourself bigger . . . . .	168
Married couple . . . . .	168
Miscarriage . . . . .	169

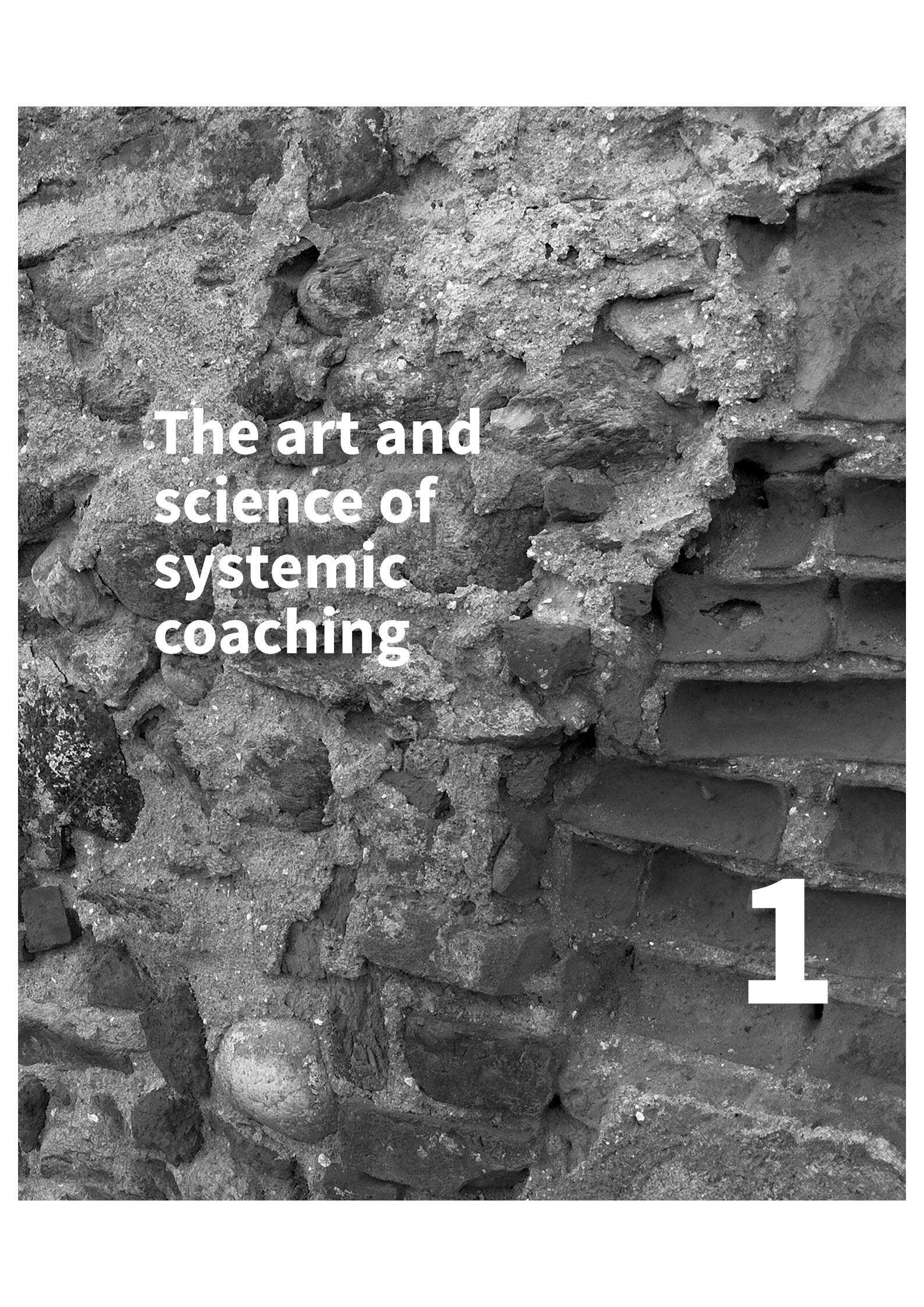
More love for animals than for people . . . . .	169
Mother . . . . .	169
Overeating . . . . .	169
Parent . . . . .	170
Poverty or lack of money . . . . .	170
Resistance . . . . .	171
Rigid belief in something . . . . .	171
Suicide . . . . .	171
To freeze up, not being able to change . . . . .	172
Voluntary work . . . . .	172
Working in the education system . . . . .	172
Working in (health) care . . . . .	173
Working in the prison system . . . . .	173
<b>A. Appendices</b>	<b>175</b>
A.1. Figures for orgenograms . . . . .	177
A.2. About constellations . . . . .	178
A.3. Sources in literature . . . . .	179
Stephan Hausner . . . . .	180
Bert Hellinger . . . . .	180
Anton de Kroon and Siebke Kaat . . . . .	180
Heather Plett . . . . .	180
Jean-Paul Ressegier . . . . .	180
Otto Scharmer . . . . .	181
Daniel Siegel . . . . .	181
Jan Jacob Stam . . . . .	181
A.4. About Jan Jacob Stam . . . . .	182
A.5. About Bibi Schreuder . . . . .	183
A.6. About Systemic Books . . . . .	184



# List of exercises

1: Exercise – Systemic observation . . . . .	17
2: Exercise – phenomenological observation . . . . .	20
3: Exercise – systemic observation . . . . .	23
4: Exercise – the whole reality . . . . .	24
5: Exercise – the Empty Centre . . . . .	26
6: Exercise – For what is this a solution? . . . . .	29
7: Exercise – group-conscience and belonging . . . . .	34
8: Exercise – exchange in taking and giving . . . . .	38
9: Exercise – how many systems are involved? . . . . .	53
10: Exercise – genogram . . . . .	55
11: The process of systemic division of property . . . . .	65
12: Exercise – judgment . . . . .	81
13: Process – letting go of the pattern “realising someone else’s assignment” . . . . .	87
14: Meditation – revising the promise that goes with the pattern “realising someone else’s assignment” . . . . .	88
15: Exercise – two films crossing . . . . .	90
16: Three steps to unravel double image . . . . .	91
17: Meditation – “difficult child” . . . . .	95
18: Intervention polarities between people or parts of a system . . . . .	99
19: Intervention of polarities within the individual . . . . .	100
20: Intervention with double binds nr. 1: destabilising the pattern . . . . .	102
21: Intervention with double binds nr. 2: digging your own grave . . . . .	102
22: Exercise – meta-feelings . . . . .	113
23: Exercise – the first order of helping . . . . .	116
24: Exercise – systemic empathy . . . . .	117
25: Exercise – beyond good and bad . . . . .	119
26: Exercise – intention . . . . .	121
27: Exercise – “ <i>What do I consider my purpose as a systemic coach to be?</i> ” . . . . .	122
28: Process – finding the parts that split off . . . . .	134
29: Process – reconnecting split off parts . . . . .	136
30: Process – acknowledging the survival strategy . . . . .	137
31: Process – facing the event and growing beyond it . . . . .	138

32: Exercise – creating a field . . . . .	142
33: Exercise – genogram . . . . .	150
34: Exercise – organogram . . . . .	151
35: Exercise – orgenogram . . . . .	151
36: Variations on the exercise genogram and organogram . . . . .	152
37: Exercise – Training physical perceptions . . . . .	154



**The art and  
science of  
systemic  
coaching**

**1**

**S**ystemic coaching In essence, systemic coaching is the art and science of working with a client or team to find the hidden dynamics in the various systems the client is a part of and making them workable. It is also the art of letting the natural systemic intelligence flow freely again. In this way, the coach doesn't only help the client to find space for a solution for the issue, he also helps the client draw from a natural source, a source of systemic wisdom that in the rush of everyday life and pressures of the world around us, may have been temporarily unavailable.

If you are familiar with family or organisational constellations, then systemic coaching is the equivalent of a constellation. Without working with representatives or objects, which give the constellation a strong visual and spacious impression, but with the same fundamental effects. Systemic coaching can equally be done by skype or phone. For the coach, the “art” remains the same; you connect to the systems that your client is part of and you explore where the problem lies.

### **The art of asking questions**

Systemic coaching is all about asking the right questions. By asking questions you can lead the client to crucial areas in his system. This could be within the family system, the system of the present-day family unit, in present or past relationships, work related systems, education or career, the organisation the client is part of or it could just as well be a societal issue in which the question of the client is deeply-seated. But it could also concern the inner system of the client. Dynamics in the outside world are often mirrored internally.

### **The art of letting the client lead the way**

The client always remains in the lead. The coach works as a navigator who doesn't lead the way but positions himself alongside to the client. Together they step into the marshes of systems, sometimes sinking deep and at other times finding solid ground. Maybe even a hilltop, giving a bigger picture of the landscape of your issue. And not just an overview but also a change of perspective. As the coach you will notice this because suddenly, the client starts leading the way. Something starts flowing again. The client's voice starts to change. On the phone you can al-

most hear the client move away from you and distance himself. He has felt an impulse, seen a passage to take and has already ventured onto that path. This is how strong life is. Life wants to flow. And if the client is back on track, the coaching is done. There is nothing more to add.

### **The art of following**

Systemic coaching is about the art of following, the art of hearing what is just beneath the surface, the art of not doing anything, the art of being non-judgmental, the art of refraining and holding off.

Systemic coaching is also a science. And there is a vast amount of knowledge available about the different ways social systems work. About underlying mechanisms. About what dynamics are. About what an intervention is. The science is that you can think in dynamics, recognise and know when it's a question of a personal conscience or the conscience of the system and that you are proficient in asking the right systemic questions.

This book wants to walk you through the art as well as the science. Systemic coaching as a vocation, requires many man-hours, a lot of practice. Don't be discouraged by this. You can start today. The upside of systemic coaching is that you can practise it throughout the day. By reading the newspaper systemically: which dynamic strikes me? How many systems do you read about in just a short paragraph in the newspaper? Which systemic question would I like to ask and to whom? And above all, "what is not being said here?"

Systemic coaching can give you intense pleasure. Often, it is so beautiful! Just one right question and the person you are talking to is on his way. Do you know the film on Picasso when he draws a bull on glass with a paintbrush? And you are on the other side of the glass and can feel and experience and see the bull coming at you. It's pure beauty. This is what systemic coaching can be like.

Many problems are obviously not systemic. If my camera keeps breaking down, it's time to read the instruction manual or it may be broken. In a situation like this, systemic coaching isn't very useful. It becomes an entirely different story if camera's always break in my hands, when I normally feel comfortable with technical issues. When patterns repeat themselves, it becomes relevant to see what is going on from a systemic perspective.

## 1.1 Origin and development of systemic work and constellations

At the end of the last century, Bert Hellinger gave an enormous push to the method that has become widespread under the name family constellations. Bert Hellinger (1925) was born in Central Germany and went from priest to therapist to developer of systemic works. Psychiatrist Gunthard Weber from Heidelberg, documented the method Bert Hellinger was developing, meticulously. Because of this, it became an immense hype in Germany.

The method of constellations is the only systems approach that I know of, that started with a method. Its theory came much later. Many other system-approaches started with a theoretical framework and later the methods were developed accordingly.

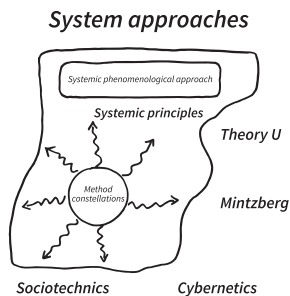
During the first 8 years that he worked with constellations, Bert Hellinger devoted his time researching mechanisms in families.

Research, not in scientific sense but in the phenomenological sense. Bert thought: All these constellations want to teach us something about how family systems works. I will open up to those insights that want to reveal themselves to me.

The effect was that after many, many constellations, penny's started dropping and slowly Hellinger started seeing the underlying mechanisms. Not invented but observed mechanisms. Mechanisms that are inherent to people at least and what examples seem to be telling us, appear with herd animals such as dogs or horses as well. This is how the theory underlying the systemic work grew slowly but surely, by doing endless amounts of constellations and good observation.

Soon, constellations, both its method and the theory, spread out across the world. The first constellations in The Netherlands took place in 1998. Also in The Netherlands, family constellations spread quickly.

It happened so fast that in 2001, the Dutch institution for inspection of mental health came to talk to us at the Bert Hellinger institute to find out what constellations were. Once they realised that constellations weren't a treatment but more a powerful awareness process and when it became clear that in The Netherlands there is much room for professionalization and intervision, they were satisfied: *"We are not against new developments at all but it is important to us that enough room for self-reflection is built-in and that clients have somewhere to go with their complaints"*, thus the inspectors.



*Many systemic principles have been derived from the method constellation.*

The development of organisational constellations followed only a few years after family constellations. Nowadays, organisational constellations have become a reasonably normal method, working with staff, management, company owners and teams to explore the flow of an organisation. It was actually the Order of Organisational Advisors who were the first to embrace this method as an intervention-method.

Since 2010, a new kind of question has come into view: societal questions. Questions such as: what is happening in the financial services industry? In Health Care? In Home Care Services? In Prenatal Care? What effects on society do the earthquakes in Groningen have? Economic decrease in society? Of fundamentalism?

Already from an early stage on together with our most direct colleagues, we were interested in systemic coaching: systemic work without the constellation. There was sound reasoning for this. It isn't always possible to set up a constellation. And in the near future, we don't foresee thousands of managers facilitating constellations during their team meetings either.

What we do see, is thousands of managers that, aware of their own systemic intelligence and the systemic awareness in their teams or organisations, look at the developments in their organisations through systemic eyes and do systemic interventions accordingly. We see boards of directors and governmental project managers understanding how they can ease societal developments from a systemic perspective. Without a constellation.

## 1.2 Systemic terminology

We use the terms systemic wisdom, systemic awareness and systemic intelligence interchangeably.

### Systemic awareness

With systemic awareness, we refer to teams who suddenly realise and understand how they have become stuck in patterns and how they repeat themselves. We refer here to a youngest child who is aware of the fact that he can only approach his demented mother as the youngest child and that mothering her will spark something off. You are aware that you are systemic by instinct.

**Systemic intelligence**

With systemic intelligence, we refer to the capacity to apply systemic principles in your everyday life, in the way you speak to your children or neighbour, the way you file a complaint etcetera. Deploying systemic intelligence doesn't always mean 'for the good'. You can deploy systemic intelligence for great and awful things.

**Systemic wisdom**

Systemic wisdom is the capacity to know what works and what doesn't. It is more a deep knowing, even beyond the systemic principles that we know today. Systemic wisdom creates a holding space for many.

You can work systemically from a more sensitive perspective or as you wish, your right hemisphere. We probably address this side more with the phrase systemic awareness. You can also do this work entirely from a logical and rational point of view, the left hemisphere, probably addressed more with the term systemic intelligence.

And systemic wisdom comes from an integrated being, being integrated.

We see many teachers using their systemic sensitivity to help (young) children find their place in the system. So they can learn better. Bibi Schreuder was one of the first to start training teachers on how to apply the systemic principles to make children feel safe and to create a better learning environment.

Bibi understood at an early stage that constellations with children in the classroom was not the way to go about it. Children have the tendency to work for their parents anyway. Using constellations has the risk that children will start doing that even more. But teachers can use the systemic principles in the classroom well. Standing silently in 'the Empty Centre' middle just for one minute, with an attitude of being systemically aware, often has a huge impact on a class. Without the constellation.

In this book we will describe the underlying mechanisms of the constellation, the science, elaborately. It creates the theoretical base for the systemic coach. You will find that once you master this underlying base, you won't need the method of constellations as much to be able to work and coach systemically.

Of course, the method of constellations will keep its value and systemic coaches will at times still facilitate a constellation with their clients.



However, this book is mainly directed to those already applying systemic work in their daily practice, without necessarily setting up a constellation.

### ***Learning to look around a corner***

Coaching isn't exclusively for those who have the name 'coach' on their business cards. Parents, teachers, professionals, entrepreneurs, managers, therapists and consultants coach regularly. Even if that's not what they call it. The basics of conversation techniques are assumed familiar.

This book can also be an eye-opener to those who enjoy looking at the world from a different systemic perspective and who marvel at the views that could open up. "Learning to look around a corner" was how one of the pupils of the course on systemic coaching put it.

## **1.3 What is specific to systemic coaching?**

What is specific to systemic coaching? Coaching has become a broad work field in The Netherlands. There are many different ways of coaching. It is therefore difficult to compare systemic coaching with different forms of coaching. Additionally, the different forms of coaching are constantly developing and we would be failing them if we compare them.

As we attempt to describe the specifics of systemic coaching below, the reference I may have in the back of my mind, is what I call "classic management coaching", which I did for many years: coaching individuals, mostly leaders, sometimes in combination with change.

Specific for systemic coaching is:

- You work with systemic information;
- You work for the wellbeing of the entire system;
- You work with the principles of the consciences;
- You look at positions, because in a system, you are more than your behaviour;
- Done is done.