Introduction

Personality psychology studies how psychological systems work together and, consequently, can act as a resource for unification in the broader discipline of psychology. Yet personality's current field-wide organisation promotes a fragmented view of the person, seen through such competing theories such as the psychodynamic,¹ trait,² and humanistic.³ There exists an alternative, *systems framework for personality*, that focuses on four topics: Identifying personality, personality's parts, its organization, and its development. (Mayer, 2005: I)

Fragmentation in Personality Psychology

The fragmentation of personality psychology is demonstrated by the many independent and isolated explorations of the field. This notion is supported by Magnusson and Torestad (1993) who indicate that it has resulted in a discipline with distinctive theoretical sectors like perception, cognition, emotion, behaviour, genetics, and physiology. Each sector has its own concepts, methods, and research strategies, and with little or no exchange of ideas between them. Personality psychology, they say, also suffers from sectorial hostility, rivalry and incomprehension, and as part of behavioural science it represents a state of bureaucratic warfare.⁴ Magnusson and Torestad's solution is to offer *dynamic* personality models that are concerned with how and why the individual is seen as a total integrated entity that thinks and feels, and where the mind and its processes are recognised through its behavioural consequences. Mayer's (2005) approach is an elaboration of this that seeks to adopt a systems framework for personality delivering dynamic systemic personality models in which personality is active and informed. In this book we extend such an approach to living systems - those capable of providing generalised dynamic qualitative modelling.

Small movement towards an integrated systems theory of personality has been made. The move by Mischel and Shoda (1995) proposes that

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personality must be shown to be susceptible to both social and interpersonal situations as well as intrapsychic situations like mood states that arise in the everyday stream of experience and feeling. They theorise that when a situation is perceived, the mind creates subjective maps concerning the acquired meaning of situational features for that person. Here, then, individuals differ in how to focus on these features, how they categorise and encode them cognitively and emotionally, and how the encodings activate and interact with other cognitions and affects in the personality system. This theory can be useful to elaborate on the processes of internalisation of some situational effect. This is because internalisation involves: assimilation - where an observed effect is brought into agency as information through some inherent process of categorisation and encoding; and accommodation - where the information becomes incorporated in agency thereby modifying it in some way as an adaptive process. In another development, Kaschel and Kuhl (2004) have proposed their Personality Systems Interactions (PSI) theory which postulates seven levels of personality functioning. It captures various areas of personality psychology that act through an architecture of rationality and intuition operating under the assumptions of positive or negative affect modulation. They recognise that structure that they have created makes PSI a complex theory.

While in the early part of the millennium there has been agreement in the literature that personality psychology is fragmented, very little appears to have changed. Following Baumert et al. (2017), integration across the field of personality theory is essential because, with fragmentation, our understanding of the nature of personality and how it functions is inadequate and can even be misleading. They argue that a move towards integration can occur by differentiating the field into three domains of personality giving an increased potential for integrated development. The first is *personality struc*ture, formulated for instance by trait theories which can explain the psychological states that relate to behaviour, and include thoughts and feelings that vary with situational contexts. The second is *personality processes* which explains concrete behaviour in concrete situations, and should provide explanation for patterns of variation across situations and individuals. The third is *personality development* which provides understanding about enduring changes in individuals across their lifespan, including both normative changes as well as deviations from norms. However, they conclude by explaining how future personality psychology should progress towards complete integration, rather than illustrating it through exemplars therefore guiding the process of defragmentation.

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Simplifying Complexity

Personality is complex and to explain it one needs theories of complexity (Cervone et al., 2001). Thus, reflecting on PSI, it would be better as a theory of complexity rather than a complex theory. The reason is that complex theories have issues not held by simple theories. This is explained by Bradley (2018) who identifies four issues that complex theories have: (1) empiricism – there is evidence that simpler theories are more likely to be true than complex theories; (2) likelihood - evidence tends to provide greater confirmation for simpler theories; (3) numerousness - more complex theories have lower prior probability (prior referring to the rank order of degree of theoretical complexity); and (4) bounded asymmetry - there is a simplest theory, but there is no most complex theory since there is no bound on how complex a theory can be made. Simple theories are said to satisfy the *principle of parsimony*, defined as the most acceptable explanation of an effect (i.e., an occurrence, phenomenon, object or dynamic event) that is the simplest, minimising the involvement of entities, assumptions, or changes.⁵ Bunge (1962) elaborates by distinguishing simple theory into epistemic and ontological dimensions. Epistemic refers to the propositional structure delivering a knowledge mosaic from which rational discourse arises (Bradley, 2018), and ontology to the properties and relationships between schemas that are conceptually diverse (cf. Fu & Li, 2005). It now makes technical sense to talk of ontological and epistemic parsimony. Thus, ontological parsimony occurs when theories having elementary components do not multiply them beyond that which is necessary, and epistemic parsimony limits the propositions in such a way that is can still explain the characteristics of observed effects sufficiently well (cf. Baker, 2004). A theory having *ontological parsimony* may become simplistic when its *epistemic parsi*mony has modelling options that are so limited that complexity cannot be addressed (cf. Joosse & Teisman, 2020). Baker (2004) notes that the principle of parsimony is also called Occam's razor, its elementary definition being: the simplest explanation is usually the best one. Effectively, Occam's razor is a principle through which epistemic and ontological structures are normalised such that a potential for redundancy and contradiction are eliminated.

One way of creating theoretical parsimony is through meta-level rules or principles that regulate what a theory can do, when it can do it, and under what conditions, potentially enabling variation in the degree of epistemic and ontological complexity of a theory. As illustration, if a theory has a recursive capability, then recursive adjustability allows a change in the focus of the modelling of an effect, so that drilling-down into a situation can generate more localised detail about effects. It may also involve an

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expansive capacity of theorisation, this providing a breadth of examination, creating a capacity to explore more global theoretical extensions connected with an effect. Both cases are consistent with the creation of theoretical complexification. Tsoukas (2016) argues that theory complexification is needed to represent the complexity of observable effects, and that theory building is needed for this. We shall develop such an approach here by creating, not a theory with a capacity to express itself in general terms (as observed by Mayer earlier), but rather as a *general theory* able to express itself in a variety of specific terms of reference, together with a capacity for complexification.

General Theory

Now, *theory* may be defined as a collection of interconnected systemic ideas intended to explain in general terms, describe, analyse, or predict - with a purpose of creating knowledge about observed effects using concepts, definitions, assumptions, and generalisations. In contrast, general theories are concerned with a broad range of phenomena, either across several levels of analysis or by consolidating a variety of theoretical perspectives, these explaining developmental phenomena and unifying existing theory (Johnson et al., 2013). General theories have a substructure and a *superstructure* (Mahoney, 2004). The terms *substructure* and *superstructure* have been used for around three centuries, for instance, in civil engineering since 1726 in relation to construction, and by Karl Marx in his economic theory in the 1860s. To understand them within our context, consider a general theory of agency (as a living system), and where the meaning of the word agency is action towards an end (Kelso, 2016: 290). This implies that as a system, agency has purpose and interest through which an end can be identified, and behaviour allows it to be acquired. If it has purpose, then it must have more than just a behavioural system from which behaviour arises. Looking at the notion of purpose more closely, we see that it refers to something that is done or created or for which something exists. Rosenblueth, Weiner, and Bigelow (1943) explain that purpose is a function of a living system, but this does not need to involve consciousness, supported indirectly by Prigogine and Stengers (1984). Locke (1969) insists that purpose requires consciousness, but fails in his rationale beyond some emotive tradition. Indeed in due course it will be explained that there are at least six levels of consciousness in living systems, the least being its absence. Purpose is not part of the behavioural system, but is rather part of a higher meta-system that coincide in some way with regulation. Any

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general theory concerned with living systems should recognise this. So, here we shall introduce a *general theory of agency*, where agency is a living system with behaviour and a meta-system that provides at least a potential for affect and cognition.

A general theory of agency needs to model complexity, and as such must be able to represent dynamic conditions. For Rittel (1972), such modelling processes require the capability of reflection, i.e., the ability to 'reflect' themselves (for instance through feedback processes) in order to capture change. Hence, both identity and reflection are important to general Agency Theory.

Since agency is set within a general theory, it would need to have the properties of both a substructure and a superstructure that have a clear reflexive relationship (see Figure I.I), and since agency is also a living system it requires a boundary that distinguished between its internal and external environments. That such a boundary exists constitutes a primitive form of identity. Non-primitive identity requires some degree of consciousness that might include a sense of being, mental awareness and reflection (Shanon, 1990). To explain Figure I.I, we need to explore the natures of substructure and superstructure.

Substructure involves immanent axiomatic *foundational causes* (or forces) that are expressed through *causal agents* and *causal mechanisms*. A causal agent is some sub-structural dynamic elements that produces an effect or is responsible for events that result, and that has properties that explain outcomes and associations. An example of a causal agent is Piaget's (1950) intelligences that, as we shall see later, has the immanent property of ontological process



Figure I.1 Nature of general theory of agency with reflexive relationship between substructure and superstructure.

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transformation, permitting external environmental effects to be adventitiously manifested in different parts of agency's internal environment through outcomes like internalisation, learning, and adaptation.⁶ Another causal agent is self which inherently involves feedback processes (Kelso, 2016), and where both immanent and adventitious influences produce outcomes like selforganisation. Kelso explores the notion of self by recognising, for instance, that processes of self-organisation are natural to complex dynamic evolutionary systems. An outcome is viability facilitated through the development of coordinative structures with functional synergies. While self may be an important causative agent to a general theory of agency, it only arises with the emergence of boundary that provides distinction between internal and external environments, thereby enabling the attribute of autonomy, or selfdetermination. With the emergence of consciousness, self becomes elaborated by degree to perhaps include other properties like non-primitive identity, a sense of being, awareness, self-realisation, and self-reflection. A causal mechanism is linked to empirical analysis through bridging propositions/assumptions, and have a flexible nature, providing an argument or description or formal mechanism that explains the means or process or trajectory of a causal agent and its effects, and this may include a micro-level explanation for a causal phenomenon or one that is context dependent. An illustration in Agency Theory is the idea of hidden regulatory structures for behaviour in complex systems that create simplexity, and through which processes of selforganisation are enabled. Another illustration of a causal mechanism is the influence a causal agent experiences that might result in an adjustment of the effect it is responsible for. For agency one also needs to be able to differentiate between internally derived (immanent) influences on its causal agents, and those (adventitious) influences arriving from an external source.

Consciousness can only emerge if agency has sufficient complexity (Kahn, 2013). Living system complexification enabling the emergence of consciousness is an evolutionary process, and Bitbol and Luisi (2004: 105) have identified five stages for this that involve various degrees of internalisation.⁷ That there are five stages eliminates the idea that non-salient and salient entities are discontinuous and need to be considered in distinct frameworks. Rather, they may be considered in a single framework in which complex processes are at work enabling evolutionary processes to create a consciousness shift. The null stage occurs when agency is devoid of consciousness, with the fifth stage occurring with a collective consciousness involving common predictive rules that obey internal closure (i.e., the rules are not influenced from outside the agent). Seppälä (2019) identifies a sixth stage that occurs with a radical shift in conscious self-realisation, as agencies

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no longer automatically internalise every outer experience, and a sense of self moves beyond the limits of the mind to explore identity beyond the collective consciousness and its associated conditioning.

So, agency does not require consciousness to be able to have the properties associated with living. With autonomy, it only requires the ability to continually change its structures, undergoing renewal while preserving its patterns of organisation (Burke, 2002: Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Maturana and Varela (1973) argued that living is a property of a network of processes that they called autopoiesis (or self-production). This is a requirement for agency internalisation of external effects, and which is functionally equivalent to Piaget's operative intelligence. Schwarz et al. (1988) argue that autopoiesis is insufficient for the process of living, and autogenesis (or self-creation) is also required, this being functionally equivalent to Piaget's notion of figurative intelligence which concerns learning or innovation. Learning and innovation result from a history of interactions, occurring through immanent and adventitious dynamics, and this can happen when the living system has a primitive identity - that is, no consciousness. Internalisation via autopoiesis is a sub-structural process that uses reflexivity to facilitate superstructural assimilation. When actuated through accommodation, adjusted structures develop that to some degree modify imperatives for behaviour. Internalisation thus enables processes of adaptation where a change in behaviour can improve agency viability. An alternative to adaptation is innovation, this being a process of diversity that arises from creative learning from which new structures result, giving new patterns of behaviour.

Superstructure involves theory building which, for our agency, includes commensurable configurations like traits, culture, institutions, identity, and norms. Each of these named configurations is also a schema. Following DiMaggio (1977), schemas are structured knowledge frameworks that define a pattern of thought or behaviour and adopt an organisation of information categories and relationships representing effects. They maintain propositions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments (i.e., deductions or implications), perhaps with incomplete information. They can refer to simple highly abstract concepts or complex social phenomena, and include group stereotypes or social roles, and knowledge scripts.

While configurations may be represented through schemas, they are more than this. Configurations have inherent coordinative structures that can respond to the needs of complexity modelling by incorporating connecting schemas representing processes of change. A plurality of configurations operates as a complex system of interdependencies, therefore having core orchestrating themes with identifiable characteristics (Miller, 1996,

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2018). Superstructure that draws on configurations to satisfy particular modelling purposes or interests creates an improved potential to enhance theoretical specificity and/or generality. While particular configurations can respond to specificity by modelling detail, the use of a plurality of ontologically connected configurations can result in elaborated models with inherent developmental potential, offering increased superstructural generalisation. Specificity and generality taken together improves the modelling ability to respond to complexity. The resulting superstructure, embracing a constellation of interconnected conceptual and relational schemas, can enable a complex situation to be better understood as a whole (cf. Miller, 2018; Fiss et al., 2013). This occurs when ontological analysis allows conceptual patterns to be produced that makes theoretical sense, enabling them to epistemically relate.

Superstructural development requires candidate configurations that can connect recognised properties, relationships, and processes from theoretical schemas, and these can result in testable theoretical propositions (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Dauber et al., 2012). Consider the configurations of culture, traits, and identity. These may be orchestrated by recognising in what way they are ontologically connected. This might include an argument that traits can be defined in terms of values that belong to culture, and identity can be defined in terms of traits. An inherent potential is therefore provided to connect culture with identity through values and traits. Such ontological connections will be undertaken during the course of this book. The reflexive interconnection between the substructure and superstructure can be illustrated in terms of the examples already provided where, given that the sub-structural Piagetian process intelligences internalise external effects that are delivered to the superstructural traits, these can now influence both cognition and affect. The candidate configurations to be selected may be determined by modelling context and purpose that need to be satisfies.

To facilitate the introduction of configurations into a superstructure a *meta-analysis* is required.⁸ This examines the inherent nature and characteristics of candidate configurative schemas, and indicates how they relate to the superstructure. Such a meta-analysis can occur, for example, by techniques like: epistemic mapping, where the meaning of candidate schemas is related to existing superstructural schemas; interrogating relevant propositions for consistency with the current context and standing of the substructure; and seeking legitimate adaptive process to enable the candidate schema to be suitably related and harmonised. Meta-analysis will be found in action throughout this book as configurations are introduced.

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Agency Living System Theory

It has been said that our approach in this book is to adopt Agency Theory as a general living system theory, with a substructure and superstructure. In the personality exemplar of Agency Theory to be developed here, configurations will be anchored to a generic platform for personality psychology that can represent elements of Meyer's system set as required. This will provide an exemplar for the development of general theory to specific areas of application. For Fiss et al. (2013), the adoption of configurations comes from the view that the situation to be modelled as a whole is best understood from a systemic perspective and should be viewed as a constellation of interconnected elements enabling increased levels of complexity to be accommodated theoretically and methodologically. Agency Theory conforms to this with an adaptive capacity to connect different personality schemas as configurations, the commensurability of which needs to be confirmed through a metaanalysis. As will be shown in due course and during the development of this book, Agency Theory can be formulated in terms of formative traits (like the supertraits of Bandura, 1999b), these forming the basic structure of personality. This approach is able to address at least some of the complex dynamic situations that arise in personality psychology. Recalling Rittal's (1972) comment that dynamic models able to respond to complexity need to 'reflect' themselves in order to capture change, such models will involve information feedback processes that, incidentally, are an integral part of cybernetics. Mindset Agency Theory (MAT) is such a cybernetic schema that will inherently have a capability to respond to questions concerning Meyer's system set, though there is no intention to specifically respond to any of the dimensions in that set. MAT involves Mindsets the derivation of which comes from cultural values, making them significantly different from another popular approach with a similar name by Dweck (2000) and by Gollwitzer and Bayer (1999), both of which define *mindsets* in terms of motivations through belief.

Agency Theory is a living system in which agencies have a population of autonomous self-determining adaptable agents that interact. Agencies are autonomous and are thus self-determining, but they also have other selfattributes including the ability to be adaptable, proactive, and responsible for their own behaviour, and as conscious entities that also have properties of cognition and affect. For Ryan, Kuhl, and Deci (1997), autonomy also implies self-regulation that is a manifestation of a central tendency towards the extension, coordination, and integration of function that is a common property of living things.

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The general living system theory of agency having personality that we shall develop here shows it to be active, informed and self-regulating, and provides imperatives for behaviour. The context of agency here is a living systems theory involving personality psychology, where personality is seen to be inherently coherent and able to generate generic characteristics that, under complexity, Cohen and Stewart (1995) have called *simplexity* and which Gribbin (2004) refers to as *deep simplicity*. These terms refer to the idea that coherence occurs through the creation of a regulative personality structure that exists between agency macro-behaviour and the complex fabric of agent behaviours that can create order where random fluctuation seems otherwise to dominate. Simplexity constitutes a dialectic between simplicity and complexity, and is a condition in which a set of rules can be identified that can 'explain' a situation through large-scale simplicities that have developed. This idea of simplexity is essential for complex situations seen only in terms of behaviour, though it is inherent in studies of personality psychology, where personality may be a phenomenon belonging to a unitary agency or a plural one.

Simplexity

The idea of simplexity can perhaps be posed less cryptically and hence be better understood from an alternative perspective. If one considers agency as a collective with macro-behaviour, then it has a population of agents with micro behaviours. It also has what we refer to as a normative personality, i.e., personality attributes that have normatively arisen from its population of agents. This personality constitutes a meso structure (Dopfer et al., 2004), where simplexity is defined through a set of generic meso rules resulting from the actions of whatever are the perceived driving entities of the personality (like traits) and their mutual interactions (Yolles, 2019). Micro-meso structure creates control imperatives for agents, while meso-macro structures create control imperatives for the agency. The use of the term imperatives highlights that the controls may fail, either because of internal pathologies that result in contradictory or invalid controls, or under conditions of action characterised by rapidly changing contexts or highly unstable situations. In the theory proposed in this book, when formative traits take type values that orientate agency to certain modes of cognition and behaviour, then they form a meso structure that has a regulatory function for agency.