A Brief Introduction to Transactional Analysis

These pages are intended to offer basic introductory information about a few, but not all, of the concepts developed within Transactional Analysis. They do not form a substitute for more in-depth reading or undertaking TA training in one of the four fields of TA: organisational, psychotherapy, educational, and counselling. To become Certified as a Transactional Analyst in one of the fields, takes around five years and to become a Teaching & Supervising Transactional Analyst takes an average of a further five years. However, TA concepts are used on an everyday basis for personal and professional development.

Transactional Analysis was developed by Dr. Eric Berne in the 1950's. Originally trained in psychoanalysis, Berne wanted a theory which could be understood and available to everyone. He developed a model that is a social psychology and a theory of personality. It outlines how we have developed into who we are, how we relate and communicate with others and offers suggestions and interventions which will enable us to change and grow. The underlying philosophy of TA is one of self-respect, mutual respect and caring and which is underpinned by the belief that:

- people can change
- we all have a right to be in the world and be accepted

Once slighted as a simplistic model, TA is now gathering worldwide attention. It originally suffered much from the popularised writings in the 1960's.

Also, summarised explanations, such as this one, which can necessarily only touch briefly on some of the concepts in TA, led some readers to believe that there was very little to the theory. Many did not realise how long and complex TA training is. However, more and more people are taking the 4 / 5 year part-time training courses to qualify to practitioner level and, increasingly, universities are accrediting these courses for masters degrees.

Today there is greater understanding of TA and it is a truly international theory relating to a diverse range of cultures.

Theoretical concepts within the TA world are constantly being challenged and developed making it a rich dynamic process. Therefore TA continues to develop and change, paralleling the processes we encourage in ourselves and others.

This brief introduction to some of the concepts of Transactional Analysis ("TA") will hopefully help the complete newcomer to the approach to gain a broad idea

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of its main concepts.

Organisational consulting based on TA is a contractual approach. Consultants teach understanding and skills in communication and problem solving in organisational life. TA consultants are trained to have insight into group dynamics - how groups work.

The Philosophy of Transactional Analysis

TA rests upon certain philosophical assumptions. These are statements about people, life and the objectives of change. The philosophical assumptions of TA are:

- people are OK
- everyone has the capacity to think
- people decide their own destiny, and these decisions can be changed.

From these assumptions there follow two basic principles of TA practice:

- contractual method
- open communication

People are OK

The most fundamental assumption of TA is people are OK. This means: you and I both have worth, value and dignity as people. I accept myself as me and I accept you as you.

Everyone has the capacity to think

Everyone, except severely brain-damaged people, has the capacity to think. Therefore it is the responsibility of each person to decide what he or she wants from life. Everyone will ultimately live with the consequences of what they decide.

Decisional Model

When we engage in not-OK behaviour we are following strategies we decided upon as young children. Anytime we make a decision, we can change that decision later. Thus people can change. We achieve change not merely by gaining insight into our old patterns of behaviour, but by actively deciding to change those patterns.

Contractual method

TA practitioners and their clients take joint responsibility for achieving whatever change the client wants to make.
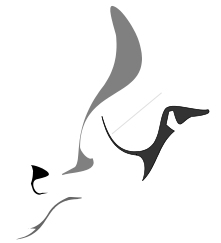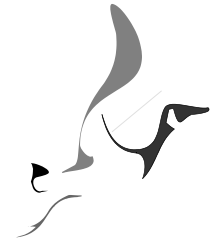
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A contract is a statement of the responsibility of each party. The client says what they want to change and the practitioner confirms that they are willing to work with the client in this task and what recompense they want from the client in return.

Open communication

Eric Berne insisted that the client, as well as the practitioner, should have full information about what was going on in their work together. This follows from the basic assumptions that people are OK and that everyone can think.

Clients are encouraged to learn the TA concepts. Although TA's language is simple, its theory is profound and closely reasoned.

Contracting

This is one of the bedrocks of TA. A contract can be defined as:
an openly made agreement to commit to a specific action or outcome, which involves all the people who will contribute to making it happen. an explicit commitment to a well-defined course of action

Mountain & Davidson, (2011)

Making an effective contract:

- phrased in positive words
- achievable
- specific and observable
- made willingly and without coercion

In summary the contract needs to be:

- MEASURABLE
- MANAGEABLE
- MOTIVATIONAL

Fanita English refers to three-cornered contracts. Her original suggestion referred to the situation where a trainer from the outside is brought in (see below), but it could equally be amended to incorporate all those who need to contract with each other, and might be a series of interlocking triangles.
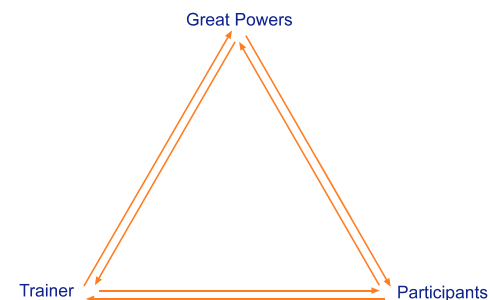
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Life Positions

A fundamental stance which a person takes up about the essential value he or she perceives in self and others:

"total life direction or a person's overall life destiny"

Eric Berne

The OK Corral

In contrast to Life Positions, the OK Corral, (Ernst 1971) whilst consisting of the same four positions, represents the minute by minute behavioural changes of position we go through:

I am not OK **You are OK** *one down position* Get away from Helpless	**I am OK** **You are OK** *healthy position* Get on with Happy
I am not OK **You are not OK** *hopeless position* Get nowhere with Hopeless	**I am OK** **You are not OK** *one-up position* Get rid of Angry

There is frequently confusion between Berne's Existential Life Positions, which are enduring, and to which we go to under stress or as an outcome of a game or racket, and the OK Corral, which refers to more behavioural shifts moment by the moment.

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The Structural Ego State Model

Ego states are the building blocks of Transactional Analysis. All the various ways that each of us behaves, thinks and feels may be put into three large categories of ego states called Parent, Adult and Child. The *Parent* ego states of a collection of attitudes, thoughts, behaviours and feelings which a person has taken in from outside sources who served as her parent figures. This is therefore historical. The *Adult* ego state is a set of behaviours, thoughts and feelings which are direct responses to the here-and-now, not copied from parents or parent-figures nor replayed from the individual's own childhood. However, we do of course integrate past experiences and ideally we do this after deciding that they are relevant today and so are not just copied from our past significant others. The *Child* ego state is a set of behaviours, thoughts, and feelings which are replayed from the individual's own childhood - i.e. an

archaic ego state.

P — PARENT EGO STATE
Behaviours, thoughts and feelings copied from parents or parent figures

A — ADULT EGO STATE
Behaviours, thoughts and feelings which are direct responses to the here and now

C — CHILD EGO STATE
Behaviours, thoughts and feelings replayed from childhood
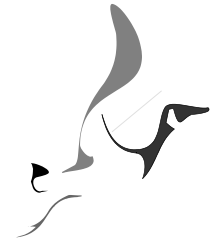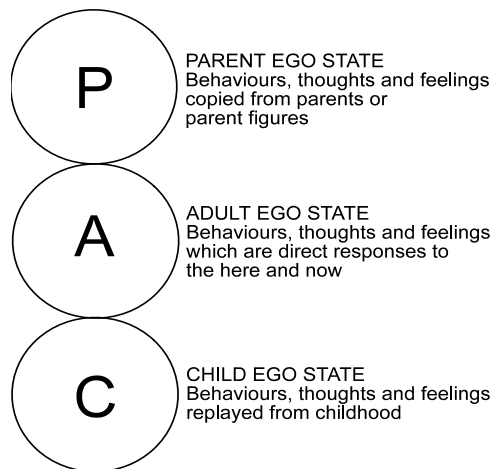
Berne defined an ego-state as a

"consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behaviour".

This means that each ego state is defined by a combination of feelings and experiences which consistently occur together.

Putting the three ego states together, we get the three-part ego state model of personality. It is conventionally pictured as a set of three stacked circles, see above.

This version of the diagram is not subdivided and is called a *first-order diagram.* The process of analysing personality in terms of ego-states is called *structural analysis.*

Ego states are names not things. We use the term ego state to describe a set of phenomena i.e. a set of related feelings, thoughts and behaviours. In the same way *Parent, Adult* and *Child* are not things. They are names. You may hear statements like: "My Kid wants some fun". The trouble with talking this way is that we may slip into believing that ego states have some kind of existence of their own, separate from the person we are talking about. It's not "My Kid" who wants some fun, I want some fun. Why would I want to behave like a "kid"? My fun is hopefully here and now.

This basic structural model is very simple and can be used in an over-simplified way. It is described here in order to show one of the original concepts from which other more in-depth models have been formulated, such as the *second order structural model* of ego-states and behavioural models. It is also important as a model to show intra-psychic processes.

Ego State Diagnosis

We cannot see an ego state - we can only infer the ego state a person is cathecting from their behaviour, from the ways in which others react to them, or by the person's description of their own experience.

Berne described four ways we can "diagnose" this - and

the more of these we use, the more sure we can be in our hypothesis.

Behavioural Diagnosis:

Words, tone, tempo of speech, expressions, postures, gestures, breathing, and muscle tone provide clues for diagnosing ego states.

These are indicators, not guarantees. You need to support your assessment by other methods of diagnosis.

Social Diagnosis:

Observation of the kinds of transactions a person is having with others. For example, if eliciting a response from someone's care-taking Parent it is likely that the stimulus is coming from Child. Our own responses to someone will often be a way of assessing which ego state they are coming from.

Historical Diagnosis:

The person's past also provides important information. If, as a child I had feelings similar to those I am experiencing now, it is likely I am in my Child ego state. If my mother or father behaved or talked in the same way that I am behaving or talking now then I am probably in my Parent ego state.

Phenomenological Diagnosis:

This is when I re-experience the past instead of just remembering it. Diagnosis is by self-examination. Sometimes it is accurate and sometimes very inaccurate.

Ideally we use all four ways of diagnosis. In practice this is not always possible. When working in organisations using TA we tend to rely on behavioural diagnosis and the OK Modes model. We can use the Structural Ego State model for ourselves but do not necessarily have a contract to ask where the other person came from.

We need all four types of diagnosis to be sure which ego state someone is in because they could be in what looks like Child ego state but it is actually Child in the Parent ego state, which would be explained if you decide to take further training in TA.

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Effective Communication

The OK Modes Model

We use here what is called the OK Modes model. We also use colour to denote effective and ineffective communication channels. The effective (green) aspects and more likely to elicit desired responses, and ineffective modes are coloured red because they invite unwanted responses. Generally when a stimulus is sent from the green mode the response with be from a green mode and vice versa.

Effective Modes

The Mindful Process

Human beings do not just respond or react - they also initiate. How you behave in any particular moment will depend upon whether you respond in a reflex or automatic way, rooted in the past, or are in the present moment, dealing with current reality.

The central area of the diagram is called Mindful as a reminder that you need to bear in mind the totality of the situation and possible consequences of any actions and interventions. It is not a Mode of behaviour as you cannot actually see someone being mindful but you will see their subsequent actions which reflect their Mindful process. The Mindful process is circular to represent being in 'the flow', taking into account the current reality and being effective in the moment.

When in this central circle you have incorporated and developed the positive behaviours from the past and brought them appropriately into the present as resources to draw on. In the diagram above, we have therefore placed the other effective modes within Mindful process to reinforce this. When here you can discuss and debate with others, be interested in opinions and have thoughts and feelings that are related to the present. Should circumstances change you can decide whether to move to a different effective Mode. You may not always be overtly aware of doing this because, when in this mode, you are relaxed and creative. However, there are times

when you need to stand back and observe a situation before deciding what to do next which is why Mindful is in the centre. All of the effective Modes communicate I'm OK, You're OK, and They're OK.

Supportive Mode

When in this Mode you are appropriately caring and affirming in your behaviour and do not take away the other person's power, or assume their inability to do something. You will be consistent and your support will be reliable, and will fit what is actually needed.

Structuring Mode

This is the boundary–setting Mode, offering constructive criticism and being caring whilst firm. You respond to, and deal with, situations and take action when a limit has been reached and over-stepped. For example, a trainer outlines the schedule for the day and ensures this is kept to, unless there is a need to alter arrangements.

Co-creative Mode

Co-creativity in this model means being willing to join with others to develop and create something different, whether that be in discussion or in practical or logistical terms. From this Mode you are able to recognize that you can create something together with others that is greater than the sum of the parts. This Mode has developed through learning the rules that help you live with others and can work alongside others for the good of all. Both leaders and team members need to be co-creative and cooperative, which is a very

different behaviour to that of being compliant. When relating from this Mode you behave in ways which keep you and others OK. You are able to consider the pros and cons of each suggestion and work with others. Indeed, productivity would lessen and little or no work would be possible unless people were willing to co–operate. This includes such basic administrative details such as when and where you will meet and who will do what so that you can develop mutuality and co-creativity.

Playful Mode

This is the creative, fun loving, curious and energetic Mode and is closely related to the Co-creative Mode. One of the strengths of this Mode is that you can confront others playfully as a way of dealing with a difficult situation. This can diffuse a potential problem and get the message across. You can be appropriately humorous and also encourage others to be playful.

When in the Mindful Process it is possible to choose which – if any – of the effective Modes to use – depending on the situation. If someone is invited to go into an ineffective Mode they have a choice – though it may not always be a conscious one. They can accept the invitation, and move to a subservient or domineering position in the conversation, or resist this invitation by staying in an OK–OK stance and responding from one of the effective Modes – thus remaining in Mindful Mode. This is referred to in TA as *crossing the transaction* – in that it will be an unexpected response for the other
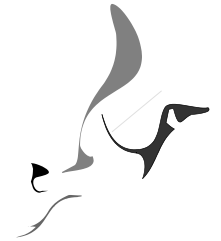
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person. We cover *transactions* in the next chapter, and in the following examples we will start to use transactional diagrams to provide a visual way of plotting a conversation.

From in the Mindful Process you will be treating yourself and others as OK and are more likely to achieve a positive response. You can also have healthy fun from here and enjoy co-creating with others. This follows Berne's idea that when we are operating in a mindful, "integrated" way, we *are* charming and courageous and are appropriately utilising our past experiences in the present moment. This is differentiated from someone who is operating in an ineffective, "unintegrated", Mode and who may "*revert* to being charming, and may feel that he *should* be courageous". (Berne, 1961)

Ineffective Modes

If you slip into one of the ineffective Modes you have left the present and are operating as you did as a child or as a significant person from your childhood behaved with you. In the diagram these are shown as boxes to symbolise the process of defaulting to the past behaviour, and in so doing, being rigid and inflexible.

The ineffective zones all reflect outdated and unintegrated experiences from your past. They will seem to "pop up" out of the blue in the same way that your leg shoots out when a doctor taps your knee to testy our reflexes. You don't seem to be in control of these responses – which would more accurately be described as reactions. They are the "overdone" counterparts of the positive ones within the

Mindful Process circle and are likely to be "hooked" by a trigger, which could be:

- another person's ineffective communication, or

- when someone presses your "button" – a sensitive issue or area for you.

We will now add the ineffective Modes to the previous diagram

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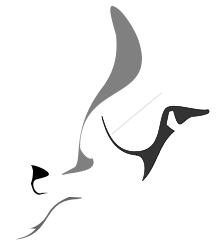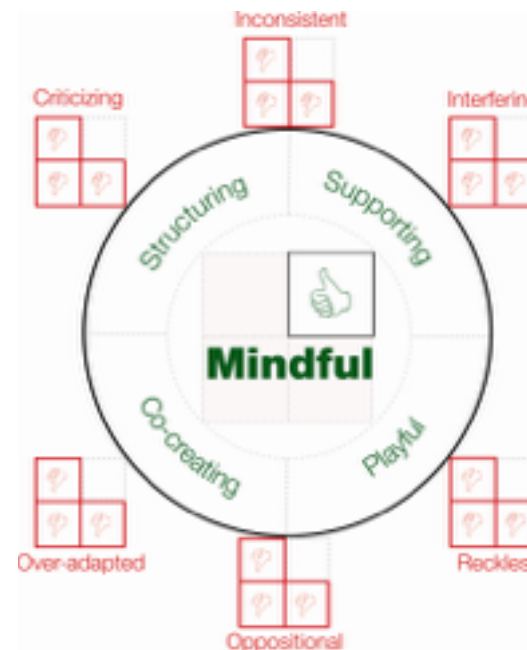
Criticizing Mode

When in this Mode you can be authoritarian and act as though you believe that others cannot do things as well as you. In this Mode you will either persecute, prohibit, or patronise. Leading from this mode is unlikely to develop a loyal supportive team or culture as the workforce will be tense and ill at ease. This mode communicates I'm OK and You're not OK.

Inconsistent Mode

Leaders in this Mode tend to be inconsistent in style – changing their behaviour in unpredictable and apparently random ways. For example, you may sometimes take control when others are capable of doing things for themselves, and then, at other times, sit back and leave the workforce to take control. This behaviour is confusing for those concerned as they do not know which of these options you as the leader will take. This Mode also communicates I'm OK and You're not OK because you either act as if you can do things better than others or you appear to be ignoring their needs.

Interfering Mode

When in this Mode, your behaviour is of "Rescuing" others (see Chapter 9 on Games – the Drama Triangle), that is, doing things for others which, in reality, they are capable of doing for themselves. You could also be over-indulgent or fussing. Here you will behaviourally be expressing I'm OK and You're Not OK.

Over-Adapted Mode

When in this Mode your behaviour is one of over–adapting to others i.e. trying to please others without asking them what they want and being passive and compliant. If you are a leader operating from this Mode you are likely to become stressed as you cannot please all the people all of the time. When in this Mode you express I'm not OK and You're OK or I'm not OK and You're Not OK.

Oppositional Mode

The behaviour in this Mode will be resisting and opposing without any objective or consistent basis for doing so. Employees who do this earn a reputation for being obstructive, saying "No" when others are saying "Yes" and vice versa. When in this Mode you are unlikely to be willing to hear others and consider their perspective, and you will express I'm OK and You're not OK or I'm not OK and You're Not OK.

Reckless Mode

When in this Mode you express You're not OK (or You're Irrelevant). At work you will tend to behave in ways which indicate unwillingness to take responsibility for your actions. Your energy appears unfocused, you fail to keep to agreed time boundaries – by for instance frequently being late. This Mode is different from oppositional Mode in that the actions will not be a response to another person, but more you doing your own thing, regardless of the people around or the situation.

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"TA Proper"

In TA we think about effective communication occurring when we are in our Integrating Adult ego state or in our Mindful Process.

Being aware of which ego state you are commencing conversation from or responding to another's conversation is important as an aid to effective communication. In formal language the opening communication is called the stimulus and the reply is called the response.

We use the OK Modes Model to help explain what goes on during communication. We, at Mountain Associates, do this because without the four types of diagnosis we are unable to know which ego state the other person is relating from. We can decide which ego state *we* are relating from but this is all. Further enquiry about someone else's Structural ego state is inappropriate in the workplace as we rarely have a contract to ask "Did your mother behave that way when you were a child?"!.

This is not the place to go further into transactions using the OK Modes model, but you can find out further information from our book *Working Together, Organizational Transactional Analysis and Business Performance.*

Strokes

Definition:

> *"A stroke is a unit of affection which provides stimulation to an individual"*
>
> Woollams and Brown

Research has indicated that babies require touching in order to survive and grow. It apparently makes no difference whether the touching induces pain or pleasure. Therefore it can be seen that in extreme situations, negative stroking is better than no stroking at all.

Stroking can be physical, verbal or non-verbal. It is likely that the great variety of stroke needs and styles present in the world results from differences in wealth, cultural mores, and methods of parenting.
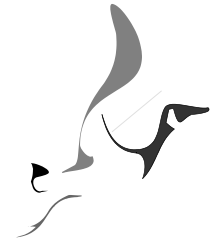
Strokes can be positive and negative:

   A) *"I like you"* B) *"I don't like you"*

Strokes can be unconditional or conditional. An unconditional stroke is a stroke for being whereas a conditional stroke is a stroke for doing. For instance:

   "I like you" - unconditional
   "I like you when you wear that coat" - conditional

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As a negative stroke this might read:

"I don't like you" - negative unconditional
"I don't like you when you're sarcastic" - negative

conditional.

Many people have a stroke filter. That is they only let in strokes which they think they are allowed to let in - e.g. strokes for being clever. They will keep out other strokes - e.g. for being attractive.

Time Structuring

We structure time in a range of different ways:

1. Withdrawal - when a person withdraws. They are mentally removed from others. Daydreams, fantasy and meditation are all forms of withdrawal. It's usually safe, requires little emotional investment and acquires minimal stroke yield.

2. Rituals - safe and predictable way of exchanging strokes. They may be short such as "good morning" or long and complex such as a religious ceremony. They provide important maintenance strokes.

3. Pastimes - just talking about things - not actioning things. Doesn't usually involve real closeness. Discussion about cars or cooking are examples.

4. Activities - work, hobbies, chores. Most people spend most of their time in activities. They produce strokes - for doing something well or negative ones for doing something poorly. Pay-cheques or trophies are other rewards.

5. Games and Rackets - familiar ways of operating which have a predictable outcome, and results in a bad feeling at the end - the racket or substitute feeling (Mountain Associates).

6. Intimacy - most risky and most rewarding. No exploitation. May be pleasant or unpleasant. When a person is convinced she is OK she will risk being open and intimate in more situations.

Script

A script is a personal life plan which we all develop by making a series of decisions early in life. These decisions are based upon the events in our lives and our interpretation of them. We begin making these decisions at birth.

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These decisions form our life plan. In *What Do You Say After You Say Hello* Berne gave the definition as:

"...an unconscious plan made in childhood, reinforced by the parents, justified by subsequent events, culminating in a chosen alternative"

There are also organisational scripts and these come from the person or people who founded the organisation.

Drivers

Driver behaviour occurs when we are under stress. Whilst these drivers influence the way we behave in every day life, they do not become problematic until we start to become distressed. When we believe that we will only be OK as long as we are…….. then we call this Driver behaviour. Hay developed the idea of Working Styles to describe someone's positive characteristics of the driver. Taibi Kahler who developed Process Communication, is more emphatic about only calling these Drivers because they are triggered by stress. This is not the place to discuss these different perspectives so I will outline a few of the characteristics and leave that discussion for another place and time. The descriptors here are not to box people in as we may show a different driver dependent on the Phase were are in (see PCM). The following is offered here as an insight not as the definitive outline of the concept.

"Hurry Up"

People with Hurry Up characteristics work quickly and get a lot done in a short time. Our energy peaks under pressure. Our underlying motivation is to do things quickly. We draw up an action plan with many items, all to be completed in a very short time. We then accomplish the changes only superficially, so that we fail to reap the full benefit of the changes. Or we select our priorities so quickly that we overlook significant areas that we should be working on.

"Be Perfect"

People with Be Perfect as a driver or working style go all out for perfection. Our major strength is producing accurate, reliable work. We aim to produce the perfect action plan, report etc., with just the right priorities and a great deal of detail on how we will implement the changes. This takes us so long that we never quite finish drawing up the plan anyway. Or we make each objective so complex that it would take hours to put any one of them into effect - so we never have a long enough period to get started.

"Please people"

People with this characteristic make good team members. Our aim is to please without asking. We may ask the trainer to tell us what should be in our action plan. If the trainer wisely refuses, we may ask our colleagues on the course, or go back to check with our manager. We want someone else to determine our priorities in case we get it wrong. Or

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we worry about upsetting other people if we make changes to our own behaviour.

"Try Hard"

People with this working style tackle work enthusiastically. Our energy peaks with something new to do. We pay attention to a whole range of aspects which others may overlook when undertaking a task. Try Hard is about trying but not succeeding. We tackle lots of things enthusiastically but never quite finish them. We will have several projects, so that we can move between them any time there is a danger that we might actually achieve one of them.

"Be Strong"

This working style means we keep a stiff upper lip. We stay calm and emotionless and are good in a crisis. We become energised when we have to cope. We keep on thinking when others may be panicking. We are loath to admit to having any weaknesses. We cannot imagine why we would want to change when we are in control of everything already.

Discounting

A definition of discounting:

An internal mechanism which involves people minimising or ignoring some aspect of themselves, others or the reality of the situation. This is done outside of awareness.

There are four *levels* of discounting –

- existence
- significance
- change possibility and
- personal abilities.

There are three *areas* of discounting –

- self
- others and
- the reality situation.

Discounting of self or others can include feelings, perceptions, thoughts and actions.

There are three *types* of discounting –

- stimulus
- problem and
- option

The *levels* and *types* are commonly put into a grid called the discount matrix.

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Games

When people communicate on more than one level at the same time, and when the results of their transactions lead to bad feelings, they are playing a game. A psychological game is defined by Eric Berne as "an ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. The predictable outcome, or payoff, consists of bad feelings for each player".

Games are played without Adult awareness so that the bad-feeling payoff comes as a surprise. Games are noted by their repetitive occurrence, always beginning with a discount and bringing a positive payoff as well as its negative payoff.

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to the exercising of options which maintain OKness in self and invites OKness in others. This happens when a person is in the I am OK and You are OK life position. When two people relate from this position they are able to undertake and achieve tasks, exchange information, and be intimate.

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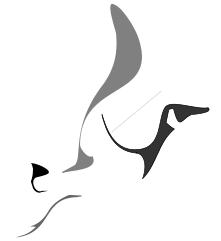
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Information about TA Associations Nationally, Regionally and Internationally

In the UK

Institute of Developmental Transactional Analysis
Wildhill
Hertford
Herts
Email: admin@instdta.org
Website: www.instdta.org

The IDTA is the UK association for the non-psychotherapy applications of TA - for which Julie Hay coined the term "developmental" - to reflect that in organisations and education, the focus is on people developing, rather than on "therapy" per se - though of course these interventions can be therapeutic

UK Association for Transactional Analysis (UKATA)

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The UKATA, whilst being open to membership of people from any of the four fields of application, has a membership consisting almost entirely of people specialising in psychotherapy.

In Europe

European Association of Transactional Analysis http://www.eatanews.org/

EATA is the Europe-wide regional TA association. It is not possible to be a member other than through one of the national Associations (such as IDTA or ITA or any of the other national associations listed below)
EATA is affiliated to ITAA and WAPATA

Internationally

International Transactional Analysis Association
http://www.itaaworld.org/

The ITAA has members in over 65 countries. It is possible to join the ITAA as an individual member. It was the founding TA association - having its beginnings in the San Francisco seminars that Eric Berne ran in the 1960's.

Western Pacific Association of Transactional Analysis
http://www.wpata.com.au/
This body, formed in 1985, encompasses Australia and New Zealand.

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