

# Teambuilding and Transactional Analysis (T.A.)

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Transactional analysis (T.A.) is a model for understanding human personality, relationships and communication. It was developed by Eric Berne and has been growing from the 1960's. To understand T.A. and how to use it in teams, you should first gain a basic understanding of the concepts. Because of the way in which T.A. focuses on behaviour in relationships with others, it becomes an excellent tool for team building.

Overall T.A. looks at the dysfunctional patterns of behaviour in people and between people. In this sense, for team building, you can approach any event by looking for these patterns of behaviours, and working on these. The theory of T.A. outlines a number of these patterns of behaviours, and as the facilitator you will need an understanding of some of these patterns such as: Ego states, transactions, strokes, drivers, life positions, scripts, games, and the drama triangle.

You do not need to know all of these, or to be an expert in any of them, but I would recommend spending some time reading any of the excellent books recommended at the end of this article, to have a basic understanding and some models to apply to the teambuilding.

T.A. can be used in a number of ways:

1. As an overall approach to development (and thus to design events)
2. As an input on the event to help delegates
3. To enable you to become aware of group process
4. To enable you to intervene and develop group process
5. As a tool for your own development

## **1. Using TA as an overall approach to development (used to design events).**

The aims of T.A. are for teams and individuals to achieve a number of things. These are awareness, spontaneity, intimacy and the ability for people to take responsibility for themselves. Awareness is the ability to see things as they really are, not only having the experiences through our own 'filters' or interpreting them according to our own learnt beliefs and values. Spontaneity means the ability to choose from a full range of options in thinking, feeling and behaving, rather than just responding habitually time after time. Intimacy in T.A. terms means the ability to openly share feelings and wants between people.

Becoming 'cured' is not a once and for all event. Rather T.A. sees it as a progressive learning to exercise new choices. This in itself involves experimenting with new behaviours and trying out new ways of working. All of the above can be built into the aims and design of the programme.

A T.A. approach also builds strongly on the idea of contracting, and becoming very clear about what the team would like to change, often in specific behavioural terms. This contract would be detailed and very clearly agreed. All work taking place happens within this contract.

## **2. Using TA as an input**

One of the key ways in which development takes place is by raising awareness. A good way of doing this is by giving the team members inputs or presentations on aspects of T.A. The beauty of T.A. is that the theory comes in sections, each of which can stand alone in its own right. As the facilitator, you can choose which of these theories to share with the group. Ego states, Transactions and Strokes tend to be the most commonly used theories as inputs to

teams. By giving inputs to the team, you are giving them a framework which enables them to look at their own behaviour, and a common language by which they can jointly discuss and resolve issues.

### **3. Using TA to look at team process**

Looking at the team process will be the most powerful way in which you will develop teams. T.A. is an excellent tool for this. The main question to ask yourself overall is "using the frameworks within T.A, what are the common patterns or dynamics of the team?"

For example, what are the most common Ego states of this team? What Ego states are they in when they are not working effectively? What Ego states are not being used effectively or not being used enough? One of the aims of T.A. is to enable individuals and teams to be able to use all the Ego states equally as appropriate, and spontaneously. Therefore as a team-builder, your aim is to help the team develop a complete range of Ego states, and an ability to use these.

- What are the transactions between them, and how are these leading to poor communication?
- Your aim is to enable the communication in the team to be clear from transactions which lead to lack of understanding and 'game playing'.
  
- What is the life script of this team and how is the team fulfilling negative parts of this script?
- Your aim is to let the team discover its unsaid script, identify which parts are preventing them from operating effectively, and to re-write their script in a way in which success is allowed.
  
- How is the team supporting and recognising each other by restricting its strokes?
- Your aim is to get the team freely recognising and rewarding the behaviours that will make them effective.

As well as the above examples, all parts of T.A. theory can be applied to team process in this way, if you choose to.

### **4. Using TA to intervene in group process**

The above understanding of group process will allow you to ask the question 'what can I do to develop this team?' One key way of doing this is by enabling the team to become more skilled and used to using a new or little used Ego state. You can do this by implementing exercises and interventions which encourage the group and individuals to use that Ego state. For example, with the group that uses little or no 'free child', you might give them exercises to allow them to be creative and spontaneous. Alternatively you can 'model' the Ego state that you are encouraging the team to use, allowing the team to learn directly from you.

Another key way is to raise the group's awareness of their patterns of behaviour, particularly their script messages. If they are not coming to these realisations themselves from exercise reviews etc., you can offer direct observations about what you notice about them. Another important part of the modeling process is to model transactions in the way you relate to the

group. You can also pay attention to the transactions between members of the group, and ensure that these are complementary transactions, and not ulterior transactions, by asking people to re-state the comment in a way which is a complementary transaction. The group will learn from what you model, particularly if you explain to them what you are doing and why. Overall you may notice an individual's life positions, and provide interventions to enable them to be in an O.K - O.K. position. After you have learnt a part of T.A. theory, ask yourself how you could apply this to the team situation. I would encourage you strongly to work out your own exercises to use Ego states.

### **Using TA to design exercises**

Here are three possible exercises to explore and understand Ego states:

A. Draw an Ego gram. This is a bar graph in which each bar represents an Ego state. The delegates draw each bar according to how much time they spend in each Ego state. This gives them information to discuss and plan for how they can develop other less used Ego states.

B. In role plays. Get the role player to act into each Ego state. So for example, they may do the role play in parent, and then try parts of it in child or adult. What this does is let them practice using different Ego states, and experience the effect of each. It tends to be a very powerful exercise.

C. Acting the part. Give teams the task of preparing an informal presentation (any topic will do, but it works better when it is related to T.A.). They then have to present back in a particular Ego state. For example they may do the presentation in 'Free Child'. This gives them an understanding of Ego states in practice, not just theoretically.

### **5. Using TA as a tool for your own development.**

In what ways are your own patterns of behaviours driving or affecting the way you are working with the team? For example, do you particularly want the client team to be happy? If so are they hooking into your 'please me' driver? Or in your transactions what do you encourage or allow the team to be? All the theories of T.A. can be applied to you, and the interaction with the group will reflect this. In this sense then, it is an excellent way of looking at and working on your own development.

### **Summary**

Transactional Analysis is one approach to teambuilding. It offers a structured, clear and easily understood approach for trainers and facilitators. It can be used as an overall approach to development and change in teams, or as individual theories and frameworks for looking at teamwork. It is therefore very useful and highly appropriate for the team builder. However, I would say that if you plan to use this approach, it is essential that you have some background knowledge on the topic before using it. The books listed below are excellent and easily readable.

### **Further Reading**

T.A. Today - Ian Stewart & Vann Joines, 1989 Sage publications

Transactional Analysis: A practical handbook for managers and trainers - Ron Clements 1990 Insight Training Ltd

Transactional Analysis for Trainers, McGraw Hill 1995