Integrating Counselling and Psychotherapy

Directionality, Synergy, and Social Change

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FROM INTRAPERSONAL TO INTERPERSONAL LEVELS OF ORGANISATION

Playing to win-win

This chapter discusses:

- The transposition of the concepts of directionality, dysergies, and synergies to interpersonal levels of organisation.
- *Non-zero-sum* games, as developed in *game theory*, and how this can develop our understanding of synergies and dysergies.

To this point, it has been argued that a person's context – including their interpersonal and social relationships – plays a crucial role in determining how, and whether, a person will actualise their directions. However, this analysis remains focused at the individual level, in terms of how the actualisation of a person's directions are shaped by their context. By contrast, in this chapter, we will look at how the whole framework, and the concepts developed so far, can be transposed to a range of interpersonal levels: dyadic, family, community, national, and global. So the focus turns to *interpersonal directionality*, *interpersonal synergies*, and *interpersonal dysergies*. No doubt, much could also be said about effective and ineffective strategies at the interpersonal level (see Chapter 7). However, for reasons of space, the principal focus here is on horizontal coherence and incoherence alone.

LEVELS OF ORGANISATION

Within the field of individual counselling and psychotherapy, as in this book, there is a tendency to start with the person as the organising unit of analysis. On the other hand, disciplines like sociology or politics tend to start with more macro *levels of organisation* (Koestler, 1967) – like classes, communities, or society as a whole – and understand individual processes in terms of these wider social 'fields' (Mindell, 2014). From a Marxist perspective, for instance, individuals' desires and behaviours may be understood in terms of the power and interests that flow 'through them' (Smail, 2005). Within the therapeutic field, couples, groups, or family therapists may also start with more macro units of analysis: seeing, for instance, the 'family system' (Gurman, 2003), or the 'group-as-a-whole' (Foulkes, 1984), as the principal operating entity, rather than its individual components. Here, individual difficulties may be viewed as a product of dysfunction within the larger family system (Lebow, 2008a). That is, fields are seen as creating and organising us as much as we organise them (Mindell, 2014).

Certainly, a focus at the macro level alone cannot explain many micro-level processes and variations. While it may be true, for instance, that girls in Western society are socialised to desire thinness, this does not hold for everyone. Some girls may be quite happy being larger. Conversely, however, 'Collective actions … cannot be reduced down to individual intentions' (Gibbs Jr, 2001, p. 113). This is because once individuals collect together they form relationships and interconnections – synergies and dysergies (see below) – that make them 'greater than' the individual parts alone. Lewin (1947) writes:

> There is no more magic behind the fact that groups have properties of their own, which are different from the properties of their subgroups or their individual members, than behind the fact that molecules have properties which are different from the properties of the atoms or ions of which they are composed. (p. 8)

Just as water, then, has very different properties from hydrogen and oxygen alone, so a collection of two or more people is not simply the additive effects of their individual characteristics. A couple, for instance, has its own 'personality', habits, and friendship network – evolving over time – and these are more than just the sum of its individual parts. 'Posh and Becks' is more than Victoria Adams and David Beckham in isolation; 'Brangelina' was more than Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie alone. Indeed, the contemporary tendency to hybridise couples' names into a single identity highlights the Gestalt-like unity of such a higher-level entity.

Koestler's (1967) concept of a *holarchy* may be a useful way of conceptualising these different levels of organisation. For Koestler, each organising unit (or what he termed a *holon*), sits within an 'open-ended' hierarchical structure, with lower- and higher-level units that can range from sub-atomic quarks to the omniverse (see, for instance, Figure 9.1). Here, higher-level organising units are 'made up' of lower-level units. So, for instance, the individual is made up of goals, the family is made up of individuals, and the community is made up of families. But because the higher-level units are formed through the relationships between the lower-level units, they are never simply reducible to them. This means, then, that at each level, the holons can be considered a functioning whole – self-regulating and semi-autonomous – with none more 'real' or significant than the others.
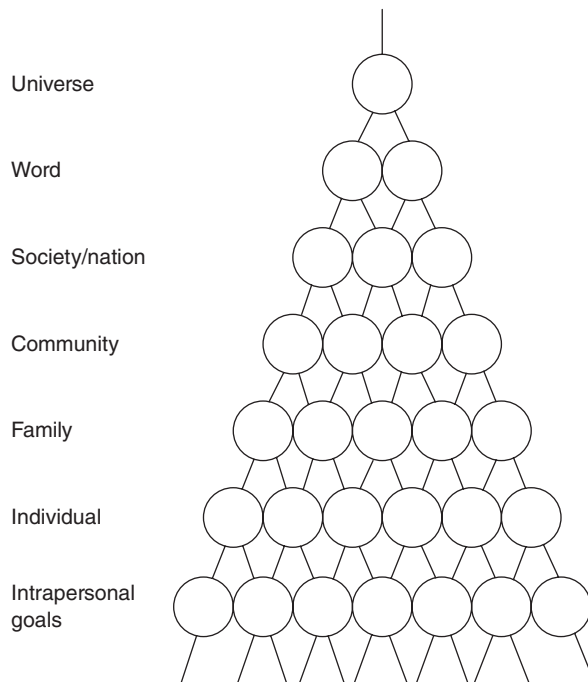

Figure 9.1 An illustrative holarchy

INTERPERSONAL DIRECTIONALITY

Just as individuals have desires, intentions, and goals, so too do higher levels of organisation (Malle et al., 2001; Mindell, 2014). A couple, for instance, might be striving to buy their first home, or a social class might be fighting to control the means of production. Within the therapy and psychology field, there has been a particular focus on the way in which small groups (such as therapy groups) can have a 'will', 'drive', and 'common purpose' of their own (e.g., Bion, 1961; Foulkes, 1984) and behave in the light of particular 'needs' (Houston, 1993). As at that individual level, these can be conscious or unconscious (Mindell, 2014).

Theorists and researchers have also described how small groups can move through a sequence of stages – such as 'forming', 'storming', 'norming', and 'performing' (Tuckman, 1965), or 'induction', 'goaling', 'change', and 'termination' (Burlingame & McClendon, 2003) – which have many parallels with the phases of the direction arc (Chapter 3, this volume). The family has also been described by therapists as a goal-oriented system (e.g., Lebow, 2008a): for instance, striving to create, and maintain, a particular 'phantasy' of what it is, despite the actual experiences of individual members (Laing, 1967). Within the organisational field, too, practices have developed which emphasise particular phases of the directional arc, in particular feedback. This includes the use of 'PDSA' cycles (Plan–Do–Study–Act) and the 'Agile Method', where iterative cycles of testing and adjustment are carried out before changes are disseminated more widely.

Critically, as with all aspects of these organising units, this *we-intentionality* (Gibbs Jr, 2001) cannot be reduced down to the intentionality of its constituent members. An example of this is the way that when two people dance together, their movement co-evolves in a highly interactive and indetermined way (Gibbs Jr, 2001). Here, intention is not simply in each dancer's head; rather, it interactively emerges through the process of being together (Gibbs Jr, 2001). Another example is: 'John and Jeremy' want to buy their first home, but this 'dyadic desire' is not simply the sum of John's desire plus Jeremy's desire. They are a couple, with a particular, distinctive vision that they have created together for their home, and a way of striving towards it that has emerged from their relational dynamic.

One of the particular reasons why directionality, at the interpersonal level, is irreducible to individual directionality is because of the way that one person's directions interact and shape those of another person. John, for instance, wants to buy a minimalist loft conversion by the sea, and because one of Jeremy's highest-order desires is for John to get what he wants, Jeremy wants this loft conversion too. But John gets frustrated when Jeremy wants what he wants – he wants Jeremy to make his own mind up – and so he starts going off the idea of a loft conversion and starts thinking about a bungalow in the countryside. This is one thing that Jeremy really does not want, but the more he pushes back against John, the more adamant John becomes. Finally, they agree on a semi-detached house in a seaside town. Here, the

directionality of 'John-and-Jeremy' as a couple emerges as a complex web of their interacting, individual directions. It cannot be reduced to either alone.

INTERPERSONAL DYSERGIES

In Chapter 8, we saw how the actualisation of higher-order directions can be understood in terms of dysergies and synergies between lower-order directions. Similarly, as suggested by Figure 9.1, we can think of a directional structure at each of the other levels of organisation: with, for instance, lower-order, individual directions nested within higher-order, dyadic, family, or group etc. directions (Miller et al., 1960). This means that relationships within higher levels of organisation can also take one of three forms – synergetic, dysergetic, or independent – with higher-level directions actualised to the extent that their lower-level directions are pulling together, rather than apart.

The dynamic between Mei and Rob illustrates how directions between two individuals can be dysergetic, to the detriment of the overall dyad (see Figure 9.2). Mei desperately wants excitement and passion in her life, but Rob's priority is for 'down time'. If Mei and Rob were independent entities, these different directions would not be a problem. But as a couple, who have been committed to the sharing of time and space together, a push from one party has an inevitable influence on the other. So Mei feels dragged down by Rob's 'laziness'; and Rob might feel that his pursuit of pleasure is continually interrupted by Mei's busyness. As with dysergies at an intrapersonal level, then, Mei and Rob are like two thermostats in a room, each trying to regulate the same activity according to different standards. The result is a problematic relationship, and consequently two dissatisfied individuals.
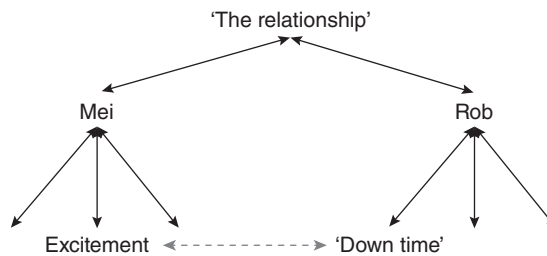
Figure 9.2 Dysergetic interpersonal relationship

Such dysergies can also be seen in therapy groups (Slavson, 1957) or in family systems where, for instance, two members form a coalition against a third (Kaslow, Dausch, & Celano, 2003). A father and son, for example, strive to maintain their sense of camaraderie by teasing the mother for being 'stupid', thereby undermining her desire for self-worth. Racism can be understood as a manifestation of a similar

dysergy at the community level: one group actualising its desires (for instance, for self-worth) through the undermining of another's. And, of course, war – the social ill that causes an abundance of misery, terror, and loss (Layard, 2006) – can be considered the most macro form of dysergetic relating. Here, one nation's directionality is specifically aimed at overpowering and controlling the directionality of another.

In these latter examples, we can see parallels to the deliberate forms of conflict discussed in Chapter 8. And if directionality is understood as the essence of human being, then deliberate attempts to sabotage or suppress it in others is, perhaps, the most malevolent of human actions. This compares with its more incidental form. Mei and Rob, for instance, pull each other in different directions, but they do not intend to deliberately block the other's direction; rather, it is a by-product of their striving for their own goals.

To complicate matters further, we can also consider dysergies *between* levels. For instance, Mei may decide, in relationship to Rob, to do exactly what she wants. But this then has a detrimental effect on the actualisation of their relationship – and, consequently, on her. In this respect, we could conceptualise the conflict between intrinsic and extrinsic directions (see Chapter 5) as a dysergy across levels: with the individual's desires pulling against those of their family, or society. A cultural more that boys should not cry, for instance, may run against the individual's own desire for emotional expression, or a cultural value for genital mutilation may fundamentally undermine an individual's highest-order directions towards safety, autonomy, and self-worth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Within organisations, we also often see a conflict between what a company or institution wants and an individual's personal goals (Powers, 1992). For instance, an individual may have a desire to be original or creative in their work, but the organisation needs them to complete more mundane tasks.

This means that we cannot conceptualise the individual's directions in isolation from the directions of those around them. And, indeed, at times, people may face a choice between actualising individual-level directions and contributing to the actualisation of a greater whole. For instance, at a personal level, Mei might want to leave Rob and Olivia to live with Saul, but this would have serious detrimental consequences for her family as well as for Saul, and perhaps their wider social network. Furthermore, because Mei herself is part of these higher-level organising units – the family or the social network – she herself will lose out if the larger group loses out. Hence, in parallel with intrapersonal processes, there is a complex balance to be found between actualising one's individual directions and actualising those of the larger whole. In group therapies, this may be a particular focus, where members learn to negotiate the tensions between the group needs and their own individual needs (Bion, 1961; Paul, 2012).

Moreover, as at the individual level, interpersonal conflicts may become increasingly intensified with reduced levels of resources and possibilities (Powers, 1992). In an affluent society, for instance, people may be able to follow their own interests and directions without having a particularly detrimental effect on others. But in a

more poorly resourced context, the actualisation of one person's individual needs may directly take away from the possibilities of others. If, for instance, I try to get my client to be seen more quickly by the National Health Service (where resources are very limited), I know that another person will be disadvantaged (Kagleder, personal communication, 17 April 2018). By contrast, if our NHS was very well funded, then there would be resources to see my client more quickly without the need to de-prioritise anyone else.

INTERPERSONAL SYNERGIES

Relationships at higher levels of organisation may also take more synergetic forms. Here, 'two people [or groups, etc.] have arranged their relationship in such a fashion that one person's advantage is the other person's advantage rather than one person's advantage being the other's disadvantage' (Maslow, 1971, p. 200). Such synergies can also be seen in Mei and Rob's relationship. For instance, as depicted in Figure 9.3, Mei wants to nurture Olivia in a supportive, loving, and caring family, as does Rob. Through working together on this, they have both been able to actualise this desire in a way that neither could do so fully on their own.
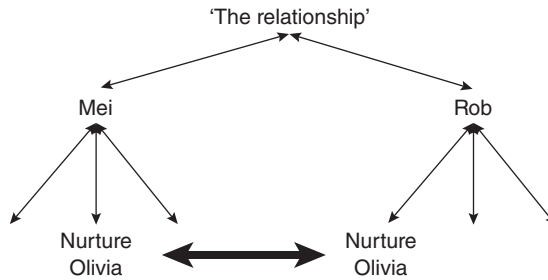
Figure 9.3 Synergetic interpersonal relationship

These synergies may also exist at the level of the group. From a group analytic perspective, for instance, Slavson (1957) writes that:

> The basic integrating force that assures the survival and achievement of ordinary groups is what has been described as *synergy*. By synergy is meant the drive, purpose, aim and effort common to and congruent in all the individuals constituting a group or mass of people. The cementing ties, the coherence in these groups, is the personal homogeneity of their members and/or of their interest or goal. (p. 169)

For Slavson (1957), however, it is this synergetic organisation that is missing, by definition, in therapy groups, with each patient acting as an individual, for his or her individual ends, rather than for a common group aim.

At the wider community level, Maslow (1971) also describes social arrangement in both traditional and contemporary cultures that are high and low in synergy. An example of the former is the Kalahari *Ju/'hoansi* hunter-gatherer community, in which spiritual healing energy (*n/om*) is shared out among the group (Katz & Murphy-Shigematsu, 2012). Unlimited in supply, the activation of this energy in one member of the community is seen as stimulating *n/om* in others. Katz and Murphy-Shigematsu (2012) also point to self-help groups – such as Alcoholics Anonymous – as a paradigmatic form of synergistic community (somewhat in contrast to Slavson, above), in which members benefit from both providing and receiving support. By contrast, Maslow points to the college grading system in the USA as a dysergetic system, in which a higher grade for one student necessarily entails a lower grade for another.

As at the interpersonal level, systems can be seen as 'good' to the extent that they are synergetic rather than dysergetic. Synergetic systems increase the overall actualisation of highest-order directions – that is, more people (or families, or groups, or communities) get more of what they want more of the time – whereas dysergetic systems decrease it. In this way, as Maslow (1971) suggests, the synergy principle 'opens up the way for a supracultural system of values by which to evaluate a culture and everything within it', because it 'furnishes a scientific basis for Utopian theory' (p. 199).

Here, for instance, actions like communication, tolerance, and compassion can all be considered 'good' things because, through their synergetic potential, they can increase the 'net' actualisation of directions across the system. Acting compassionately, for instance, helps some people feel good because they experience the pleasure of reaching out, and it helps other people feel good because they experience the pleasure of being helped and supported in their lives. By contrast, actions like intolerance, racism, and homophobia are 'bad' because they reduce the net actualisation of directions. Homophobia, for instance, reduces the capacity of its many victims to feel good about themselves without actualising anything of positive or enduring worth for anyone else. Understanding society in these terms, we can begin to develop a robust argument for why values and actions such as compassion and altruism are the basis for a thriving society. Not because they are simply 'nice' or 'kind', but because they are the best way of all us getting more of what we want.

This perspective on social wellbeing can be considered a modified version of utilitarianism, which holds that 'The *rightness* of an action is to be judged by the contribution it makes to the increase of human happiness or the decrease of human misery' (Urmson & Ree, 1989, pp. 318–319, emphasis in the original). Here, however, the rightness of an action, or of a society, is judged more broadly: in terms of its contribution to the actualisation of highest-order human directions, whatever they may be. So this may be happiness, but it may also be autonomy, relatedness, or whatever highest-order directions are unique to the individual (see Chapter 6). This is similar to Powers's definition of an affluent society as one in which many people have achieved their goals; to Snygg and Combs's (1949) statement that 'The good society satisfied

need' (p. 198); and to Rescher's (1993) *Principle of Benevolence*, which holds that 'A world in which people have what they want is a better world than one in which they do not, provided there is no harm to what they [or others] want' (p. 129). Hence, while a utilitarian position holds that 'the greatest happiness is the right guide to public policy' (Layard, 2006, p. 114), from the current perspective, public policy should be oriented to the greatest actualisation of all higher-order directions. We shall explore the practical implications of this in Chapter 16.

This valuing of synergetic relationships can be seen, albeit implicitly, in the many forms of therapy that focus on person-to-person dynamics, as well as those that work with two or more clients consecutively. For instance, one of the principal aims of interpersonal therapy is to help clients improve their interpersonal relationships and to reduce levels of conflict (Stuart & Robertson, 2003). Similarly, transactional analysis uses the concepts of *complementary* and *crossed transactions* to help clients improve their interpersonal functioning (Stewart & Joines, 1987). Complementary transactions are those in which people respond from the ego-state to which they were addressed. For instance, Mei talks to Rob as an Adult ('I'd really like it if you could help me take the kids out'), and Rob responds from Adult to Adult ('I've just got to do something for five minutes and then I will'). By contrast, crossed transactions are those in which the ego-state addressed is not the one that responds. For instance, Mei talks to Rob from Adult to Adult, but Rob responds from Adapted Child to Controlling Parent ('You're always telling me what to do…' [feeling: 'it's not fair']). In complementary transactions, we can see a basic synergetic relationship: the two parties matching, and building on, each other. However, crossed transactions involve a basic dysergy: one form of communication undermines the other. Similarly, couples therapy aims to help clients develop conflict management skills (Meneses & Scuka, 2016); family therapies aim to help clients develop cohesive, yet flexible, family structures and functioning (Kaslow et al., 2003; Lebow, 2008a); group psychotherapies all strive to address interpersonal foundations of pathologies (Dies, 2003); and mediation practices strive to help clients move from *win–lose* to *win–win* relationships.

NON-ZERO-SUM GAMES

To develop a deeper understanding of processes at interpersonal levels of organisation (and, in Chapter 16, back to intrapersonal levels), we now turn to *game theory* and its concept of *non-zero-sum games*. Game theory 'is the study of strategic interdependence – that is, situations where my actions affect both my welfare and your welfare and vice versa' (Spaniel, 2015, p. 1). Game theory is used in such fields as economics and political sciences, and involves the development of mathematical models of conflict and cooperation. It provides a helpful – albeit somewhat mechanistic – language for deepening an understanding of synergies and dysergies.

In game theory, *zero-sum games* are those in which the 'fortunes' of each 'player' are inversely related. This is a 'win–lose' or a 'draw–draw' interaction, in which any gains in one party are mirrored by the losses of another (Wright, 2000). A classic example of this might be a game of poker between two players. If I win £3, the other player loses £3, and vice versa. So the total 'gain' is constant, or 'zero sum', in the sense that the minuses and the pluses always cancel each other out. In a zero-sum game, synergies and dysergies are not possible: there is no slackage, no room for allowing more (or less) optimal outcomes overall. And in a truly zero-sum game, where there are no advantages whatsoever to more equal outcomes (including, for instance, a moral sense of fairness), then there is no reason for people not to engage in direct competition.

In reality, however, most real human interactions are *non-zero-sum*. These are 'games' in which the total amount of benefit is not constant: where there is the possibility for 'win–win' and 'lose–lose' outcomes, as well as various degrees of 'win–lose'. Non-zero-sum games are synonymous with a potential for synergy (Wright, 2000), and Corning (2003) describes synergy as the 'hidden key' in game theory modelling: the difference between the zero and the non-zero of a game.

One reason why most real 'games' may be *non-zero-sum* is because any situation is likely to involve a variety of directions. For instance, it is true that, in terms of purely monetary gain, my victory at poker is mirrored in my partner's losses. But if, for instance, we both also desire excitement from playing poker together, then a longer game (say, two hours) would be more synergetic than a shorter one (say, five minutes). Most games are also non-zero-sum because the majority of human interactions continue over time, and this means that any immediate outcomes are just one part of a more complex, dynamic, non-linear network of consequences. For instance, even if my partner and I were playing for purely monetary gain, if I won £3000 from them rather than £3, they might refuse to play poker with me again, or skill themselves up so that they won the next time (or, if in the Wild West, shoot me), so there is no simple cancelling out of gains and losses. And, of course, any two-person game is embedded in a wider social network which then, as discussed above, may be affected by – and effect – lower levels of organisation. If I win £3000 from my friend, for instance, other friends may refuse to play poker with me – so again, the overall gains and losses in utility may be varied. And if we think about this in the context of multiple people and multiple levels of organisation with multiple desires and goals, it seems unlikely that there will ever be a real-life situation in which the overall 'sum' remains zero.

Within game theory, the classic scenario that has been used to explore non-zero-sum games is the *prisoner's dilemma game* (Axelrod, 1984; Wright, 2000). This takes the following form:

> Two criminals, A and B, are arrested and imprisoned. They are in solitary confinement so that they cannot talk to each other. If they both stay silent (i.e., 'cooperate' with each other), the police will not have enough evidence to prosecute them, but they can get them on a lesser charge, and each will go to

prison for one year. However, the police offer each criminal the opportunity to 'defect' (i.e., admit the crime), with the promise that if they do so, then they will be set free (and their partner will get three years in prison). However, if both criminals defect – and admit to their crime – then they will both receive a two-year sentence. So what should each criminal do? (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner%27s_dilemma)

To help explore such dilemmas, game theorists often use *payoff matrices*, with different numbers representing different 'wins' or 'losses' for 'different players'. The payoff matrix for the above game, in terms of years imprisoned, is displayed in Table 9.1 (with scores preceded by a minus sign to indicate that more is worse). This shows the different combinations of moves, and the payoffs for A and B if each makes the choice to cooperate with, or betray, the other. The 'payoff' for A is in the bottom left of the square cells, and for B in the top right of the cells. So, for instance, in the top left-hand cell, we can see that if B cooperates and A cooperates, A will get one year in prison and B will get one year in prison; and in the top right-hand cell, we see that if A cooperates and B betrays, A will get three years in prison and B will get no years in prison. What this matrix also shows, as a non-zero-sum game, is that the total payoff varies from cell to cell: from -2 (A and B both stay silent) to -4 (A and B both betray each other).

Table 9.1 Payoff matrix for the classic prisoner's dilemma game

A \ B	B cooperates (stays silent)	B betrays (defects)
A cooperates (stays silent)	-1 years / -1 years	0 years / -3 years
A betrays (defects)	-3 years / 0 years	-2 years / -2 years

Note: The 'payoff' for A is in the bottom left of the square cells, and for B in the top right of the cells

Although this payoff matrix refers to a specific, imaginary situation, we can apply it to many real-life scenarios. For instance, imagine that Mei and Saul are both deciding on whether to ask the other out, and the payoff in this vignette is in terms of 'psychological suffering' (Table 9.2). Here, if Mei asks Saul out but Saul says nothing, she feels awful (a -3 of embarrassment), and the same goes for Saul. If neither of them say anything, on the other hand, they both lose out pretty badly in terms of missing a potential romance (-2). The 'winning' scenario, then, is if they both take the plunge, and both experience just a wince of discomfort, but feel better because the other has done the same.

The payoff matrix given here is just one of an infinite variety of zero-sum and non-zero-sum matrices that might exist; and scores can be positive as well as negative. For

Table 9.2   Payoff matrix for Mei and Saul dating

Mei \ Saul	Saul asks Mei out	Saul says nothing
Mei asks Saul out	-1 / -1	0 / -3
Mei says nothing	-3 / 0	-2 / -2

instance, in the above scenario, we might suggest that if both Saul and Mei ask each other out, then both will gain +5, or perhaps +10 or even +100,000. And it may also be that different participants have different gains or losses with different combinations (Spaniel, 2015). For instance, Mei might feel deeply humiliated by asking Saul out (-5), but Saul actually quite enjoys it as it gives him a sense of bravado (+2). And while Mei might find it torturous not going out with Saul (-10), and yearns to have more time with him (+10), Saul might be more diffident about it (±1). However, in zero-sum games, the total scores in all cells of the matrix will be equivalent; whereas in non-zero-sum games they will vary, with the most synergetic solution being the cell with the highest total score.

In some instances, synergetic solutions may be compatible with each person's immediate self-interest (i.e., the cell in which they score the highest). Supposing, for instance, that Mei and her girlfriend, Sasha, are deciding whether or not to go out on a Friday night (see Table 9.3). Both of them will feel bored and alone if they stay in (-2 'pleasure' each), but even worse if they end up going out on their own (-4 'pleasure' each). However, if they both go out together, they will really enjoy themselves (+7 'pleasure' each). Here, both Sasha and Mei, individually, are better off going out than staying in, and this win–win solution also gives the best overall outcome (+14).

Table 9.3   Payoff matrix for Mei and Sasha's evening in/out

Mei \ Sasha	Sasha stays in	Sasha goes out
Mei stays in	-2 / -2	-4 / -2
Mei goes out	-2 / -4	7 / 7

However, what is so fascinating about the kind of payoff matrix in the prisoner's dilemma game is that, for both players, their immediate rational self-interests – when considered in isolation – lead to sub-optimal outcomes overall (Axelrod, 1984). If A, for instance, considers their best move in relation to each of B's possibilities (in game

theory terms, the *dominant strategy*), then they might think the following: 'If A stays silent, then I am better off betraying them (0 [years in prison]) than staying silent (-1); and if B betrays me, then I am also better off betraying them (-2) than staying silent (-3); so I should choose to betray.' The exact, same logic holds for B. However, if both A and B act in terms of their immediate, rational self-interest, then the outcome for both (-2 each) is worse than if they had chosen to act with regard for the other (-1 each).

Put another way, in game theory terms, the *Nash equilibrium point* in the prisoner's dilemma game – the 'position in which neither side can then independently change its strategy without ending up in a less desirable position' (Fisher, 2008, p. 18) – is not the optimal solution. The Nash equilibrium in this game is the 'betray–betray' option: and once at this point, neither side can independently move without making things worse for themselves. Yes, this is a trap, and means that neither can achieve the optimal solution.

To summarise, then, in the prisoner's dilemma game, if both parties act according to their immediate self-interest, the outcome is worst for all (Axelrod, 1984; Rapoport, 1960). This is a *lose–lose* outcome, and this can be seen as 'an abstract formulation of some very common and interesting situations' in the real world (Axelrod, 1984, p. 9). For instance, my partner and I are having an argument, and we both know that the way to resolve this is to communicate to the other in a more tender way, rather than with hostility. Yet this co-hostility is the Nash equilibrium point: if I move towards a softer position, and she does not, I lose out (I feel humiliated), and vice versa. Even though, then, we are better off moving out of our positions, it is not easy to do so (Fisher, 2008). Another personal example, on a larger scale: if I get on to a crowded underground train, it is not in my personal interests to move down the carriage. I have to walk more and end up further from the door. However, if everyone else also acts according to the same individualistic logic – hanging round the train doors rather than moving down the carriage – then everyone loses out: fewer people can get on to the trains. Similarly, Rapoport (1960), writing in the 1960s, described the arms race as a scaled-up version of the prisoner's dilemma game. Country A and Country B have the choice to arm or not arm, and both countries might think that, by arming, they can gain security in relation to the other nation. But the problem, of course, is that if Country A spends money on arms, then this motivates Country B to do the same, and vice versa.

What we also see in these examples, and as touched on above, is that, in reality, most 'games' are played out numerous times. And the more extended the time period, the more non-zero-sum they become. If, for instance, the prisoner's dilemma game is played only once, then the difference between dysergetic and synergetic solutions would not be that great (from -2 to -4). But if the game were played ten times or a thousand times, then the differences between the most and least synergetic approaches could be vast. Moreover, as a game extends over time, so the strategy that

a person adopts in one round has the capacity to impact back on them in subsequent rounds. Person A, for instance, may get away with betraying Person B if they play just one round of the prisoner's dilemma game, but if they play this game ten or a thousand times, Person B will quickly learn that they are better off betraying back – to the detriment of Person A and the dyad overall. Again, then, with more time comes the potential for more or less synergetic configurations.

At this point, what may be obvious to the reader (and, hopefully, of interest) is the parallels between game theory at the interpersonal level and the intrapersonal processes explored earlier in the book. Just as goals, for instance, can go rogue (Chapter 8), so we can see how people can end up acting in terms of immediate self-interest, even if it is to the detriment of the greater whole. At an intrapersonal level, we can envisage people as constantly getting stuck in Nash equilibrium points, where they know what is going to be most helpful overall but cannot get out of their ruts because of the immediate costs. Logan, for instance, knows that he is better off seeing himself in a more positive light: quietening his critical voice and giving more space and acceptance to his vulnerability. But his vulnerable side is terrified of coming out its bunker and facing the full force of the critical voice; his critical side is terrified of giving ground and letting his vulnerabilities overwhelm. So relationships, at an intrapersonal level, remain betray–betray, neither side risking a more cooperative stance. As we begin to explore ways of forming more synergetic interpersonal relationships, then, we can also begin to consider the implications for intrapersonal relating.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have seen how the structural model of directionality, developed at the individual level (Chapter 6), can be extended to interpersonal levels of organisation. From dyads to nations, it has been proposed that collections of individuals can have directions – irreducible to the directions of their individual constituents – which can function in synergetic or dysergetic ways. Game theory has been used to develop this analysis, and later on in this book we will look at what has been learned from it in terms of facilitating synergetic functioning (Chapter 16). At this stage, however, perhaps the most important 'take away' point from this chapter is that the structural model developed in this book can be – and has been – effectively transposed to different levels of organisation. This suggests that it is a robust and replicable structure. It also suggests that this framework has the potential to account for a wide variety of phenomena: from individual to group to societal actions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

• Consider one of your closest interpersonal relationships. What are the synergies in this relationship for you and what are the dysergies?

- Identify a current situation which involves you and someone close to you having to make a decision (for instance, whether to go on holiday together, or whether to talk about a difficult issue). See if you are able to develop a payoff matrix for it. What is the Nash equilibrium point? What is the solution with the greatest overall benefit?

FURTHER READING

Axelrod, R. (1984). *The evolution of cooperation*. New York: Basic Books. Classic, very readable text detailing the outcomes of the prisoner's dilemma tournament and what it can teach us about human conflict and cooperation.

Koestler, A. (1967). *The ghost in the machine*. London: Pan. Dated, but a very valuable text introducing such key concepts as holons and the holoarchy.

The Evolution of Trust (http://ncase.me/trust/) Excellent online game theory tutorial.