Relationships and Team Dynamics (Transactional Analysis)

When carrying out any of the activities contained in this resource, it is useful to remind ourselves of the importance of the working relationship in aiming to secure the 'buy in' of the team. The way we engage, the way we try to influence and the ways in which the team behave with each other can be determining factors in the success or failure in what is trying to be achieved. Transactional Analysis can help us focus in this area.

What is Transactional Analysis?

The theory of transactional analysis was developed by Eric Berne in the 1950s. He suggested that when we communicate with others we do so in one of three states.

We communicate as a **parent** would communicate, as a **child** would communicate, or as an **adult** communicates.

THE THREE STATES

The state that we fall into will be based on our past experiences.

When we are in the **parent** state, we can adopt one of two approaches. We can be:

Nurturing Parent In this state we are very caring and maternal.

Controlling Parent In this state we can be controlling and judgemental.

In the **child** state we can also do one of two things. We can be:

Free Child In this state we are carefree, playful, uninhibited (and undisciplined) and creative.

Adapted Child In this state we can be obedient or, on the other hand, resentful or manipulative.

In the **adult** state we behave much more logically, basing what we say and do on facts and an objective analysis of the situation.

We can all access to all three states, and we all use different ones at different times. They all have their uses, have their strengths and weaknesses and are appropriate in different circumstances. For example free child state is particularly useful if we want to generate lots of new ideas in a brainstorming session.

We are however, likely to have preferred states or a tendency to adopt some more than others, and it is the balance between the three which are said to make up our personality.

To understand how we can achieve smoother more effective communication with people we need to understand how we are communicating now.

The Parent State

The parent state has two sides:

The **Controlling**, disciplining, restricting parent, using words like:

- Right / wrong
- Good / bad
- Never / always

The **Nurturing**, helpful, caring, loving parent, using phrases like:

- What a shame
- Take care
- Remember to
- I'll help you
- It won't take me long to

This state comes from our experiences of life with our parents and teachers, particularly in early life:

- 'Sit up straight at the table' (controlling)
- 'Use your knife and fork properly' (controlling)
- 'Bring it here and Mummy will help you' (nurturing)

When we feel, think, talk and behave in the way we remember our parents doing then we are adopting a parent state:

- 'In our line of business' (controlling)
- 'Leave it to me' (nurturing)

Often it is the attitude rather than the actual words that reveal themselves in later life.

The Child State

The child state represents the child we once were. It is derived from our emotions and early experiences as well as our initial view of ourselves and of others. It has two aspects:

- The natural or free child: impulsive, instinctive, creative, undisciplined and demanding.
- The adapted child carrying the influences of our upbringing, doing as we are told giving rise to guilt, rebellion, obedience and compromise.

In the child state we will use words like:

- I won't
- I must
- I like
- You always try to
- Help me
- If only
- It's not fair!

The Adult State

All facts, logic and common sense contribute to the adult state. It is the mature and deliberating part of personality. When we are in this state our actions and words are sensible and well considered - as opposed to the almost automatic reactions of the parent or child states. In the adult state we collect information, evaluate it, work out possibilities and resolve problems in a logical, calm way. We concentrate on facts - not feelings and prejudices.

We all have access to all three states, and we all use different ones at different times (these are known as transactions) and they can be complimentary, crossed (where responses are often unexpected) or ulterior (where there may be a hidden agenda).
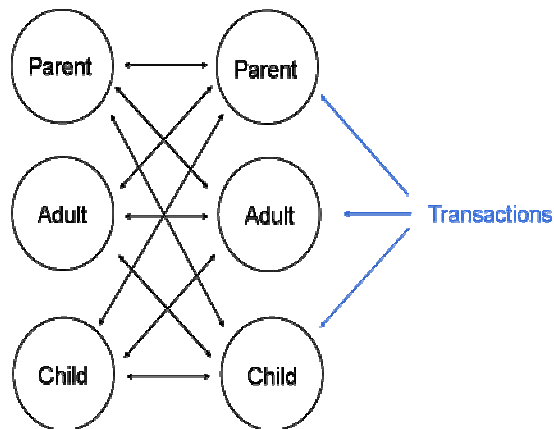
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IMPORTANT!

- Observe your team in the workplace to help you to understand their default state

- Obtain feedback from colleagues to help you understand your default state

With this evidence, you can then adopt an appropriate state to gain the 'win-win' in making the activities you choose to use successful.