

Transactional Analysis

Transactional analysis can be used to improve the effectiveness of the way you communicate with people.

Three positions

Transactional analysis (by E. Berne) assumes that we can react to situations and other people from three positions, or 'modes of being', i.e.:

- the Parent
- the Adult
- or the Child

The **Parent** represents values and standards. The parent has acquired a wealth of parents' standards and culture. The parent knows what is good and bad, and how to behave, so he can be critical and condemn others, but he can also take responsibility and care for them.

The **Adult** represents the information-processing system and the skills that a person possesses. The adult processes information, examines and provides information. We could say he is a databank. The Adult can also provide information on the Parent's standards and the Child's feelings.

The **Child** represents emotions, vitality, creativity, and he can also be dependent or cantankerous.

It is important to realise that all three positions are present in every person. It is up to you to decide which one you allow to prevail.

By opting for a certain position you can influence the communication with others. For example, by using this model you can predict whether your reaction will increase or reduce the chance of a conflict. In addition, it allows you to accurately trace where things went wrong after a conflict.

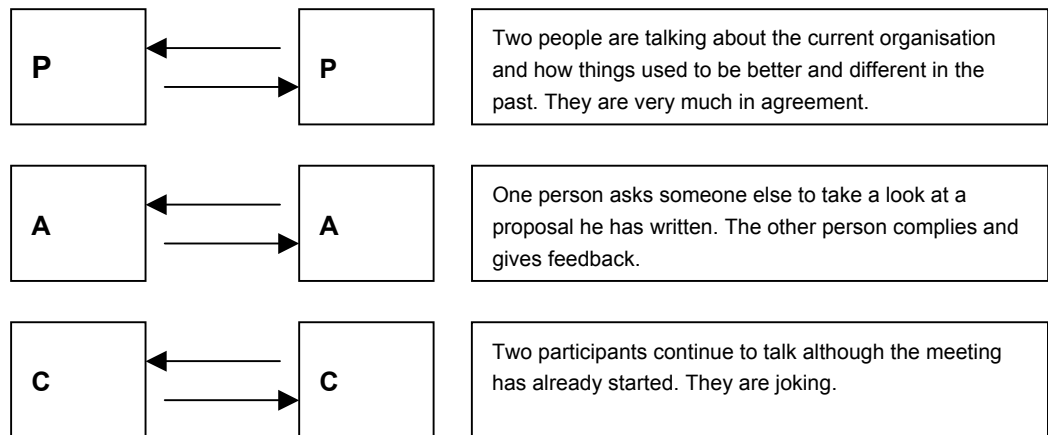
What you, as a manager, can do with the three positions

So every person possesses the three positions and can use them in the interaction with others. As a manager you should be aware of how the interaction is proceeding. When you are able to analyse in which mode of being a participant is communicating, you can attune your own communication to this.

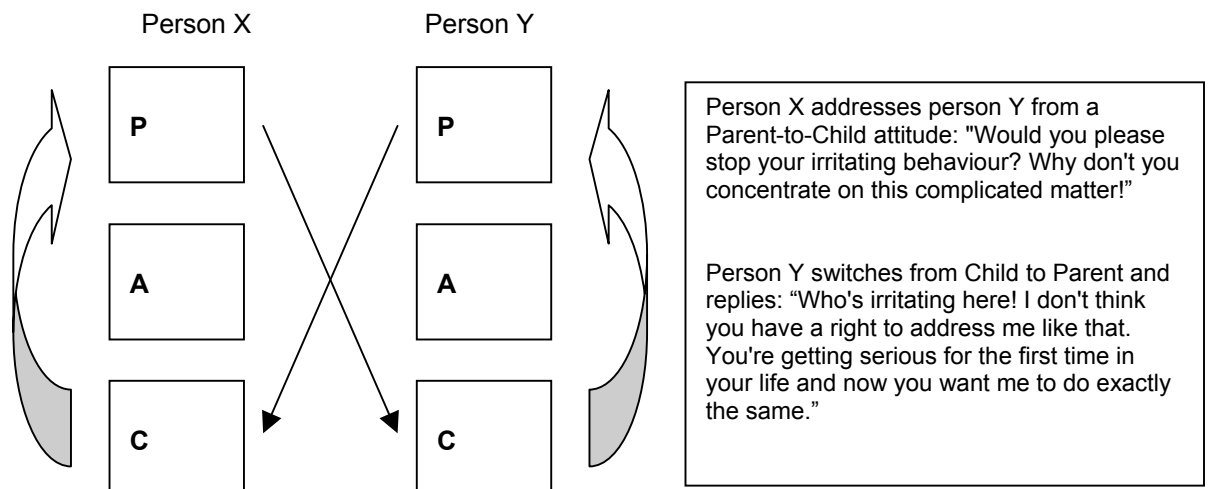
A few rules apply in this respect:

1. Parallel transactions mostly proceed harmoniously and can continue endlessly. When two people are talking with one another in the same mode of being, the communication between the two will proceed well.

Below are a few examples of parallel transactions:



When two people are not talking from the same mode of being, a conflict situation may develop. We call this a cross transaction (the arrows are crossing). Below are a few examples of such situations:



When a conversation as outlined above continues for some time, a serious conflict may arise. As a matter of fact, we see a series of negative, escalating reactions. Y could have prevented a conflict with a parallel reaction, that is, by reacting from the Child position: "Sorry X, I'll never do it again."

But not everyone is fond of the Child role. Y does feel a negative strong emotion (C) but is unwilling to display a parallel reaction. It is impossible for him to switch to the Child position, for there is a special rule:

DATABANK CLOSED BECAUSE OF CHILD

Anyone sensing too much emotion is unable to think properly; the databank, or the A, is inaccessible then. So, there isn't much left for Y than to take his emotion along to the P and to hit back fiercely by accusing X (by addressing X's C).

X was already angry and is now confronted with Y's new negative emotion; he does not want to adopt the C position, is unable to reach the A and therefore strikes back even more fiercely from the P. Y was already angry, etc. The escalation is a fact.

A manager who forces an employee into the Child position and risks a conflict arouses negative emotions.

These emotions may be so powerful that they make it impossible for the employee to think properly (and, thus, make it impossible for him to switch to the Adult position). The employee's choice is then: either P or C.

Thus, the manager will end up with a grouching, grumbling negative employee (P) or with one who takes a dependent attitude (C): "I only work when the boss is watching".

Employees perform adequately from the Adult position. The manager will derive most benefit from a type of communication which allows both to remain in the A position..

The coaching leadership style is an A style.

This does not mean that you no longer adopt any standards or have any feelings at work.

From the A position, it is possible to express both. For instance:

A expresses a P standard without judgement:

"I object to this plan because I cannot guarantee the safety of the people. I would like this standard to come first for you too"

or a feeling:

It is my impression that our meetings are getting duller and duller; I notice that I don't enjoy them anymore. "

How do you get other people in the A position again?

By not leaving that position yourself, even though they choose the P or C position.

When you consistently continue to react from the Adult position, the other person will eventually switch to that position also, and consultation is possible again.

How do you react from the A?

Practically all discussion techniques and interventions are A interventions.

An A position is often evident from the word "I" (the I message).

The P position often uses "you should, you are" (accusations).

When you are **transparent** you provide information about what you want and why you want it.

Transparency requires the A position: You say what you **do** want: "I would like to.... "

Your intentions: "Because I believe in....

because I want to achieve that...."

For instance: you make an intervention when addressing a group which does not respond and remains silent:

"What I want from you is a clear answer.

When you guys don't respond, I don't know what you think and I may choose the wrong solution. I suggest that we briefly ask everyone's opinion"

Also **compliments** are received better from the A position:

" I am pleased with your effort in solving the problems after Dick fell ill".

Instead of P:

" You are very good colleagues for Dick".

When **giving feedback** you can use the three-stage method: observing, consequence, proposal.

Also the three-stage method is an A intervention and consists of three "I messages":

Example of three-stage method:

Observation: "I see that many of you have planned their holidays in July".

Consequence: "I expect that we will be faced with a lack of staff then".

Proposal: "I want to have a meeting as soon as possible to find a way to prevent this."

Instead of P: "Has it ever crossed your mind to consult about the holidays? Now we're facing major absence in July".

Also, **reflecting the feelings** of others is an A intervention:

You describe (A) the feelings of the other person, as observed by you. You do not add any of your own feelings (C) or judgement (P).

Example, A: "You feel so excluded that your pleasure of work is all gone"

Instead of P: "You shouldn't make such a problem of that, they don't mean it that way, that's just the way they are, you allow yourself to be influenced too much"

When a person is full of emotions (C), such as in a **confrontation**, you know that it's no use trying to find solutions (*Databank closed because of child*). The best thing to do then is to reflect, allowing the other person's Child position to be 'drained'. After you have properly reflected a number of times, the other person will say: "What next?"

"That is the signal that he is capable of thinking again (that he is in the A position), allowing you to proceed to finding a solution.

Vicious communication: hidden cross transactions

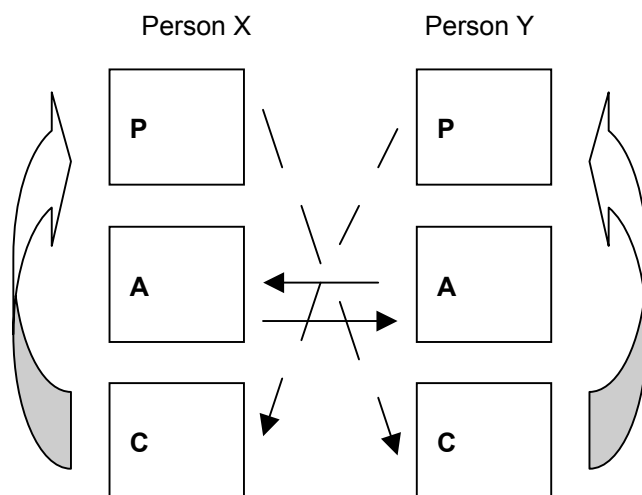
A possible pitfall is the hidden cross transaction: You say something with a hidden ulterior motive.

Quite superficially, it looks like you're asking a question or supplying information (A), but the if you listen well you hear the subdued criticism or insult (hidden P).

When acting in this manner you say something as if you were in the A position, while the other person is expected to understand that you condemn him.

Example:

Your employee is a bit chaotic and you have told him a number of times already that you want him to put his desk straight.



Employee: "Where's my file! I've been looking for it for the last hour. You leave something here, and you can be sure it's gone!"

Manager: "Gee, your file is gone, how could that have happened?"

This is an A, but what is intended is a reprimand; so it is an A(P).

Another example:

You are about to start the meeting and John is reading the newspaper.

You ask a couple of times: Can we start now? John continues to read the newspaper.

Now the vicious game commences:

You ask: "John, is there something interesting in the newspaper?" (a request for information, so an A, but it is a question which you do not want to be answered, so it is an A(P)).

Says John: "You bet, it's fascinating! (answers (A) and acts as if he were really interested in the newspaper, so an A(P)).

You: "Would you mind reading aloud what's so fascinating, John?" (You ask him to read aloud (A) and you want him to guess that he is irritating and that he should put the newspaper away. You give him a riddle, so an A(P)).

John: "Of course, you know I like to do you a favour. Well, here goes. In Rotherham...." etc.

All the sarcasm, all cynical remarks, all questions that you do not really want to be answered, fake emotions, all riddles you include in your communication, are VICIOUS. They will result in conflicts that cannot be discussed, they cause major stress and they cost a lot of energy. After a conflict, analyse where the first cross transaction occurred and you have found the clue to de-escalation.