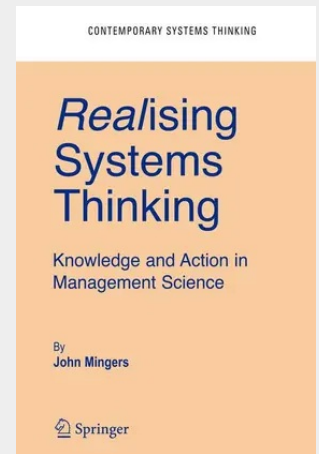


Realising Systems Thinking: Knowledge and Action in Management Science

This book deals with the contribution of a systems approach to a range of disciplines from philosophy and biology to social theory and management. It weaves together material from some of the pre-eminent thinkers of the day. In doing so it creates a coherent path from fundamental work on philosophical issues of ontology and epistemology through specific domains of knowledge about the nature of information and meaning, human communication, and social intervention.

1.1 Introduction Systems thinking and the systems movement have been enormously productive and innovative since they emerged through developments in biology and information technology in the 1930s. To highlight a few of the major contributions: Von Bertalanffy's (1971) first conscious articulation of general systems theory. Cybernetics as developed by Weiner (Weiner 1948), Ashby (1956), Bateson (1973) and others, and then applied to management by Stafford Beer (1966). The living systems approach to biology developed by Miller (1978). C West Churchman's (1968; 1971) ideas on dialectical systems further developed by Ulrich (1994). Ackoff and Emery's (1972) theory of purposeful systems. Hard systems engineering (Hall 1962). Checkland's (1981; 1990) reorientation of the discipline with the development of soft systems. Maturana and Varela's (1980; 1987) enormously influential theories of autopoiesis and cognition. Social systems theory developed, for instance, by Buckley (1967), Luhmann (1995), Habermas (1984; 1987) and Giddens (1984). Jackson (2000), Flood (1991), Midgley (2000) and Mingers' (1997) investigations of critical systems thinking and most recently multimethodology. Developments in chaos and complexity theory particularly at Santa Fe (Kaufmann 1995). I do of course recognise that systemic thinking has occurred throughout human history.



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