Contents

	List of figures	X11
	List of tables	xiii
	Acknowledgements	xiv
	RT I	
Fo	undations	1
1	Introduction	3
	1.1 Introduction 3	
	1.2 Developments in systems thinking 4	
	1.3 Structure of the book 9	
2	Philosophical foundations: critical realism	10
	2.1 Introduction and context 10	
	2.2 Problems in the philosophy of natural science 11	
	2.3 An introduction to critical realism 16	
	2.4 Criticisms of critical realism 22	
	2.5 Conclusions 27	
3	Systems thinking and critical realism	28
	3.1 Introduction and context 28	
	3.2 The development of basic systems concepts 28	
	3.3 Systemic concepts in Bhaskar's early work 36	
	3.4 Systemic concepts in dialectical critical realism 42	
	3.5 Conclusions 47	
PA	RTH	
PART II Ontological issues		49
4	Explanatory mechanisms	51
	4.1 Introduction 51	

X	Comenis		
	4.2 Deduction, induction and abduction: the logic of mechanistic		
	explanation in critical realism 52		
	4.3 Parts, wholes and boundaries: the basis of systemic		
	thinking 55		
	4.4 Issues in mechanistic explanation 55		
	4.5 Conclusions 63		
5	Emergence, generative powers and causality	65	
	5.1 Introduction 65		
	5.2 Emergence and causality 65		
	5.3 Powers, properties and tendencies 71		
	5.4 Events: the Actual and the Real 73		
	5.5 Abstracting causal relations – demi-regs 78		
	5.6 Conclusions 83		
6	Can social systems be autopoietic?	85	
	6.1 Introduction 85		
	6.2 The attractions and problems of social autopoiesis 85		
	6.3 Society as a system of autopoietic communication 90		
	6.4 Structuration theory and critical realism 97		
	6.5 Conclusions 110		
PA	RT III		
Ep	istemological issues	115	
7	Observing systems: the question of boundaries	117	
	7.1 Introduction 117		
	7.2 Physical boundaries 118		
	7.3 Mathematical boundaries 123		
	7.4 Conceptual boundaries and language 126		
	7.5 The boundaries of social systems 134		
	7.6 Self-bounding through organization closure 134		
	7.7 The problem of the observer 137		
	7.8 Boundary setting in practical interventions 143		
	7.9 Conclusions 144		
8	Knowledge and forms of truth	147	
	8.1 Introduction 147		
	8.2 The realism debate 148		
	8.3 Knowledge management 149		
	8.4 Truth 152		

	8.5 Forms of knowledge and truth 159 8.6 Conclusions 166	
	RT IV ctical issues	169
9	Methodology: what might we do?	171
	9.1 Introduction 171	1 / 1
	9.2 Quantitative methods in systems research 172	
	9.3 Qualitative methods in systems research 181	
	9.4 Multimethodology 184	
	9.5 Critical realism and research 187	
	9.6 Conclusions 194	
10	Ethics: what should we do?	195
	10.1 Introduction 195	
	10.2 Philosophical ethics 195	
	10.3 Business ethics 197	
	10.4 Habermasian discourse ethics 199	
	10.5. Ethics in critical realism 205	
	10.6 Comparing Habermas and Bhaskar 209	
	10.7 Applying discourse ethics and critical realism in	
	management 214	
	10.8 Conclusions 216	
11	Conclusion	218
	Bibliography	220
	Index	245