GENERAL SYSTEM THEORY—PROSPECTS AND PRINCIPLES

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While attracting increasing attention, general system theory also invites both extravagant praise and biased criticism. The prospects of the theory include, however, the promise of being able to draw on emerging parallelisms in different scientific fields and provide the basis for an integrated science of complex organization. A number of factors favor the emergence of such a theory, including the valuation of integrated general theories in scientific communities and the shifting patterns of resource allocations for research which now favor interdisciplinary investigations. At the same time, a number of factors block the development of the theory, including intellectual as well as organizational inertia, a confusion concerning the meaning of the term general system theory, and misapprehensions concerning its level of generality.

The significance of the theory can be concisely stated in terms of a few basic principles which give a definition of general system theory, and provide the conceptual framework for integrating a hierarchy of systems and system theories into a unitary general system theoretic framework. The principles define categories of system types and system levels, intertype relations, system evolution, and approaches to systems research.