

Practising Purposefully

SYSTEMIC PRACTICE

First & Second Order Change

What is it?

First and second order *cybernetics* was a phrase coined by Gregory Bateson, one of the forefathers of Systemic Theory.

Cybernetics is derived from a Greek word which refers to a pilot of a boat. Therefore in Systemic approaches it is used to think about the reoccurring cycles of error correction that are made in response to the environment around the person (think of people stuck in repetitive patterns of behaviour, but always trying to maintain the normal functioning of the family – just as a pilot of a boat makes adjustments based on the water in order to keep the boat on track or a driver makes small adjustments of the steering wheel in response to the road surface).



How does this link to working with families?

| | First Order | Second Order |
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| Workers view of the family & the workers positioning | <p>The family is viewed like a piece of machinery (moving parts all working together with specific roles).</p> <p>Therefore, the worker is separate to the 'machine' but able to control it and fix any problems as they see fit. In this regard the worker is very much the expert of what needs to happen and how it will happen.</p> | <p>The family are viewed more 'biologically' as stuck in repetitive patterns.</p> <p>Worker knows they cannot be truly objective about the family. Whether you like it or not, as soon as you join with a family, you alter it in some way. You can become a collaborative 'explorer' when working with the family. The family are the experts of their lives (not the worker).</p> |
| View of problems | <p>The worker diagnoses what is wrong with the family and seeks a solution to solve it.</p> | <p>You cannot objectively report on a family as we all come with our own biases and prejudices which impact the way we view the family but also what we choose to pay attention to and give 'value' to and what we don't (think Social Constructionism & Social GRACES)</p> |
| Impact | <p>Change does occur but doing work this way, from a position of expert & diagnosing a problem/solution leads to very</p> | <p>Change happens at a deeper level of beliefs, morals and values. Personal esteem and growth is encouraged. The family understand the problem better and are therefore able to make choices in their</p> |

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| | little impact deeper down with the families as they are just doing 'as they have been told' by the 'expert' and may not always understand why. | response as to how they are going to change things. |
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This is not to say that one approach is better than another. You can use both approaches – it is not an 'either/or'.

Some occasions require a first order response, we have to instruct families what to do to encourage safety for children, for example. However, lasting change is mostly seen when you work in collaboration with the family. Making change tailor-made for them - change which they have subscribed to and are therefore more committed to.