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GEOMETRIC CONVERGENCE OF VALUE-ITERATION IN MULTICHAIN MARKOV RENEWAL PROGRAMMING

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Geometric convergence of value-iteration in multichain Markov renewal programming

by

P.J. Schweitzer * & A. Federgruen **

ABSTRACT

This paper considers undiscounted Markov Decision Problems. With no restriction (on either the periodicity - or chain structure of the problem) we show that the value iteration method for finding maximal gain policies, exhibits a geometric rate of convergence, whenever convergence occurs. In addition, we study the behaviour of the value-iteration operator; we give bounds for the number of steps needed for contraction, describe the ultimate behaviour of the convergence factor and give conditions for the existence of a *uniform* convergence rate.

KEY WORDS & PHRASES: *Markov Decision Problems; average cost criterion; value-iteration method; geometric convergence; convergence factor; existence of a uniform convergence rate.*

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1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

The value-iteration equations for undiscounted Markov Decision Processes (MDP's) were first studied by BELLMAN [2] and HOWARD [9]:

$$(1.1.)\qquad v(n+1)_i = Qv(n)_i, \qquad i = 1,\dots N$$

where the value-iteration operator Q is defined by:

$$(1.2.)\qquad Qx_i = \max_{k\in K(i)} \{q_i^k + \sum_{j=1}^{N} P_{ij}^k v(n)\}_j, \qquad i = 1,\dots,N;\ x \in E^N.$$

and with $v(0)$ a given N-vector. $K(i)$ denotes the finite set of alternatives in state i, q_i^k the one-step expected reward and P_{ij}^k the transition probability to state j when alternative $k \in K(i)$ is chosen in state i $(i = 1,\dots,N)$. For all $n = 1,2,\dots$ and $i \in \Omega = \{1,\dots,N\}$, $v(n)_i$ denotes the maximal total expected reward for a planning horizon of n epochs obtained when ending up at state j.

BROWN [3] showed that $\{v(n)-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ is uniformly bounded in n, provided g^* is taken as the maximal gain rate vector. In [18] we proved the existence of an integer J such that

$$(1.3.)\qquad u(r) = \lim_{n\to\infty} [v(nJ+r) - (nJ+r)g^*]$$

exists for *all* $v(0) \in E^N$ and $r = 0,\dots,J-1$. (Previous proofs in [3] and [10] are both incorrect or incomplete.)

In general $\{v(n)-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ may fail to converge for arbitrary $v(0)$ if some of the transition probability matrices (tpm's) are periodic i.e. $J \geq 2$ can occur. Sufficient conditions for the convergence of $\{v(n)-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ for *all* $v(0) \in E^N$, were obtained by BATHER [1], LANERY [10], SCHWEITZER [14,15] and WHITE [22], while the necessary and sufficient condition was recently obtained in [18]. While the result in [18] settles the issue if one demands existence of $\lim_{n\to\infty} \{v(n)-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ for every $v(0) \in E^N$, it should be noted that $\{v(n)-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ always converges for $v(0)$ belonging to some non-empty closed set $W \subseteq E^N$ (cf. lemma 2.2).

In this paper we return to the issue of the *rate* of convergence. Our main result (th.4.2) is the fact that if $\lim_{n\to\infty} v(n)-ng^*$ exists, then the approach to the limit is *geometric*. Consequently this result shows that the *value-iteration method* for locating maximal gain policies (cf. [12],[14] and [22]) exhibits a geometric rate of convergence. This result is of particular importance to the case N >> 1 where this value-iteration method is the only feasible one for finding maximal gain policies.

This generalization of White's result (cf. [22] to the general multichain case is remarkable since the property of geometric convergence holds in spite of the fact that the operator Q is *never* a contraction mapping or a J-step contraction mapping for any J = 1,2,... (cf. DENARDO [4] and [7]) with respect to any norm on E^N. Note e.g. that for all $x \in E^N$ and scalars c:

$$(1.4.) \qquad Q(x+c\underline{1}) = Q\,x + c\underline{1}, \qquad \text{with } \underline{1} \text{ the N-vector of ones.}$$

In addition, and even more remarkably, the Q-operator, does not need to be (J-step) contracting (for any $J \geq 1$) with respect to the following pseudo-norm either (cf. [1]):

$$(1.5.) \qquad \|x\|_d = x_{max} - x_{min}, \qquad x \in E^N$$

with $x_{max} = \max_i x_i$ and $x_{min} = \min_i x_i$, the use of which is suggested by the very property (1.4.) (cf. BATHER [1]).

Indeed although we find a convergence rate (or *ultimate* average contraction factor per step) which is strictly bounded away from one on W, the average contraction factor per step may initially be very close to one; and in general there does not exist an integer $n \geq 1$ such that the *n-step* contraction factor is strictly bounded away from 1 (cf. section 7).

One should point out that the geometric convergence result holds for all $v(0) \in W$, with *no* restrictions imposed on e.g. - the chain - and periodicity structure. In addition if v(0) is such that (1.3.) holds with $J \geq 2$ the same th.4.2 applied to a related "J-step" decision process shows that the approach to the limit in (1.2.) will be geometric for each r = 0,...,J-1 as well.

In section 2 we give the notation and preliminaries. In section 3 we study the evolution of the Q-operator. The geometric convergence result is obtained in section 4. In section 5 we give some additional properties for MDP's satisfying condition (H1) to be stated below; in particular, we show that the number of steps needed for contraction is bounded by a quadratic function in N. In section 6 we characterize the ultimate behaviour of the Q-operator and of the average contraction factor per step. In section 7, finally, we derive for MDP's satisfying (H1) the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of a uniform n-step contraction factor (for some $n \geq 1$) - i.e. a n-step contraction factor which is strictly bounded away from one on W.

We refer to [7] for some necessary and some sufficient conditions for the Q-operator to be contracting with respect to the $\|-\|_d$ norm.

2. NOTATION AND PRELIMINARIES

A (stationary) randomized policy is a tableau $[f_{ik}]$ satisfying $f_{ik} \geq 0$ and $\sum_{k \in K(i)} f_{ik} = 1$ (f_{ik} denotes the probability that the k^{th} alternative is chosen when entering state i).

We let S_R denote the set of all randomized policies, and S_P the subset of all *pure* (non-randomized) policies, i.e. for $f \in S_P$, each $f_{ik} = 0$ or 1. For $f \in S_P$, we use the notation $f(i) = k$, where k denotes the single alternative used in state i. Associated with each $f \in S_R$, are the N-component "reward" vector q(f) and the N x N matrix P(f):

$$
\text{(2.1)} \qquad
\begin{aligned}
q(f)_i &= \sum_{k \in K(i)} f_{ik}\, q_i^k, \qquad i = 1,\ldots,N \\
P(f)_{ij} &= \sum_{k \in K(i)} f_{ik}\, P_{ij}^k, \qquad i = 1,\ldots,N;\ j = 1,\ldots,N.
\end{aligned}
$$

Note that P(f) is a stochastic matrix, for any $f \in S_R$, and define the stochastic matrix $\Pi(f)$ as the Cesaro limit of the sequence $\{P^n(f)\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$. Define the *maximal-gain rate vector* g^*:

$$
\text{(2.2)} \qquad g_i^* = \sup_{f \in S_R} \Pi(f) q(f)_i, \qquad i = 1,\ldots,N.
$$

DERMAN [5] proved that there exists a *pure* policy that achieves the N suprema in (2.2) simultaneously. In addition Howard's Policy Iteration Algorithm (cf. [9]) showed that the quantities $a_i^k = \sum_{j=1}^N P_{ij}^k g_j^* - g_i^*$, $i \in \Omega$, $k \in K(i)$ satisfy:

$$(2.3) \qquad \max_{k \in K(i)} a_i^k = 0 \qquad , i = 1,\dots,N,$$

as well as the existence of vectors v^* satisfying the optimality equation:

$$(2.4) \qquad v_i^* = \max_{k \in L(i)} \{q_i^k - g_i^* + \sum_j P_{ij}^k v_j^*\}, \qquad i = 1,\dots,N, \text{ where}$$

$$L(i) = \{k \in K(i) \mid a_i^k = 0\}, \qquad i = 1,\dots,N.$$

Accordingly define S_{PMG} and S_{RMG} as the set of pure and randomized maximal-gain policies i.e.

$$S_{PMG} = \{f \in S_P \mid g^* = \Pi(f)q(f)\} \text{ and}$$

$$S_{RMG} = \{f \in S_R \mid g^* = \Pi(f)q(f)\}$$

Let $R(f) = \{j \in \Omega \mid \Pi(f)_{jj} > 0\}$ i.e. $R(f)$ is the set of recurrent states for $P(f)$, and define $R^* = \cup_{f \in S_{RMG}} R(f)$.

In th.3.2. of [17] we proved that

$$(2.5) \qquad R^* = \cup_{f \in S_{PMG}} R(f).$$

and that there exists $f \in S_{RMG}$ with $R(f) = R^*$. Let V denote the non-empty solution set to the optimality equation (2.4). Observe that if $v \in V$ then $v + c_1\underline{1} + c_2 g^* \in V$ for all scalars c_1, c_2. For any $v \in E^N$, define

$$(2.6) \qquad b(v)_i^k = q_i^k - g_i^* + \sum_{j=1}^N P_{ij}^k v_j - v_i; \qquad i \in \Omega, k \in K(i)$$

and

and

$$b(v,f)_i = \sum_{k\in K(i)} f_{ik} b(v)_i^k = [q(f) - g^* + P(f)v-v]_i, i \in \Omega, f \in S_R.$$

Note that $\max_{k\in L(i)} b(v)_i^k = 0$ for every $i \in \Omega$, if and only if $v \in V$. As a consequence we define for any $v \in V$:

(2.7) $$L(i,v) = \{t \in L(i) \mid b(v)_i^t = \max_{k\in L(i)} b(v)_i^k = 0\}.$$

In th.3.1. part (e) of [17] we established the following characterization of S_{RMG}:

(2.8) Fix $v \in V$. Let $f \in S_R$; then $f \in S_{RMG}$ if and only if: $f_{ik} > 0$ implies $k \in L(i,v)$ for all $i \in R(f)$ and $k \in L(i)$ for all $i \in \Omega\backslash R(f)$.

In addition to the pseudo-norm $\| \ \|_d$ (cf.(1-5)) we will use the norm $\|x\|_\infty = \max_i |x_i|$. Note that

(2.9) $$x_{min} \le 0 \le x_{max} \Rightarrow \|x\|_\infty \le \|x\|_d; \qquad x \in E^N.$$

Finally, define for $x \in E^N$:

(2.10) $$x^+ = \begin{cases} \min\{x_i \mid x_i > 0, i \in \Omega\} & \text{if } x_{max} > 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$$x^- = \begin{cases} \max\{x_i \mid x_i > 0, i \in \Omega\} & \text{if } x_{min} < 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Lemma 2.1. below enumerates a number of elementary properties of the Q-operator that will be needed in the remainder. First, let Q^n denote the n-fold application of the operator:

$$Q^n x = Q(Q^{n-1}x); \quad n = 1,2,... \text{ and } x \in E^N, \text{ with } Q^0 x = x$$

and define for all $x \in W$, $L(x)=\lim_{n\to\infty} Q^n x - ng^*$:

LEMMA 2.1.

(a) $(x-y)_{min} \le (Qx-Qy)_{min} \le (Qx-Qy)_{max} \le (x-y)_{max}; x,y \in E^N$

(b) $\|Qx-Qy\|_d \le \|x-y\|_d$; $\|Qx-Qy\|_\infty \le \|x-y\|_\infty; x,y \in E^N$

(c) *If* $x,y \in W$ *then for* $n = 0,1,\ldots$:

$$(Q^n x-Q^n y)_{min} \le (L(x)-L(y))_{min} \le (L(x)-L(y))_{max} \le (Q^n x-Q^n y)_{max}$$

and

$$\|L(x)-L(y)\|_d \le \|Q^n x-Q^n y\|_d;\ \|L(x)-L(y)\|_\infty \le \|Q^n x-Q^n y\|_\infty.$$

(d) $L(x)$ *is a Lipschitz continuous function on* W.

(e) W *is closed and unbounded.*

(f) *If* $x \in W$, *then* $Q^m x \in W$ *for all* $m = 1,2,\ldots$ *and* $L(Q^m x)=L(x) + mg^*$.

(g) *Suppose* $(Qx-Qy)_{max} = (x-y)_{max}$; *state* r *satisfies* $(Qx-Qy)_r = (Qy-Qy)_{max}$ *and alternative* $k \in K(r)$ *achieves* $(Qx)_r$, i.e. $(Qx)_r = q_r^k + \sum_j P_{rj}^k x_j$.
Then $(Qy)_r = q_r^k + \sum_j P_{rj}^k y_j$ *as well, and* $P_{rs}^k > 0$ *only if state* s *satisfies* $(x-y)_s = (x-y)_{max}$.

(h) *Similary, if* $(Qx-Qy)_r = (Qx-Qy)_{min} = (x-y)_{min}$ *for some* $r \in \Omega$ *and* $k \in K(r)$ *achieves* $(Qy)_r$, i.e. $(Qy)_r = q_r^k + \sum_j P_{rj}^k y_j$ *then* k *achieves* $(Qx)_r$ *as well and* $P_{rs}^k > 0$ *only if* $(x-y)_s = (x-y)_{min}$.

PROOF: The proof of part (a) is easy and may be found in lemma 2.1 of [1]; part (b) follows from part (a). A repeated application of (a) shows that for all $n,m \ge 0$: $(Q^n x-Q^n y)_{min} \le [(Q^{n+m}x-(n+m)g^*) - (Q^{n+m}y-(n+m)g^*)]_{min} \le [(Q^{n+m}x-(n+m)g^*) - (Q^{n+m}y-(n+m)g^*)]_{max} \le (Q^n x-Q^n y)_{max}$.
Next, the first assertion of part (c) follows by letting m tend to infinity, whereas the second assertion and part (d) are an immediate consequence of the first one.
Next, consider a sequence $\{x^\alpha\}_{\alpha=1}^\infty$ with $x^\alpha \in W$, $\alpha = 1,2,\ldots$ and $\lim_{\alpha\to\infty} x^\alpha = x^*$. Pick $\varepsilon > 0$ and x^α such that $\|x^\alpha-x^*\|_\infty < \varepsilon/3$.

Since $x^{\alpha} \in W$, there is some $n_0(\varepsilon) \geq 1$ such that for all $n,m \geq n_0(\varepsilon)$:

$$\|(Q^n x^{\alpha} - ng^*) - (Q^m x^{\alpha} - mg^*)\|_{\infty} < \varepsilon/3.$$

Hence, for all $n,m \geq n_0(\varepsilon)$:

$$\begin{aligned} &\|(Q^n x^* - ng^*) - (Q^m x^* - mg^*)\|_{\infty} \leq \|Q^n x^* - Q^n x^{\alpha}\|_{\infty} + \\ &\|(Q^n x^{\alpha} - ng^*) - (Q^m x^{\alpha} - mg^*)\|_{\infty} + \|Q^m x^* - Q^m x^{\alpha}\|_{\infty} \\ &\leq 2\|x^* - x^{\alpha}\|_{\infty} + \varepsilon/3 = \varepsilon, \end{aligned}$$

the last inequality following from part (a). Hence, by Cauchy's convergence criterion, $\lim_{n\to\infty} Q^n x^* - ng^*$ exists, which proves that W is closed, whereas W is unbounded in view of $x \in W$ implying $x + c\underline{1} \in W$ for any scalar c, with $L(x+c\underline{1}) = L(x) + c\underline{1}$, thus proving part (e).

(f): follows from $\lim_{n\to\infty} Q^n(Q^m x) - ng^* = \lim_{n\to\infty} \{Q^{n+m}x - (n+m)g^*\} + mg^* = L(x) + mg^*$.

The proofs of part (g) and (h) are easy, and may also be found in BATHER [1], lemma 2.2. □

In addition to the Q-operator defined by (1.2), we introduce:

(2.11) $$Tx_i = \max_{k\in L(i)} \{q_i^k + \sum_{j=1}^{N} P_{ij}^k x_j\}, \qquad i \in \Omega;\ x \in E^N.$$

We let T^n denote the n-fold application of the T-operator and in analogy to W and $L(x), x \in W$ we define:

$$\tilde{W} = \{x \in E^N \mid \lim_{n\to\infty} T^n x - ng^* \text{ exists}\} \text{ and for all } x \in \tilde{W},$$

$$\tilde{L}(x) = \lim_{n\to\infty} T^n x - ng^*.$$

Observe that the T operator is the value-iteration operator associated with a related MDP in which the policy space is restricted to $X_{i=1}^{N} L(i)$. As a consequence it has *all* of the properties of the Q-operator as exhibited in the previous lemma.

The following lemma shows that the Q-operator reduces to the T operator in at least two ways, and that the latter has a number of additional

properties which induce that the sequence $\{T^n x\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ has a more regular behaviour than $\{Q^n x\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$.
First define:

$$(2.12) \qquad \begin{aligned} e(n,x) &= Q^n x - ng^* - L(x), \quad x \in W, \quad n \geq 0. \\ \tilde{e}(n,x) &= T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x), \quad x \in \tilde{W}, \quad n \geq 0. \end{aligned}$$

By definition, $\lim_{n\to\infty} e(n,x) = 0$ for $x \in W$ and $\lim_{n\to\infty} \tilde{e}(n,x) = 0$ for $x \in \tilde{W}$:

LEMMA 2.2.

(a) $T(x+cg^*) = Tx + cg^*$ *for any scalar* c. *If* $x \in \tilde{W}$, *then for any scalar* c, $x + tg^* \in \tilde{W}$ *and* $\tilde{L}(x+cg^*) = \tilde{L}(x) + cg^*$.

(b) *For any* $v \in V$, $T^n v = v + ng^*$. *Also* $V \subseteq \tilde{W}$ *and* $\tilde{L}(v) = v$ *for any* $v \in V$.

(c) *For any* $n \geq 1$ *and* $i = 1,\ldots N$.

$$(2.13) \qquad e(n+1,x)_i = \max_{k\in K(i)} [na_i^k + b(L(x))_i^k + \sum_{j=1}^{N} P_{ij}^k \, e(n,x)_j], \quad x \in W$$

$$(2.14) \qquad \tilde{e}(n+1,x)_i = \max_{k\in L(i)} [b(\tilde{L}(x))_i^k + \sum_j P_{ij}^k \, \tilde{e}(n,x)_j], x \in \tilde{W}.$$

(d) *For each* $x \in E^N$ *there exists an integer* $n_0(x)$ *such that* $Q^{n_0+m}x = T^m(Q^{n_0}x)$ *for* $m = 1,2,\ldots$. *Also if* $x \in W$, *then* $Q^{n_0}x \in \tilde{W}$ *with* $\tilde{L}(Q^{n_0}x) = L(x)+n_0 g^*$.

(e) *For all* $x \in W$:

$$e(n+1,x)_{\min} \geq e(n,x)_{\min}; \qquad n = 0,1,\ldots$$

$$e(n+1,x)_{\max} \leq \begin{cases} e(n,x)_{\max}; & n > n_0(x) \\ \max_{i,k} b(L(x))_i^k + e(n,x)_{\max}; & n \leq n_0(x) \end{cases}$$

Hence, for all $x \in \tilde{W}$ *and* $n = 0,1,\ldots$:

(2.15) $\tilde{e}(n,x)_{min} \leq \tilde{e}(n+1,x)_{min} \leq 0 \leq \tilde{e}(n+1,x)_{max} \leq \tilde{e}(n,x)_{max}$, *and*

$$\|\tilde{e}(n+1,x)\|_d \leq \|\tilde{e}(n;x)\|_d;\ \|\tilde{e}(n+1,x)\|_\infty \leq \|\tilde{e}(n,x)\|_\infty$$

(f) *For each* $x \in E^N$ *there exists a scalar* $t_0(x)$ *such that*
$Q^n(x+tg^*) = T^n(x+tg^*)$ *for* $n = 0,1,2,\ldots$ *and* $t \geq t_0(x)$.
Hence if $v \in V$ *then* $v + tg^* \in W$ *if* t *large enough i.e.* W *is non-empty.*

(g) *For any* $x \in W, L(x) \in V$ *and for any* $x \in \tilde{W}, \tilde{L}(x) \in V$.

(h) $\tilde{W}\backslash V = \{x \in \tilde{W} \mid \|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d > 0\}$.

<u>PROOF</u>.

(a) Immediate from the definition of L(i).

(b) For $v \in V$, $Tv=v + g^*$ follows from (2.4). By induction, we obtain $T^n v= v + ng^*$.

(c) Part (c) follows straightforward from the definitions (2.3), (2.6) and (2.12).

(d) The fact that for large n, the Q-operator only uses alternatives in L(i) was proved in th.4.4 of [3] (cf. also remark 1).
Next, $\lim_{m\to\infty} T^m(Q^{n}0x) - mg^* = \lim_{m\to\infty} \{Q^{m+n}0x-(m+n_0)g^*\}+n_0g^* = L(x)+n_0g^*$.

(e) Since by (2.7) and (2.13), $e(n+1,x)_i \geq \sum_j P^k_{ij}\ e(n,x)_j$ for $k \in L(i,L(x))$ we have $e(n+1,x)_{min} \geq e(n,x)_{min}$ for all $x \in W$. Next by (2.3):

$$e(n+1,x)_i \leq \max_{k\in K(i)} \{b(L(x))^k_i + \textstyle\sum_j P^k_{ij}\ e(n,x)_j\},\ i \in \Omega \text{ so}$$

$$e(n+1,x)_{max} \leq \max_{i,k}\ b(L(x))^k_i + e(n,x)_{max};\ n=0,1,\ldots$$

Since part (d) shows that for all $n > n_0(x)$ the maximum in (2.13) is attained by an alternative in L(i), for all $i \in \Omega$, we obtain the sharper bound $e(n+1,x)_{max} \leq e(n,x)_{max}$ for all $n > n_0(x)$ in view of (2.7). Next, the outer inequalities in (2.15) follow immediately from the above, whereas the inner ones are due to $\{\tilde{e}(n,x)\quad\}^\infty_{n=0}$ and $\{\tilde{e}(n,x)_{max}\}^\infty_{n=0}$ being monotonically non-decreasing and non-increasing to $\lim_{n\to\infty}\tilde{e}(n,x)_{min}=\lim_{n\to\infty}\tilde{e}(n,x)_{max}=0$.

(f) Fix $v \in V$. By repeating the proof of part (e) with repect to $\tilde{e}(n,x) = T^n x - ng^* - v$, for any $x \in E^N$, one shows that $\{T^n x-ng^*\}^\infty_{n=1}$

is bounded for all $x \in E^N$ (cf. also BROWN [3] and remark 1).

$$Q(T^n x+tg^*)_i = \max_{k\in K(i)} \{(t+n)a_i^k + (t+n)g_i^* + q_i^k + \sum_j P_{ij}^k [T^n x-ng^*]_j\}, i \in \Omega$$

it follows that there exists a scalar $t_0(x)$ such that for all $t \geq t_0(x)$ only alternatives in L(i) achieve the maximum, for all n = 0,1,.... Hence the first assertion of part (f) trivially holds for n = 0 and proceeding by complete induction, assume it holds for some integer n. Then $Q^{n+1}(x+tg^*) = Q[T^n(x+tg^*)] = Q[T^n x+tg^*] = T[T^n x+tg^*] = T^{n+1}(x+tg^*)$ for all $t \geq t_0(x)$. Finally if $v \in V$ and $t \geq t_0(v)$ then $Q^n(v+tg^*) - ng^* = T^n v + tg^* - ng^* = v + tg^*$ for all n = 0,1... (cf. part (b)) which proves $v + tg^* \in W$ for all $t \geq t_0(v)$.

(g) Letting n tend to infinity in (2.14) and recalling $\lim_{n\to\infty} \tilde{e}(n,x)=0$ one observes that for $x \in \tilde{W}$, $\max_{k\in L(i)} b(\tilde{L}(x))_i^k=0$; hence $\tilde{L}(x) \in V$. Since $L(x)= \tilde{L}(Q^{n_0}x) - n_0 g^*$ for any $x \in W$ (cf. part (e)) it follows that $L(x) \in V$ for any $x \in W$.

(h) Let $x \in \tilde{W}$. If $x \in V$ then $\|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d = 0$ follows form part (b). Conversely if $\|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d = 0$ then $x = \tilde{L}(x) + c\underline{1}$ for some scalar c; so $x \in V$ in view of part (g). □

3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE Q OPERATOR.

Convergence of $\{Q^n x-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ occurs in three phases. During the first phase the Q operator still uses alternatives in K(i)-L(i). Lemma 2.2 part (d) shows that for any $x \in E^N$ after finitely many steps namely for $n \geq n_0(x)$, alternatives in L(i) achieve the maximum in (2.13) or in other words *Q reduces to T*. (In fact the proof of this part of the lemma shows that from a certain point on, *only* alternatives in L(i) achieve the maxima). Next, lemma 2.2 part (e) shows that the distance between $[Q^n x-ng^*]$ and its limit $L(x)$ as measured e.g. by the $\| \ \|_\infty$ is guaranteed to be monotonically non-increasing after these first $n_0(x)$ steps. This is why we say that the first $n_0(x)$ iterations constitute the *first* phase of the convergence process during which the behaviour of either $\| e(n,x)\|_d$ or $\|e(n,x)\|_\infty$ may be very irregular.

Observe that the first phase is non-existing when $K(i)=L(i)$ for all $i \in \Omega$ as is e.g. the case when $g^* = \langle g^* \rangle \underline{1}$, i.e. when the maximal gain rate is independent of the initial state of the system.
While for $n \geq n_0(x)$ the Q-operator reduces to the T-operator, for still larger n and $x \in W$ due to $\lim_{n\to\infty} e(n,x)=0$ the maximum in (2.13) can only be achieved by alternatives for which $b(L(x))_i^k=0$ i.e. alternatives that belong to $L(i,L(x))$ (cf. (2.7)).
Hence for very large n (say for $n \geq n_1(x)$) we get the behaviour:

$$(3.1) \qquad e(n+1,x) = U(L(x))\, e(n,x), \qquad x \in W$$

where for any $v \in V$ the U(v)-operator is defined by:

$$(3.2) \qquad [U(v)y]_i = \max_{k \in L(i,v)} [\textstyle\sum_j P_{ij}^k y_j], \qquad i = 1,\ldots,N.$$

Observe that the U(v)-operator is a value-iteration operator with zero rewards. Since the associated maximal gain rate vector is $\underline{0}$ i.e. has identical components, it has all of the properties of the T-operator.
In addition it distinguishes itself by the following special (*positive homogenity*) feature:

$$(3.3) \qquad U(v)[ax] = a\, U(v)x, \qquad x \in E^N \text{ and for any scalar } a \geq 0$$

as well as by:

$$x_{max} \geq [U(v)x]_{max} \geq [U(v)x]_{min} \geq x_{min}.$$

Note that there are only a finite number of *distinct* U(v)-operators, since there are only finitely many subset of $X_i\, L(i)$.
For any $v \in V$, define:

$$(3.4) \qquad \delta(v) = \begin{cases} \infty, & \text{if } b(v)_i^k = 0 \text{ for all } i \in \Omega,\ k \in L(i) \\ \min\{-b(v)_i^k \mid i \in \Omega,\ k \in L(i), \text{ such that } b(v)_i^k < 0\}, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Note that for all $x \in W$, the reduction to the $U(L(x))$-operator occurs at the very last when $\|e(n,x)\|_d$ drops below the $\delta(L(x))$-level.

We will say that the *second* phase of the convergence process starts at the $n_0(x)+1$-th iteration and terminates at the $n_1(x)$-th iteration. It is followed by the *third* phase from there on. In the following section we will show that in the second and third phase $\|e(n,x)\|_\infty$ decreases to zero at a geometric rate of convergence for all $x \in W$. Whereas the contraction factor per step initially depends upon the starting point x and may be very close to unity, the *ultimate* convergence rate or average contraction factor per step is determined by the behaviour of the $U(v)$-operator in the third phase and will be shown to be *uniform* i.e. strictly bounded away from one, on W.

The remainder of this section is devoted to a description of the first phase as well as to a preliminary characterization of the $U(v)$-operators in the third phase.

We first observe that (2.13) may be rewritten as:

$$(3.5) \qquad e(n+1,x)_i = \max_{k \in K(i)} \{b(L(Q^n x))_i^k + \textstyle\sum_j P_{ij}^k \, e(n,x)_j\}, i \in \Omega$$

since $na_i^k + b(L(x))_i^k = b(L(x)+ng^*)_i^k = b(L(Q^n x))_i^k$ the last equality following from lemma 2.1 part (f). Define:

$$(3.6) \qquad \Psi(n,x) = \max_{i \in \Omega, k \in K(i)} b(L(Q^n x))_i^k; \qquad x \in W.$$

The next theorem shows that $\{\psi(n,x)\}_{n=1}^\infty$ decreases in at least a linear way with n, so it reduces in a finite number of steps to 0, after which the non-increasing of $\|e(n,x)\|_d$ is guaranteed. Hence convergence is lexicographic in the sense that first $\{\psi(n,x)\}_{n=1}^\infty \downarrow 0$ and next $\{\|e(n,x)\|_d\}_{n=1}^\infty \downarrow 0$.

THEOREM 3.1. *Let* $x \in W$.

(a) $\psi(n,x) \geq 0$; $n = 0,1\ldots$. *If* $K(i) = L(i)$ *for all* i, *then* $\psi(n,x) = 0$ *for all* $n = 0,1\ldots$.

(b) $\psi(n+1,x) \leq \psi(n,x)$; *if* $\psi(n+1,x) > 0$ *then* $\psi(n+1,x) \leq \psi(n,x) + \Delta$ where

$$(3.7) \qquad \Delta = \begin{cases} \infty, & \text{if } K(i) = L(i), \quad i \in \Omega \\ \max\{a_i^k \mid a_i^k < 0;\ i \in \Omega, k \in K(i)\}, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

(c) *There exists an integer* $n_0'(x) \le \frac{\Psi(0,x)}{|\Delta|}$ *with* $\Psi(n,x)=0$ *for* $n \ge n_0'(x)$

Also $\|e(n+1,x)\|_d \le e(n,x)\|_d$ *for* $n > n_0'$.

PROOF.

(a) $\psi(n,x) \ge \max_{i\in\Omega, k\in L(i)} b(L(Q^n x))_i^k = 0$ since $L(Q^n x) \in V$ (cf. lemma 2.2 part (g)) while the equality sign holds if $K(i)=L(i)$ for all $i \in \Omega$.

(b) $\psi(n+1,x) = \max_{i\in\Omega, k\in K(i)} \{(n+1)a_i^k + b(L(x))_i^k\} \le$

$$\max_{i\in\Omega, k\in K(i)} \{na_i^k + b(L(x))_i^k\} = \psi(n,x)$$

Assume $\psi(n+1,x) > 0$. Then $\psi(n+1,x) = a_i^k + b(L(Q^n x))_i^k$ for some $i \in \Omega$, and $k \notin L(i)$ since $b(L(Q^n x))_i^k \le 0$ and $a_i^k = 0$ for $k \in L(i)$. Hence, $a_i^k \le \Delta$ and $\psi(n+1,x) \le \psi(n,x) + \Delta$.

(c) The existence of $n_0'(x) \le \frac{\psi(0,x)}{|\Delta|}$ follows immediately from part (b). Next, assume $\psi(n,x) = 0$ and use (2.13) to obtain:

$$e(n+1,x)_i \le \max_{k\in K(i)} \{na_i^k + b(L(x))_i^k\} + \max_{k\in K(i)} \{\textstyle\sum_j P_{ij}^k e(n,x)_j\}$$
$$\le \psi(n,x) + e(n,x)_{max} = e(n,x)_{max}$$

Hence, $e(n+1,x)_{max} \le e(n,x)_{max}$, whereas $e(n+1,x)_{min} \ge e(n,x)_{min}$ was shown in lemma 2.2 part (e). Since $\psi(n,x) = 0$ for $n \ge n_0'(x)$, we conclude that $\|e(n,x)\|_d$ is non-increasing for $n \ge n_0'$. □

Part (c) of the previous theorem shows that both $n_0(x)$ and $n_0'(x)$ are bounds on the number of iterations before $\{\|e(n,x)\|_d\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ starts to be monotonically non-increasing. The following example will show that:

(a) the behaviour of $\|e(n,x)\|_d$ (or $\|e(n,x)\|_\infty$) may be very irregular during the first phase: in this particular example, $\|e(n,x)\|_d$ first decreases, then increases during a number of steps that is of the order of N

(b) both $n_0(x)$ and $n_0'(x)$ as defined in lemma 2.2. and th.3.1, may be very large and are not uniformly bounded in $x \in W$

(c) the convergence of $\{\psi(n,x)\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ to 0 is exactly *linear*, i.e. $\psi(n+1,x) = \psi(n,x) + \Delta$ for all $n < n_0'(x)$

(d) both cases $n_0(x) > n_0'(x)$ and $n_0(x) < n_0'(x)$ may occur.

EXAMPLE 1:

i	k	P^k_{i1}	P^k_{i2}	P^k_{i3}	P^k_{i4}	P^k_{i5}	....	P^k_{iN}	P^k_{iN+1}	q^k_i	
1	1	1								1	
2	1	1								1	
2	2			1						0	
3	1				1					2(N-4)	
4						1				2(N-5)	$g^* =$
											(1,1,0,...,0)
N-3											
N-2								1		2	
N-1								$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	0	
N								0	1	0	

($P^1_{i\,i+1} = 1$ for $3 \le i \le N-2$; $q^1_i = 2(N-i-1)$ for $3 \le i \le N-2$.

Take $x = [0,1,0,A,A,\dots,A+\ell,A]$.

Since $L(2) = \{1\}$, for n large we have $(Q^n x)_2 - ng^*_2 = 0$, hence $L(x)_1 = L(x)_2 = 0$. Moreover $L(x)_i = \sum_{r=i}^{N-1} 2(N-r-1)+A = (N-i)(N-i-1)+A$ for $i \ge 3$.

Let $\ell = 0$:

$$\|e(0,x)\|_d = e(o,x)_{max} - e(o,x)_{min} = 1+(N-4)(N-3)+A$$
$$\|e(1,x)\|_d = e(1,x)_2 - e(1,x)_3 = 0-2(N-4)+(N-4)(N-3)$$

Using $\|e(n,x)\|_d - \|e(n-1,x)\|_d = \{e(n,x)_2 - e(n-1,x)_2\} - \{e(n,x)_3 - e(n-1,x)_3\}$:

$$\|e(n,x)\|_d - \|e(n-1,x)\|_d = \begin{cases} (2(N-4)+A-1)-2(N-3) = A+1, \text{for } n=2 \\ (2(N-n-2)-1)-2(N-n-3) = 1, 2<n\le N-3 \\ -1 \qquad \text{for } N-3 \le n \le A+(N-3)(N-4) \end{cases}$$

and

$$\|e(n,x)\|_d = 0 \text{ for } n > A + (N-3)(N-4).$$

$$\Delta = a^2_2 = -1; b(L(x))^1_i = 0 \text{ for all } i; b(L(x))^2_2 = A+(N-4)(N-3)-1$$

hence

$$\psi(n,x)=\begin{cases} A+(N-4)(N-3)-(n+1) & \text{for } n<A+(N-4)(N-3) \\ 0 & \text{for } n>A+(N-4)(N-3) \end{cases}$$

and conclude that $\psi(n+1,x) = \psi(n,x) - \Delta$ for $n < n_0'(x)$.

Finally note that since the quantities $b(L(x))_i^k$ and $\psi(n,x)$ are independent of $\ell, n_0(x) > n_1(x)$ occurs when $\ell >> 0$ and $n_0(x) < n_0'(x)$ when $\ell << 0$.

REMARK 1. Fix $v^* \in V$. Let $\bar{e}(n,x) = Q^n x - ng^* - v^*$ for any $x \in E^N$, and $\bar{\psi}(n,x) = \max_{i\in\Omega, k\in K(i)} \{na_i^k + b(v^*)_i^k\}$. An examination of the proof of th.3.1 with $e(n,x)$ and $\psi(n,x)$ replaced by $\bar{e}(n,x)$ and $\bar{\psi}(n,x)$, shows that:

(a) $\{Q^n - ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ is bounded in n, for all $x \in E^N$

Next it follows from (a) and (2.15) with $e(n,x)$ and $L(x)$ replaced by $\bar{e}(n,x)$ and v^*, that

(b) for n large enough, the Q-operator uses only alternatives in $L(i)$.

These results were already obtained in BROWN [3], who employed limiting results from the discounted case.

Lemma 3.2 below gives some preliminary properties of the $U(v)$-operator (as appearing in the third phase) and concludes this section:

LEMMA 3.2.

(a) *Fix* $v \in V$. *If* $\|y-v\|_d < \delta(v)$ *then*

$$T^n y - (ng^*+v) = T^n y - T^n v = U(v)^n (y-v): n = 0,1,2,\ldots$$

(b) *Take* $x \in \tilde{W}$ *with* $\|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d < \delta(\tilde{L}(x))$. *Then for any* $\lambda \in [0,1]$, *the vector* $x(\lambda) = (1-\lambda)\tilde{L}(x) + \lambda x$ *satisfies* $x(\lambda) \in \tilde{W}$ *and* $\tilde{L}(x(\lambda)) = \tilde{L}(x)$.

(c) *If* $v \in V$ *and the vector* p *satisfies* $\|p\|_d = 1$ *and* $\lim_{n\to\infty} U(v)^n p = 0$ *then for* $0 \le \lambda < \delta(v)$, $v + \lambda p \in \tilde{W}$ *and* $\tilde{L}(v+\lambda p) = \tilde{L}(v) = v$.

PROOF. We first observe that, by lemma 2.2 (b), $T^n v = ng^* + v$, and $T^n v \in V$, for all $n \ge 1$.

(a) $Ty_i - Tv_i = \max_{k\in L(i)} \{q_i^k + \sum_j P_{ij}^k y_j - (v_i+g_i^*)\} = \max_{k\in L(i)} \{b(v)_i^k + \sum_j P_{ij}^k (y_j-v_j)\}$

Let $k(i)$ achieve this maximum. Then applying lemma 2.1, part (a) to T:

$(y-v)_{min} \le (Ty-Tv)_{min} \le b(v)_i^{k(i)} + \sum_j P_{ij}^{k(i)}(y_j-v_j) \le b(v)_i^{k(i)} + (y-v)_{max}$, for all $i \in \Omega$. Hence $0 \le -b(v)_i^{k(i)} \le \|y-v\|_d < \delta(v)$, or $b(v)_i^{k(i)} = 0$ for $i = 1,\dots,N$ (cf. (3.4)). This proves part (a) for $n = 1$. Next, observe that by $T^n v = v + ng^*, b(v)_i^k = b(T^n v)_i^k$ for all i and $k \in L(i)$. Hence, for all $n, \delta(v) = \delta(T^n v)$ and the $U(v)$-operator and the $U(T^n v)$-operator coïncide. Now assume that the assertion holds for one value of n. This implies using lemma 2.1 part (b): $\|T^n y - T^n v\|_d \le \|y-v\|_d < \delta(v) = \delta(T^n v)$, and invoking the induction assumption: $T^{n+1}y - T^{n+1}v = T(T^n y) - T(T^n v) = U(v)(T^n y - T^n v) = U(v)^{n+1}(y-v)$, which proves the equality for n+1.

(b) Since $\|x(\lambda)-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d = \lambda\|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d \le \delta(\tilde{L}(x))$ for $\lambda \in [0,1]$, it follows from part (a) with $v = \tilde{L}(x)$ that $T^n x(\lambda) - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x) = U(v)^n(x(\lambda) - \tilde{L}(x)) = U(v)^n(\lambda(x-\tilde{L}(x))) = \lambda U(v)^n(x-\tilde{L}(x))$, the last equality following from (3.5). Since, $U(v)^n(x-\tilde{L}(x)) = T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x)$, part (b) follows by letting n tend to infinity.

(c) Since for $0 \le \lambda < \delta(v)$, $\|(v+\lambda p)-v\|_d < \delta(v)$, it follows from part (a) and (3.5) that $T^n(v+\lambda p) - (ng^*+v) = \lambda U(v)^n p$. The assertion follows again, by letting n tend to infinity.

4. GEOMETRIC CONVERGENCE IN PHASE 2 AND PHASE 3.

Thanks to lemma 2.2, part (d), the behaviour of $\{v(n)-ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ for $v(0) \in W$ in phase 2 and phase 3 can be studied by considering the convergence of $\{T^n x - ng\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ for $x \in \tilde{W}$. Since for $x \in V$, $x = T^n x - ng^* = \tilde{L}(x)$ for all $n = 1,2,\dots$ we can in general restrict ourselves to (cf. lemma 2.2 part (h)):

$$W^* = \tilde{W}\backslash V = \{x \in \tilde{W} \mid \|\tilde{e}(0,x)\|_d = \|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d > 0\}$$

Since $\|\tilde{e}(n,x)\|_d$ is monotonically non-increasing (cf. lemma 2.2 part (e)) we will consider for $n = 1,2,\dots$ the n-step contraction factor $f_n(x)$, defined by:

$$(4.1) \qquad f_n(x) = \begin{cases} \dfrac{\|\tilde{e}(n,x)\|_d}{\|\tilde{e}(0,x)\|_d} = \dfrac{\|T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x)\|_d}{\|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d} = \dfrac{\|T^n x - T^n\tilde{L}(x)\|_d}{\|x-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d}, & \text{for } x \in \tilde{W} \\ 0 & \text{for } x \in V \end{cases}$$

the last equality following from parts (b) and (g) of lemma 2.2. Observe using lemma 2.2 part (e) that $o \le f_{n+1}(x) \le f_n(x) \le 1$ for all $n = 1,2,\ldots$ and that for fixed n, $f_n(x)$ is a continuous function on W^* (cf. lemma 2.1 part (d)). We now prove our main result:

THEOREM 4.1. *There exists an integer* $M \ge 1$ *such that* $f_M(x) < 1$, *for every* $x \in \tilde{W}$.

PROOF. Define:

$$W_A^* = \{x \in W^* \mid \tilde{e}(o,x)_{max} > 0 \text{ and } \tilde{e}(o,x)_{min} \le 0\}$$
$$W_B^* = \{x \in W^* \mid \tilde{e}(o,x)_{max} = 0 \text{ and } \tilde{e}(o,x)_{min} < 0\}$$

Note, using (2.15) that $W^* = W_A^* \cup W_B^*$. Define for $x \in W^*$, $S_n(x) = \{i \mid \tilde{e}(n,x)_i = \tilde{e}(o,x)_{max}\}$. It follows from lemma 2.1 part (g) that:

$$(4.2) \quad S_{n+1}(x) = \{i \mid \text{there exists an alternative } k \in L(i,\tilde{L}(x)), \text{ such that } \sum_{j \in S_n(x)} P_{ij}^k = 1\}$$

For any $v \in V$ define the set of pure policies $SP(v) = X_{i=1}^N L(i,v)$. Note that there exists a finite sequence $\{v^{(1)},\ldots,v^{(R)}\}$ such that $\cup_{v \in V} SP(v) = \cup_{\ell=1}^R SP(v^{(\ell)})$.

Let $\{\Omega^{(k)}; k = 1,\ldots,2^N-1\}$ be the finite collection of non-empty subsets of Ω, and define the following partition of W_B^*.

$$W_{\ell,m}^* = \{x \in W_B^* \mid SP(\tilde{L}(x)) = SP(v^{(\ell)}), S_0(x) = \Omega^{(m)}\}, \ell = 1,\ldots,R;\ m = 1,\ldots,2^N-1.$$

Finally let $I(x) = \inf\{n \mid \|\tilde{e}(n,x)\|_d < \|\tilde{e}(0,x)\|_d\}$, which is finite, for $x \in W^*$, since $\lim_{n\to\infty} \tilde{e}(n,x) = 0$.

In part I) below we show $\sup_{x \in W_A^*} I(x) < 2^N-1$ and in part II) $\sup_{x \in W^*_{\ell,m}} I(x) < \infty$ for fixed $1 \le \ell \le R$ and $1 \le m \le 2^N - 1$, which together imply the theorem:

I) Since $\lim_{n\to\infty} \tilde{e}(n,x)_{max} = 0$, for each $x \in W_A^*$ let $I_0(x)$ be the smallest integer such that $S_n(x)$ is empty for $n \ge I_0(x)$.
Now, $\|\tilde{e}(I_0(x),x)\|_d < \|\tilde{e}(0,x)\|_d$. In addition, in the sequence $\{S_0(x),\dots,S_{I_0(x)-1}\}$ no two members can be equal since using (4.2) this would imply that $S_n(x)$ is non-empty for all $n \ge 1$.
Hence $I_0(x) \le 2^N - 1$ since there are only $2^N - 1$ distinct non-empty subsets of Ω.

II) Fix $x^0 \in W^*_{\ell,m}$. Due to (3.1) and (3.2) there exists an integer N_1 such that $\tilde{e}(n+1,x^0)_i = [P(f_n)\dots P(f_{n_1+1})\tilde{e}(n_1,x^0)]_i$ for $i = 1,\dots,N$; $n \ge n_1+1$ where $f_n,\dots,f_{n_1+1} \in SP(v^{(\ell)})$. Define I_1 as follows:

$$I_1 = \begin{cases} \min\{n \ge n_1+1 \mid 0 \ge \tilde{e}(n,x^0)_{min} > \tilde{e}(n_1,x^0)^-\} & \text{if } S_{n_1}(x^0) \ne \Omega. \\ n_1+1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Then in both cases I_1 is finite, since n_1 is finite and $\lim_{n\to\infty}\tilde{e}(n,x^0)_{min} = 0$. In addition, we shall prove for both cases:

(4.3) $$\sum_{j \in S_{n_1}(x^0)} [P(f_{I_1})\dots P(n_1)]_{ij} > 0, \text{ for all } i \in \Omega.$$

(4.3) trivially holds if $S_{n_1}(x^0) = \Omega$, and for the other case we have $\tilde{e}(I_1,x^0)_{min} \le \tilde{e}(n_1,x^0)^-$, if (4.3) does not hold. This contradicts the definition of I_1. Next fix for $r = 1,\dots,n_1+1$, $f_r \in SP(v^{(\ell)})$ such that

(4.4) $$\sum_{j \in S_0(x^0)=\Omega(m)} [P(f_{I_1})\dots P(f_1)]_{ij} > 0, \text{ for all } i \in \Omega,$$

the existence of which follows from $S_{n_1}(x^0) \ne \emptyset$ in view of $\tilde{e}(0,x)_{max} = 0$ in combination with lemma 2.1 part (g).
Now observe that for all $x \in W^*_{\ell,m}$ we have $b(\tilde{L}(x),f_n) = 0$ for

$n = 1,\dots,I_1$ since $f_n \in SP(v^{(\ell)}) = SP(\tilde{L}(x))$. Hence, using (3.1), (3.2) and (4.4) $\tilde{e}(I_1,x) \geq \sum_{j\in\Omega-S_0(x)} [P(f_{I_1})\dots P(f_1)]_{ij}\, \tilde{e}(0,x)_j > \tilde{e}(0,x)_{min}$. This implies that for all $x \in W^*_{\ell,m}$: $I(x) < I_1$. □

In order to prove the geometric convergence of $\{T^n x - ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$, we define:

(4.5) $$h_m(x) = \sup_{n=0,1,\dots} f_m(T^n x), \quad x \in \tilde{W} \text{ and } m = 0,1,\dots$$

which has the following easily verified properties:

(4.6) $$h_m(x) = h_m(x+c_1 g^* + c_2 \underline{1}), \text{ for all scalars } c_1,c_2;\ x \in \tilde{W};\ m = 0,1,\dots$$
$$0 \leq h_{m+1}(x) \leq h_m(x) \leq 1, \quad x \in \tilde{W};\ m = 0,1,\dots$$
$$h_m(T^r x) \leq h_m(x), \quad x \in \tilde{W};\ m,r = 0,1,\dots$$

THEOREM 4.2. (Geometric convergence result).

(a) $h_m(x) < 1$ *for all* $m \geq M$ *and* $x \in \tilde{W}$.

(b) $\|\tilde{e}(nM+r,x)\|_\infty \leq \|\tilde{e}(nM+r,x)\|_d \leq [h_M(x)]^n \|\tilde{e}(0,x)\|_d$ for $n = 0,1,2,\dots$; $r = 0,1,\dots;M-1$ *and* $x \in \tilde{W}$.

Hence the convergence of $\{T^n x - ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ *is geometric for all* $x \in \tilde{W}$.

PROOF.

(a) Suppose to the contrary that $h_M(x) = 1$ for some $x \in \tilde{W}$. It then follows from (4.1) and lemma 2.2 part (b), that $x \in W^*$ and that there exists a subsequence $\{x^j\}_{j=1}^{\infty} = \{T^{n_j}x - n_j g^*\}_{j=1}^{\infty}$ such that $\lim_{j\to\infty} f_M(x^j) = 1$. Using lemma 2.1 part (f), it easily follows that $x^j \in \tilde{W}$ with $\tilde{L}(x^j) = \tilde{L}(x)$ and $\|x^j - \tilde{L}(x)\|_d > 0$ for all $j = 1,2,\dots$

Put $x^j = \tilde{L}(x) + \xi^j$. Since for j large enough, $\|x^j - \tilde{L}(x)\|_d < \delta(\tilde{L}(x))$, we have using lemma 3.2 part (a), for all $n \geq 1$:

$T^n(x^j) = \tilde{L}(x) + ng^* + U(\tilde{L}(x))^n(\xi^j)$, and $\lim_{n\to\infty} U(\tilde{L}(x))^n(\xi^j) = 0$ for j sufficiently large. Hence,

$$1 = \lim_{j\to\infty} f_M(x^j) = \lim_{j\to\infty} \frac{\| T^M(x^j)-Mg^*-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d}{\| x^j-\tilde{L}(x)\|_d} =$$

$$\lim_{j\to\infty} \frac{\| U(\tilde{L}(x))^M(\xi^j)\|_d}{\|\xi^j\|_d}$$

For any $v \in V$, define $Y(v)=\{y \in E^N \mid \|y\|_d = 1 \text{ and } \lim_{n\to\infty} U(v)^n y=0\}$, and

(4.7) $$\Gamma_n(v) = \begin{cases} \sup_{y\in Y(v)} \| U(v)^n y\|_d & \text{if } Y(v) \neq \emptyset \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Observing with the help of (3.3) that $\xi^j/\|\xi^j\|_d \in Y(\tilde{L}(x))$, $j = 1,2,\ldots$ and recalling that $\Gamma_n(v) \leq 1$, $n = 1,2,\ldots$ and $v \in V$ (cf. lemma 2.1 part (b)), we conclude that $\Gamma_M(\tilde{L}(x)) = 1$.

Observe by lemma 2.1 part (e) that $Y(v)$ is closed for any $v \in V$. In addition $Y(v)$ is bounded since for any $y \in Y(v)$, $y_{max} \geq 0 \geq y_{min}$ as a result of lemma 2.2 part (e) being applied to the $U(v)$-operator, and hence $\|y\|_\infty \leq \|y\|_d = 1$ for any $y \in Y(v)$ (cf. (2.9)).
We conclude that in (4.7) the supremum is taken of a continuous function (cf. lemma 2.1 part (d)) over a compact set, and this implies the existence of a vector $y^0 \in Y(\tilde{L}(x))$ with $\|U(\tilde{L}(x))^M y^0\|_d = 1$.
Invoking lemma 3.2 part (c) we find that $\tilde{L}(x) + \lambda y^0 \in W^*_,$ for $0 < \lambda < \delta(\tilde{L}(x))$ with $\tilde{L}(\tilde{L}(x) + \lambda y^0) = \tilde{L}(x)$. Next using lemma 3.2 part (a) and (3.3):

$$f_M(\tilde{L}(x)+\lambda y^0) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \| T^M(\tilde{L}(x)+\lambda y^0) - T^M(\tilde{L}(x))\|_d = \frac{1}{\lambda} \| U(\tilde{L}(x))^M(\lambda y^0)\|_d = 1,$$

thus contradicting th. 4.1.

(b) Fix $x \in \tilde{W}, n = 0,1,\ldots$ and $1 \leq r \leq M$:
The first inequality follows from part (c) of lemma 2.2 and (2.9).
If $\|\tilde{e}(nM+r,x)\|_d = 0$, we trivially have:

(4.8) $\|\tilde{e}((n+1)M+r,x)\|_d \le h_M(x)\ \|\tilde{e}(nM+r,x)\|_d$

Next assume $\|\tilde{e}(nM+r,x)\|_d > 0$. Then

$$\frac{\|\tilde{e}(nM+M+r,x)\|_d}{\|\tilde{e}(nM+r,x)\|_d} = f_M(T^{nM}x) \le h_M(T^{nM}x) \le h_M(x),$$

the last inequality following from (4.6).
This proves the second inequality in part (b) for all $x \in \tilde{W}, n = 0,1,\ldots$ and $r = 1,\ldots,M$. □

Th.4.2 in combination with lemma 2.2 part (d) establish the geometric convergence result for all $x \in W$. If $x \notin W$, then certain subsequences of the type:

(4.9) $\{Q^{nJ+r}x - (nJ+r)g^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}; J = 2,3,\ldots$ and $r = 0,\ldots,J-1$

will converge. We refer to th. 5.8 of [18] for a characterization of the integers $J \ge 1$ for which convergence occurs. Fix $J = 2,3,\ldots$ and note that: (cf. section 4 in [18]):

(4.10) $Q^J x_i = \max_{\xi\in\tilde{K}(i)} \{\tilde{q}_i^\xi + \sum_j \tilde{P}_{ij}^\xi x_j\}$ where

$\tilde{K}(i) = \{(f^1,\ldots,f^J) \mid f^1,\ldots,f^J \in S_P\}$

$\tilde{q}_i^\xi = q(f^1)_i + P(f^1)q(f^2)_i + \ldots + P(f^1)\ldots P(f^{J-1})q(f^J)_i,$
$i \in \Omega,\ \xi = (f^1,\ldots,f^J) \in \tilde{K}(i)$

$\tilde{P}_{ij}^\xi = P(f^1)\ \ldots\ P(f^J)_{ij};\quad 1 \le i,j \le N$ and $\xi = (f^1,\ldots,f^J) \in \tilde{K}(i)$.

Let $\tilde{Q} = Q^J$, and define a related "J-step"-MDP, denoted by a tilde, with Ω as its state space, $\tilde{K}(i)$ as the (finite) set of alternatives in state $i \in \Omega$, $\tilde{q}_i^\xi$ as the one-step expexted reward and $\tilde{P}_{ij}^\xi$ as the transition probability to state j, when alternative $\xi \in \tilde{K}(i)$ is chosen when entering state i.

Recalling from th. 4.1 part (a) in [18] that $\tilde{g}^* = Jg^*$ we obtain in view of $\{Q^{nJ+r}x-(nJ+r)g^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty} = \{\tilde{Q}^n[Q^r x]-n\tilde{g}^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty} - rg^*$ and by applying the above analysis to the J-step MDP, the following generalization of the geometric convergence result.

COROLLARY 4.3. *Fix* $J = 1,2,\dots$ *and* $r = 0,\dots,J-1$.
If $\lim_{n\to\infty} Q^{nJ+r}x - (nJ+r)g^*$ *exists, then the approach to the limit exhibits a geometric rate of convergence.* □

REMARK 2.: Assume $g^* = \langle g^* \rangle \underline{1}$ so $Q = T$ and consider White's iterative scheme for solving MDP's (cf. [22]). Define:

$$y(n)_i = v(n)_i - v(n)_N, \quad i = 1,\dots,N;$$

and verify that

$$y(n+1) = Qy(n) - [Qy(n)_N]\underline{1}$$

Then if $v(0) \in W = \tilde{W}$:

(a) $\lim_{n\to\infty} y(n)_i = L(v(0))_i - L(v(0))_N$
(b) $[Qy(n) - y(n)]_{max} = [v(n+1) - v(n)]_{max} \downarrow g^*$ $n \to \infty$ (cf. ODONI [12], th.1).
(c) $[Qy(n) - y(n)]_{min} = [v(n+1) - v(n)]_{min} \uparrow g^*$ $n \to \infty$ (cf. ODONI 12 , th.1).

It follows from th. 4.2 that the convergence in (a), (b) and (c) is geometric since $|\, y(nM+r)_i - L(v(0))_i - L(v(0))_N| \le \|e(nM+r,v(0))\|_d \le [h_M v(0)]^n \|e(0,v(0))\|_d$.

5. THE SIZE OF M

In this section we restrict ourselves to MDP's that satisfy the condition:

(H1): there exists a $f^o \in S_{RMG}$ that is aperiodic and has R^* as its single subchain.

In [17] we proved that (H1) is satisfied e.g. if all the tpm's of the pure maximal gain policies are unichained, whereas the greatest common divisor of their periods equals 1.

Fix $v \in V$; we first observe that the policy f^*, defined by:

$$(5.1) \qquad \{k \mid f^*_{ik} > 0\} = \{k \in L(i) \mid b(v)^k_i = 0\}, \qquad i \in \Omega$$

is one of the policies with the properties mentioned in (H1).
Using (2.8) one first observes that $f^* \in S_{RMG}$ hence $R(f^*) \subseteq R^*$.
Due to (H1) all states of R^* communicate with each other under $P(f^o)$ and since for all $i \in R^*, f^o_{ik} > 0$ implies by (2.8) $k \in L(i)$ and $b(v)^k_i = 0$, hence $f^*_{ik} > 0$ they communicate with each other under $P(f^*)$. Hence $P(f^*)$ is aperiodic and has R^* as its single subchain.

Lemma 5.1 below gives some implications with respect to the chain- and periodicity structure that result from (H1).

LEMMA 5.1. *Suppose* C1 *holds. Then:*

(a) $g^* = \langle g^* \rangle \underline{1}$, i.e. $K(i) = L(i)$ *for all* $i \in \Omega$, *and* $Qx = Tx$ *for all* $x \in E^N$.
(b) $v \in V$ *is unique up to a multiple of* $\underline{1}$.
(c) *For all* $i \in \Omega$, *and* $k \in K(i)$, $b(v)^k_i$ *is independent of* $v \in V$.
(d) $W = \tilde{W} = E^N$.
(e) *If* $v \in V$, $i \in R^*$ *and* $b(v)^k_i = 0$ *then* $P^k_{ij} > 0$ *only if* $j \in R^*$.
(f) *For any bounded subset* $B \subset E^N$: $\sup_{x \in B} f_M(x) < 1$ (*where* M *is defined as in* th.4.1).

PROOF. Parts (a) and (b) follow from th. 3.2 parts (c) and (e) and remark 2 in [17]. Part (c) follows from (2.6) and part (b); part (d) is proven in [18]. To show part (e), suppose there exists (i,j,k) with $i \in R^*$, $j \notin R^*$, $b(v)^k_i = 0$ for $v \in V$ and $P^k_{ij} > 0$. Then $f^*_{ik} > 0$ and $P(f^*)_{ij} \geq f^*_{ik} P^k_{ij} > 0$ contradicting the fact that $R(f^*) = R^*$.

(f): Assume to the contrary that for some bounded subset $B \subset E^N$, $\sup_{x \in B} f_M(x) = 1$. Considering the definition of $f_n(x)\,(n \geq 1)$ we assume without loss of generality that $B \subset W^*$. Then there exists a sequence $\{x^j\}_{j=1}^{\infty}$, with $x^j \in B$ such that $\lim_{j\to\infty} x^j = c \in W$ (say) and $\lim_{j\to\infty} f_M(x^j) = 1$.

The case $c \in W^*$ leads to the contradiction $1 = \lim_{j\to\infty} f_M(x^j) = f_M(c) < 1$ in view of th. 4.1 and the continuity of $f_M(\cdot)$ on W^*.
The remaining case has $c \in V$. Put $x^j = L(x^j) + \xi^j$. Following the proof of th. 4.2 part (a) we obtain for j sufficiently large:

$$T^n(x^j) = v + ng^* + U(v)^n \xi^j \text{ and so } \lim_{n\to\infty} U(v)^n[\xi^j] = L(x^j) - v$$

Since it follows from part (b) that $L(x^j) - v$ is a multiple of $\underline{1}$ we obtain:

$$f_M(x^j) = \frac{\| T^M(x^j) - Mg^* - L(x^j)\|_d}{\| x^j - L(x^j)\|_d} = \| U(v)^M(y^j)\|_d$$

where

$y^j = (\xi^j + v - L(x^j))/\|\xi^j\|_d \in Y(v)$. The remainder of the proof is completely analoguous to that of th. 4.2 part (a). □

We next derive (for MDP's satisfying (H1)) an upperbound for M the number of steps needed for contraction:
First define:

$$(5.1) \qquad \gamma = \min\{n \geq N \mid P(f^*)^n_{ij} > 0, \quad \text{for all } i = 1,\dots,N, \quad j \in R^*\}$$

Clearly $\gamma < \infty$, since $\lim_{n\to\infty} P(f^*)^n_{ij} > 0$ for all $i = 1,\dots,N$ and $j \in R^*$. Note that $P(f^*)^n_{ij} > 0$ for all $i \in \Omega$, $j \in R^*$ and $m \geq \gamma$, since for $m \geq \gamma$ $P(f^*)^m_{ij} = \sum_{k=1}^N P(f^*)^{m-\gamma}_{ik} \cdot P(f^*)^\gamma_{kj} > 0$ for all $i \in \Omega, j \in R^*$.

THEOREM 5.2. *If* (H1) *holds then* $M \leq N^2 - 2N + 2$, (*where* M *is defined as the smallest integer satisfying the condition of* th.4.1.).

PROOF. We will first show that $\gamma \leq N^2 - 2N + 2$. Assume that R^*_i $R(f^*)$ contains $N + k \geq 1$ states. Then it follows from th. 2.8 of [17] that $P(f^*)^n_{ij} > 0$ for $n \geq (N-k)^2 - 2(N-k) + 2$ and $i,j \in R^*$. In addition for any $i \in \Omega - R^*$, there exists a path $\{t_0 = i, t_1, \dots, t_m\}$ such that $P(f^*)t_\ell t_{\ell+1} > 0$ for $\ell = 0,\dots,$ $m-1$ and $t_m \in R^*$, where without loss of generality $t_1,\dots,t_m$ are all taken to be distinct. Hence $m \leq k$ and $\sum_{\ell\in R^*} P(f^*)^k_{i\ell} > 0$ for all $i \in \Omega$.
This implies that $P(f^*)^n_{ij} \geq \sum_{\ell\in R^*} P(f^*)^k_{i\ell} P(f^*)^{n-k}_{\ell j} > 0$ for all $i \in \Omega$, $j \in R^*$ and $n \geq N^2 - 2N + 2$ (verify that $k + (N-k)^2 - 2(N-k) + 2 \leq N^2 - 2N + 2$ in view of the quadratic form $(3-2N)k + k^2$ being nonpositive for $k = 0,\dots,N-1$).

Next we fix $x \in W^*$. Let $L(x) = v^*$ and define:

$$X(m) = \{i\in\Omega \mid (T^m x - T^m v^*)_i = (x - v^*)_{max}\}; \; m = 0,1,2,\dots$$
$$Y(m) = \{i\in\Omega \mid (T^m x - T^m v^*)_i = (x - v^*)_{min}\}; \; m = 0,1,2,\dots$$

We will prove that $M \le \gamma$ and hence $M \le N^2 - 2N + 2$, by showing that the assumption $M > \gamma$ implies (a) $Y(0) \supseteq R^*$ and (b) $X(0) \cap R^* \neq \emptyset$, hence $X(0) \cap Y(0) \neq \emptyset$ contradicting $x \in W^*$, i.e. $\|x-v^*\|_d > 0$. Assume now $\gamma < M$. Then $X(m) \neq \emptyset \neq Y(m)$ for $0 \le m \le \gamma$. Fix $m \le \gamma$, and $i \in Y(m)$. Observe using part (h) of lemma 2.1, that for any $k \in L(i,v^*)$ $P^k_{ij} > 0$ only if $j \in Y(m-1)$. Using the definition of f^*, we conclude that $P(f^*)_{ij} > 0$ only if $j \in Y(m-1)$. Proceeding by induction, and invoking the definition of γ we obtain for $i \in Y(\gamma)$: $R^* \subseteq \{j \mid P(f^*)_{ij} > 0\} \subseteq Y(0)$.

The nested sequence $X(N)$; $X(N) \cup X(N-1)$;...; $\cup_{i=0}^N X(i)$ cannot exhibit strict growth since there are only N states, hence there exists a $m \le N - 1$ such that $X(m) \subset S = \cup_{\ell=m+1}^N X(\ell)$. Accordingly define a policy h in the following way:

(a) for $i \in \Omega - S$, define $h(i) = k$ for some $k \in L(i,v^*)$

(b) for $i \in S$, choose an index $\ell(m+1 \le \ell \le N)$ such that $i \in X(\ell)$, and define $h(i) = k$ for any $k \in L(i,v^*)$ such that $P^k_{ij} > 0$ only if $j \in X(\ell-1)$, the existence of such an alternative k being guaranteed by part (g) of lemma 2.1, and the fact that $L(i,T^\ell v^*) = L(i,v^*)$.

It clearly follows from (2.6) that $h \in S_{PMG}$; in addition S contains a subchain of P(h) since it follows from $X(m) \subset S$, that S is closed under P(h). Hence, $S \cap R^* \neq \emptyset$, or there exists an index r, such that $X(r) \cap R^* \neq \emptyset$ Accordingly fix $i \in X(r) \cap R^*$. Then, again applying part (g) of lemma 2.1 we obtain the existence of an alternative $k \in L(i,v^*)$ such that $P^k_{ij} > 0$ only for $j \in X(r-1)$.

In addition, since $i \in R^*$ and $k \in L(i,v^*)$ it follows from lemma 5.1 part (e) that $P^k_{ij} > 0$ only for $j \in R^*$. Hence $X(r) \cap R^* \neq \emptyset$ implies $X(r-1) \cap R^* \neq \emptyset$ and proceeding by induction we obtain $X(0) \cap R^* \neq \emptyset$. This together with $Y(0) \supseteq R^*$ implies $X(0) \cap Y(0) \neq \emptyset$, i.e. $\|x-L(x)\|_d = 0$ thus contradicting $x \in W^*$. □

The following example shows that $M = O(N^2)$ may occur.

Example 2:

i	k	q_i^k	p_{i1}^k	p_{i2}^k	p_{i3}^k	...	p_{iN-1}^k	p_{iN}^k
1	1	0	0	1				
2	1	0	0	0	1			
N-2	1	0					1	
N-2	2	0						1
N-1	1	0	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$				
N	1	0	1					

$K(i) = \{1\}$ for $i \neq N-2$; $K(N-2)=\{1,2\}$; $p_{ii+1}^1 = 1$ for $i \leq N-2$; $q_i^k = 0$ for all i,k; hence $g^* = 0$ and $K(i) = L(i)$ for all $i \in \Omega$.

Let $f_k (k=1,2)$ denote the pure policy that chooses alternative k in state N-2. Observe that (H1) holds since $P(f_1)$ and $P(f_2)$ are unichained with $P(f_1)$ aperiodic. Consider x, with $x_i = 0$ for $i \neq N-1$ and $x_{N-1} = 1$.

Clearly $[T^{J(N-1)}x]_N = [P(f_2)^{(J-1)(N-1)}P(f_1)^{N-1}x]_N = 1$, for $J = 1,2,\ldots$. Observe that whatever decisions are taken when entering state N-2, the only states j that can be reached from state 1, after J(N-1) steps are $j = 1,\ldots,J+1$ $(J \leq N-1)$. Hence $[T^{(N-3)(N-1)}x]_1 = 0$.

Note, using lemma 5.1, parts (b) and (c) that $x \in W^*$ with $L(x) = \lambda \underline{1}$ for some scalar λ. Hence, $\|T^{(N-1)(N-3)}x - L(x)\|_d = [T^{(N-1)(N-3)}x]_N - [T^{(N-1)(N-3)}x]_1 = 1 = \|x - L(x)\|_d$, and $M \geq (N-3)(N-1)$.

REMARK 3. The upperbound $N^2 - 2N + 2$ for the number of iterations needed for contraction is enormously high, compared with the empirical fact that in most cases M = 1 or 2. For example SU [20] and TIJMS [21] have solved up to 1000-state problems with good convergence after 10 - 100 value iterations. In addition if $P(f^*)$ has at least one positive diagonal entry, it may be shown that the upperbound for M becomes *linear* in N. Since it was shown in [8] that in this case $\gamma \leq 2N - r - 1$, where $r \geq 1$ is the number of positive diagonal entries of $P(f^*)$ the result $M = O(2N)$ again follows from the proof of th.5.2.

In SCHWEITZER [6] a data-transformation was introduced which turns every MDP into an equivalent one in which all of the diagonal elements of the tpm's are positive thus ensuring convergence of $\{Q^n x - ng^*\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$, for all $x \in E^N$. By the above analysis it follows that thanks to this transforma-

tion, M the number of steps needed for contraction, is in addition bounded by N-1. Finally in case S_P consists of a single unichained and aperiodic policy, we have $M \leq \frac{1}{2}N(N-1)$ as a result of the following argument:
We know (cf. th.4.4 on pp. 89 of [19]) that any aperiodic and unichained policy f, has $P(f)^n$ *scrambling* for all $n \geq \frac{1}{2}N(N-1)$, i.e.
$\min_{i_1,i_2} \sum_j \min[P(f)^n_{i_1 j};P(f)^n_{i_2 j}] = \alpha > 0$ for all $n \geq \frac{1}{2}N(N-1)$.

One next verifies (cf. th.5 in [7]) that $\|e(n,x)\|_d \leq (1-\alpha)\|e(0,x)\|_d$ for all $x \in E^N$ and $n \geq \frac{1}{2}N(N-1)$.

6. THE THIRD PHASE; THE ULTIMATE CONVERGENCE RATE

In this section we analyze the ultimate convergence rate or average contraction factor per step which is defined as the limit as n tends to infinity of:

$$(6.1)\quad f_n(x)^{1/n} = \begin{cases} \left[\dfrac{\|\tilde{e}(n,x)\|_d}{\|\tilde{e}(n-1,x)\|_d} \; \dfrac{\|\tilde{e}(n-1,x)\|_d}{\|\tilde{e}(n-2,x)\|_d} \cdot \ldots \cdot \dfrac{\|\tilde{e}(1,x)\|_d}{\|\tilde{e}(o,x)\|_d}\right]^{1/n}, & \text{if } \|\tilde{e}(n-1,x)\|_d > 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Note that $f_n(x)^{\frac{1}{n}}$ may be interpreted as the (geometric) mean n-step contraction factor. In section 3 we observed that for $n \geq n_1(x)$ (cf. (3.1)) i.e. in the third phase, the sequence $\{e(n,x)\}_{n=1}^{\infty}$ satisfies the recursion equation:

$$(6.2)\qquad e(n+1,x) = U(L(x))e(n,x), \quad x \in W; \quad n \geq n_1(x)$$

Thus, in order to characterize the ultimate convergence rate, the following two theorems give some properties of the U-operator and of the quantities $\Gamma_n(v); v \in V$:

$$(6.1)\qquad \Gamma_n(v) = \begin{cases} \sup_{y \in Y(v)} \|U(v)^n y\|_d & \text{if } Y(v) \neq \emptyset \\ 0 \end{cases}$$

where

$$Y(v) = \left\{ y \in E^N \mid \|y\|_d = 1; \lim_{n\to\infty} U(v)^n y = 0 \right\}$$

First, define for all $v \in V$, $W_{U(v)} = \{y \in E^N \mid \lim_{n\to\infty} U(v)^n y \text{ exists}\}$, and for all $y \in W_{U(v)}$, let $U(v)^\infty y = \lim_{n\to\infty} U(v)^n y$.

THEOREM 6.1.

(a) (Cf.th.4.1). *There exists an integer* $M_1 \le 2^N$ *such that for all* $v \in V$ *and* $y \in W_{U(v)}$ *with* $\|y-U(v)^\infty y\|_d > 0$:

$$\|U(v)^{M_1} y - U(v)^\infty y\|_d < \|y-U(v)^\infty y\|_d$$

Fix $v \in V$.

(b) *If* $Y(v) \neq \emptyset$ *then* $\Gamma_n(v) = \max_{y\in Y(v)} \|U(v)^n y\|_d$; $n = 1,2,\ldots$

(c) $\|U(v)^{M_1} y\|_d \le (1-\rho_1)\|y\|_d$, *for all* $y \in E^N$ *such that* $U(v)^\infty y = 0$, *where*

$$(6.2) \qquad 1-\rho_1 = \max_{v\in V} \Gamma_{M_1}(v) < 1$$

(d) $\Gamma_{m+n}(v) \le \Gamma_m(v).\Gamma_n(v)$ *for all* $m,n = 0,1,2,\ldots$

(e) *Define* $\Gamma^*(v) = \lim_{n\to\infty} \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n}$. *Then* $\Gamma^*(v) \le (1-\rho_1)^{1/M_1} < 1$ *and* $\Gamma_n(v) \ge \Gamma^*(v)$ *for all* $n = 0,1,\ldots$.

PROOF.

(a) Fix $v \in V$ and $y \in W_{U(v)}$ and recall from lemma 2.2 part (e) that $(y-U(v)^\infty y)_{min} \le 0 \le (y-U(v)^\infty y)_{max}$. Define for $n = 1,2,\ldots$:

$$S_n = \{i \mid U(v)^n (y-U(v)^\infty y)_i = (y-U(v)^\infty y)_{max}\}$$

and

$$T_n = \{i \mid U(v)^n (y-U(v)^\infty y)_i = (y-U(v)^\infty y)_{min}\}.$$

Observe using the arguments in part I) of the proof of th.4.1 that S_n must be empty for $n \ge 2^N$ if $(y-U(v)^\infty y)_{max} > 0$. However, for the U-operator the same arguments show that T_n must be empty for $n \ge 2^N$ if $(y-U(v)^\infty y)_{min} < 0$, as well.

(b) In the proof of th.4.1. part (b) we showed that the supremum in (4.6) is always achieved by some $y^o \in Y(v)$.

(c) It follows from part (a) and (b) that $\Gamma_{M_1}(v) < 1$ for any $v \in V$. Since there are only a finite number of distinct U(v)-operators, we have $\max_{v \in V} \Gamma_{M_1}(v) < 1$, which proves (6.2) and hence the remainder of part (e).

(d) For $y \in Y(v)$ with $\| U(v)^n y \|_d = 0$, we have:

$$0 = \| U(v)^{n+m} y \|_d \le \Gamma_m(v) \Gamma_n(v)$$

while for $y \in Y(v)$, with $\| U(v)^n y \|_d > 0$:

$$\| U(v)^{n+m} y \|_d = \left\| U(v)^m \left\{ \frac{U(v)^n y}{\| U(v)^n y \|_d} \right\} \right\|_d \| U(v)^n y \|_d \le \Gamma_m(v) \Gamma_n(v)$$

Hence $\Gamma_{n+m}(v) = \max_{y \in Y(v)} \| U(v)^{n+m} y \|_d \le \Gamma_m(v) \Gamma_n(v)$.

(e) The existence of $\Gamma^*(v) = \lim_{n\to\infty} \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n}$ and the relation $\Gamma^*(v) \le \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n}$ for all $n = 1,2,\dots$ follows from part (d) and a well-known theorem of KINGMAN (cf. e.g. [19], appendix A, th. A4).
It follows from (6.2) that $\Gamma_{M_1}(v) \le 1-\rho_1$, and hence using part (d), that $\Gamma_{nM_1}(v) \le (1-\rho_1)^n$. This implies:

$$\Gamma^*(v) = \lim_{n\to\infty} \Gamma_{nM_1}(v)^{1/nM_1} \le (1-\rho_1)^{1/M_1}. \quad \square$$

Th. 6.2. below proves that for any $x \in W^*$ the ultimate average contraction factor per step is at worst $\Gamma^*(L(x))$, so that for all $x \in W^*$, the ultimate convergence rate is strictly bounded away from one.
In addition, part (b) shows that for any *fixed* n, there are $x \in W^*$ for which the average n-*step* contraction factor is at least equal to $\max_{v \in V} \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n}$.

THEOREM 6.2.

(a) $\limsup_{n\to\infty} f_n(x)^{1/n} \le \Gamma^*(\tilde{L}(x))$ *for any* $x \in W^*$.

(b) $\sup_{x \in \tilde{W}} f_n(x)^{1/n} \ge \max_{v \in V} \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n} \ge \max_{v \in V} \Gamma^*(v)$, *for all* $n = 0,1,\dots$.

PROOF.

(a) Fix $x \in \tilde{W}$ and observe that by (4.1):
$f_{n+m}(x) = f_m(T^n x - ng^*)\, f_n(x)$. Fix n sufficiently large that $\| T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x) \|_d < \delta(\tilde{L}(x))$.

Then, either $T^n - ng^* = \tilde{L}(x)$ in which case $f_m(x) = 0$ for all $m \geq n$ and part (a) trivially holds, or otherwise we have, using lemma 3.1 part (a) and (3.4):
$f_m(T^n x - ng^*) = U(\tilde{L}(x))^m y$, where $y = (T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x))/\| T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x)\|_d$.
Hence, in the latter case $f_{n+m}(x) \leq \Gamma_m(\tilde{L}(x)) f_n(x)$, or
$\limsup_{m\to\infty} f_{n+m}(x)^{1/n+m} \leq \lim_{m\to\infty} \Gamma_m(\tilde{L}(x))^{1/m+n} \lim_{m\to\infty} f_n(x)^{1/n+m} = \Gamma^*(\tilde{L}(x))$.

(b) Fix $v \in V$. If $Y(v)$ is empty then $\sup_{x\in\tilde{W}} f_n(x)^{1/n} \geq \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n} = \Gamma^*(v) = 0$ holds trivially.

Otherwise considering th. 6.1 part (b), take $y \in Y(v)$ such that $\Gamma_n(v) = \| U(v)^n y\|_d$. Let $x^0 = v + \lambda y$ with $0 < \lambda < \delta(v)$. Then using lemma 3.2 parts (a) and (c) as well as (3.3), we have $x^0 \in \tilde{W}$, $\tilde{L}(x^0) = v$ and:
$f_n(x^0) = \| U(v)^n(\lambda y)\|_d / \|\lambda y\|_d = \| U(v)^n y\|_d / \| y\|_d = \Gamma_n(v)$, or $f_n(x^0)^{1/n} = \Gamma_n(v)^{1/n}$ from which the first inequality of part (b) follows
The second inequality is due to th. 6.1 part (e). □

We conclude this section by observing that the upperbound

$$\max_{v\in V} \Gamma_{M_1}(v)^{1/M_1} = \max_{v\in V} \max\{\| U(v)^{M_1} y\|_d^{1/M_1} \mid \| y\|_d = 1, U(v)^\infty y = 0\} \tag{6.3}$$

for the ultimate convergence rate reduces in the special case where S_{PMG} is a singleton, to the subdominant eigenvalue of the tpm of the maximal gain policy; and in this case the subdominant eigenvalue is known to provide a sharp upperbound for the convergence rate (cf. e.g. [11]).

7. THE N-STEP CONTRACTION FACTOR

Theorem 6.2 showed that $\max_{v\in V} \Gamma^*(v)$ is at the same time an *upperbound* for the *ultimate convergence rate* and a *lower bound* for the maximal average n-*step contraction factor* for all integers $n = 1,2,\ldots$.
The following example shows that whereas the ultimate convergence rate is strictly bounded away from one, this does not need to be the case for the average n-step contraction factor (whatever the choice of $n = 1,2,\ldots$).
In other words we may have, *for all* $n = 1,2,\ldots$:

$$\sup_{x \in W} f_n(x) = 1.$$

EXAMPLE 3:

i	k	q_i^k	P_{i1}^k	P_{i2}^k
1	1	0	1	0
2	1	0	1	0
2	2	-1	0	1

$g^* = (0,0)$ hence $K(i) = L(i)$ for $i = 1,2$
$V = \{\lambda \underline{1} \mid \lambda \text{ arbitrary}\}$. Take $x = [0,Y]$.

Observe that this MDP satisfies condition (H1) (cf. section 5); hence, using lemma 5.1 part (d), we have $\tilde{W} = E^N$:

$$T^n x = [0, \max(0,Y-n)]$$

$$f_n'(x) = \|T^n x - ng^* - \tilde{L}(x)\|_d / \|x - \tilde{L}(x)\|_d = \|T^n x\|_d / \|x\|_d =$$

$$\frac{\max\,(0,Y-n)}{Y}$$

Letting Y tend to infinity one observes that $\sup_{x \in \tilde{W}} f_n(x) = 1$ for all $n = 1,2,\ldots$.

The following theorem gives under condition (H1) the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of a uniform (n-step) contraction factor (for some $n \geq 1$) i.e. the existence of an integer M_2, such that

(7.1) $$\sup_{x \in W} f_n(x) < 1 \text{ for } n \geq M_2.$$

First define:

(7.2) $$\hat{R} = \{i \in \Omega \mid i \in R(f), \quad \text{for some } f \in S_P\}$$

and note that $\hat{R} \supseteq R^*$. We next introduce the condition:

(H2): There exists a randomized policy $f \in S_R$ which has $\hat{R}$ as its single subchain.

THEOREM 7.1. *Suppose condition* (H1) *holds.*

(a) *The existence of a uniform* n-*step contraction factor some* $n \geq 1$ *implies* (H2).

(b) (H2) $\Rightarrow$ (7.1) *with* $M_2 \leq N^2 + 2$.

PROOF: Fix $v \in V$. Due to lemma 5.1, parts (b) and (d) we have $W = E^N$ and for all $x \in E^N$, $L(x) = v + c\underline{1}$ for some scalar c. This implies $W^* = \{x \mid \|x-v\|_d > 0\}$

(a) Assume to the contrary that (H2) does not hold. State i is said to *reach* state j, if there exists a policy $f \in S_P$, and some integer $r \geq 0$, such that $P(f)^r_{ij} > 0$. Let f^* be any randomized policy which has $f^*_{ik} > 0$ for all $i \in \Omega, k \in K(i)$. We claim

(7.3) there exists a pair of states $j_1, j_2 \in \hat{R}$ such that j_2 does not reach j_1.

For assuming the contrary, would imply that all states in $\hat{R}$ communicate with each other under $P(f^*)$, i.e. either

(1) $\hat{R} \subseteq \Omega \backslash R(f^*)$, or

(2) $\hat{R}$ is a strict subset of $R(f^*)$, or

(3) $P(f^*)$ has $\hat{R}$ as a single subchain,

with each of these three possiblities leading to a contradiction in view of the definition of $\hat{R}$, and our assumption that (H2) does not hold. Fix a policy $f_1 \in S_P$ with $j_1 \in R(f_1)$ and let C be the subchain of $P(f_1)$, which contains j_1. Obviously j_2 does not reach any one of the states in C. Next choose $x \in E^N$ such that $x_i = \lambda >> 1$ for $i \in C$ and $x_i = O(1)$ otherwise where $O(1)$ denotes any bounded term in λ. Fix $n \geq 1$. Since

$$T^n x_i \geq [P(f_1)^n x]_i + \textstyle\sum_{\ell=0}^{n=1} [P(f_1)^{\ell} q(f_1)]_i,$$

and since C is a subchain of $P(f_1)$, we have

$$T^n x_i = \lambda + O(1), \quad \text{for } i \in C$$

Since j_2 cannot reach C, we have $(T^n x)_{j_2} = O(1)$. Finally observing that $T^n v = O(1)$, we have $\|T^n x - T^n v\|_d = \lambda + O(1)$ whereas $\|x-v^*\|_d = \lambda + O(1)$ as well. Conclude that for all n = 1,2,...

$$\sup_{x \in W} f_n(x) \geq \lim_{\lambda\to\infty} \frac{\|T^n x - T^n v\|_d}{\|x-v\|_d} = \lim_{\lambda\to\infty} \frac{\lambda+O(1)}{\lambda+O(1)} = 1$$

thus contradicting the prerequisite.

(b) Assume to the contrary that a sequence $\{x^\alpha\}_{\alpha=1}^\infty$ exists with $x^\alpha \in W^*$ and

$$\text{(7.4)} \qquad \lim_{\alpha\to\infty} f_m(x^\alpha) = 1 \quad \text{for some } m \geq N^2+2.$$

Due to part (b) of lemma 5.1 we have $f_n(x^\alpha) = \|T^n x^\alpha - T^n v\|_d / \|x^\alpha - v\|_d$. Hence for each $\alpha = 1,2,\ldots$ $f_n(x^\alpha)$ is unchanged by adding a multiple of $\underline{1}$ to each x^α. For the sake of notational simplicity we do this in such a way that:

$$\text{(7.5)} \qquad x^\alpha - v \geq 0 \quad \text{and} \quad (x^\alpha - v)_{min} = 0.$$

We next restrict ourselves to a subsequence of $\{x^\alpha\}_{\alpha=1}^\infty$ such that the same m-step policy $\xi=(f_1,\ldots,f_m)$ with $f_1,\ldots,f_m \in S_p$, achieves $T^n(x^\alpha)$ for all x^α in the subsequence and all $n \leq m$, i.e.

$$\text{(7.6)} \qquad T^n x^\alpha = \tilde{q}_n + \tilde{P}_n x^\alpha \quad \text{for all } x^\alpha \text{ in the subsequence and } n \leq m,$$

$$\tilde{q}_n = q(f_n)+P(f_n)q(f_{n-1}) + \ldots + P(f_n)\ldots P(f_2)q(f_1)$$

$$\tilde{P}_n = P(f_n)\ldots P(f_1)$$

Observe that the existence of this subsequence is guaranteed by the fact that there is only a finite number of m-step policies.
Using lemma 5.1 part (f), (7.4) implies that $\{x^\alpha\}_{\alpha=1}^\infty$ is unbounded; hence it follows from (7.5) that $\lim_{\alpha\to\infty} \|x^\alpha - v\|_d = \lim_{\alpha\to\infty} (x^\alpha - v)_{max} = \infty$
Next define:

(7.7) $$y^{\alpha} = \frac{x^{\alpha}-v}{\|x^{\alpha}-v\|_d} = \frac{x^{\alpha}-v}{(x^{\alpha}-v)_{max}} .$$

Observe $0 \le y_i^{\alpha} \le 1$ for all $i \in \Omega$ and $\|y^{\alpha}\|_d = 1$. Since $\{y^{\alpha}\}_{\alpha=1}^{\infty}$, is bounded we henceforth restrict ourselves to a further subsequence which has $\lim_{\alpha\to\infty} y^{\alpha} = y^*$ (say). It then follows from (7.4) that:

$$1 = \lim_{\alpha\to\infty} f_n(x^{\alpha}) = \lim_{\alpha\to\infty} \|\tilde{q}_n + \tilde{P}_n x^{\alpha} - T^n v\|_d/(x^{\alpha}-v)_{max} =$$

$$= \lim_{\alpha\to\infty} \frac{[\tilde{P}_n(x^{\alpha}-v)_{max} - [\tilde{P}_n(x^{\alpha}-v)]_{min} + 0(1)}{(x^{\alpha}-v)_{max}}$$

$$= [\tilde{P}_n y^*]_{max} - [\tilde{P}_n y^*]_{min} \text{ for all } n \le m.$$

Since $0 \le y^* \le 1$ for all $i \in \Omega$ this implies that

(7.8) $$[\tilde{P}_n y^*]_{max} = 1;\ [\tilde{P}_n y^*]_{min} = 0 \quad \text{for all } n \le m.$$

Recalling (7.6) we obtain:

$$T^n(x^{\alpha}) = \tilde{q}_n + \tilde{P}_n x^{\alpha} = \max_{(h_1,\ldots,h_n)} \{q(h_n)+P(h_n)q(h_{n-1})+\ldots+ P(h_n)\ldots P(h_2)q(h_1)+P(h_n)\ldots P(h_1)x^{\alpha}\}$$

Dividing this equality by $(x^{\alpha}-v^*)_{max}$, and letting α tend to infinity, we obtain:

(7.9) $$[\tilde{P}_n y^*]_i = \max_{(h_1,\ldots,h_n)}[P(h_n)\ldots P(h_1)y^*]_i, \quad \text{for all } i \in \Omega,\ 1 \le n \le m.$$

We shall prove that

(7.10) $$\tilde{P}_n y^*_i = [P(f_n)\ldots P(f_1)y^*]_i = 0 \quad \text{for all } i \in R^* \text{ and } n = 0,1,\ldots,2N.$$

Assume to the contrary that there exists a state $j_0 \in R^*$ such that $[P(f_n)\ldots P(f_1)y^*]_{j_0} = 0$ for some $n \leq 2N$. Fix $f^* \in S_{RMG}$ such that R^* is the single subchain of $P(f^*)$ and recall from th.5.2 that $P(f^*)_{ti}^{N^2-2N+2} > 0$ for all $t \in \Omega$, and $i \in R^*$. Then using (7.9):

$$[\tilde{P}_n y^*]_i \geq [P(f^*)^{m-n} P(f_n)\ldots P(f_1)y^*]_i \geq$$

$$P(f^*)_{ij_0}^{m+n} \; [P(f_n)\ldots P(f_1)y^*]_{j_0} > 0$$

for all $i \in \Omega$ contradicting (7.8).

Define $S_n = \{i \mid \tilde{P}_n y_i^* = y^*_{max} = 1\}$. It follows from (7.8) that S_n is non-empty for $n \leq m$. Using the same arguments as were used in the proof of th.5.2 with respect to the sets X(n), we obtain that there is a $k \leq N - 1$ such that $S(k) \subseteq S = \cup_{\ell=k+1}^{N} S(\ell)$ with S being a closed subset, i.e. containing a subchain of some policy. In other words, $\hat{R}$ intersects S(r) for some $r(k \leq r \leq N)$.

Finally, let f be a policy that has $\hat{R}$ as its single subchain. Fix $i \in R^* \subseteq \hat{R}$; since all states in $\hat{R}$ communicate with each other under $P(\hat{f})$ there exists an integer $t \leq N$ such that $\sum_{j \in S(r)} P(\hat{f})_{ij}^{t} > 0$. Hence $[\tilde{P}_{t+r} y^*]_i \geq \sum_{j \in S(r)} P(\hat{f})_{ij}^{t} \; [\tilde{P}_r y^*]_j > 0$, thus contradicting (7.10) since $t + r \leq 2N$. □

We conclude this section by observing that under (H1), a number of equivalent formulations for (H2) can be obtained, e.g.:

(7.11) No policy $f \in S_P$ has a subchain within $\Omega \backslash R^*$ which cannot be reached from R^*, i.e. if S is a subchain of some policy f^0, with $S \subseteq \Omega \backslash R^*$ then there exists a policy h such that $\sum_{j \in S} P(h)_{ij}^{n} > 0$ for some $n \leq N$.

or

(7.12) $\hat{R}$ is a *communicating system* (cf. BATHER [1]).

We refer to [6] for the proofs of these equivalences and for a more detailed investigation of the underlying structure. Note that the combination of (H1) and (H2) is trivially satisfied in the unichain case.

Observe finally that in example 3, $\hat{R} = \{1,2\}$ and that no policy has $\hat{R}$ as its single subchain.

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