

## The Evolution of Confusion: soft systems methodology and social theory revisited

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### Abstract

Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) is a potentially powerful tool for improving the management of the complex social systems aspect of Information Systems. Yet if it is to be employed effectively IS managers need to understand the theory of social systems that make finding out about that social theory is not straightforward. It is 20 years since the first discussions of the social reality implied by Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and the area has been given little attention since. Yet SSM itself has progressed dramatically since then first developed. This paper revisits the area in order to provide a contemporary perspective and foundation for future development. It reveals apparent weaknesses in the research debate about SSM and social theory, and shows how the evolution of SSM has appeared and examined according to the primary literature and re-evaluated using Burrell and Morgan's four-paradigm matrix of social theory paradigms in order to understand the social reality implied by SSM. The paper examines criticisms of SSM, the recent evolution of SSM

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