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**Ron Clements**

## **TA at work**

*Manager: "Where have you been; you're an hour late?"*

*Subordinate: "I've been getting my hair cut".*

*Manager: "But you can't get your hair cut in the firm's time".*

*Subordinate: "Why not? It grows in the firm's time".*

This manager seems to have applied the universally-held belief that things of a purely personal nature are outside the company's area of responsibility.

That may be so. But the point to consider here is, if the man lets his hair grow and doesn't get it cut, then sooner or later it could impinge upon the company's sphere of influence. And hair is not the only thing that grows in the firm's time.

For me an analagous situation is found in the area of personal behaviour, and mainly that caused as a result of difficulty in inter-personal relationships.

For relationships once formed, can flourish and grow, or fester and boil; and all in the firm's time.

With that point in mind, I make this proposal. A man/woman is a total person with his own needs and drives, thoughts and feelings, knowledge and experiences. As he lives out his daily existence he meets situations which may or may not develop into personal problems to be faced, overcome, run away from, ignored or worried about. Sometimes these problems are related to work; sometimes they are not. Whatever their origins, it would be unrealistic to believe that, like hair, although personal problems grow in the firm's time they can only be dealt with outside.

For the organization willing to face up to this reality there is a variety of things it can do. Amongst them I see the introduction and application of Transactional Analysis.

### **Current Applications of TA in Organizations**

Not surprisingly, there is relatively little published material on the uses of TA in organizational settings. By far the largest proportion of available information is concerned with TA as a clinical therapeutic tool. What few industrial publications there tend to describe what TA is rather than report on its uses. What follows then is mainly a description of my own experiences together with reported (rather than published) experiences of other organizational users.

It seems to me the main use of TA at work has been as a model with which to improve communication skills. In this respect a working knowledge of the structure and functions of the personality (ego states), of transactional analysis (complementary, crossed, ulterior), and strokes is all that is required. The ability to recognise ego states and respond appropriately will lessen the possibility of break-downs in communication.

This is especially true for staff who deal with customers, and it is at this level that most companies apply, or think of applying TA. I would estimate nine out of ten clients who approach me want to discuss TA for customer-contact staff.

Now whilst this isn't what Eric Berne had in mind when he developed TA, it is still a valid application. It allows people to communicate more efficiently in order to get their business done. From the employees point of view this is excellent. It means fewer frustrations, fewer arguments and fewer problems. For the smart employee it means more than that. At last he has something to help him understand what is going on in those office relationships that aren't working out. Even more than that, he can use TA in his social relationships too.

So everybody wins. The organization improves the quality of staff/client communication, and probably staff/staff communication too. Whilst the employee has something to help him solve those worrying problems he brings to, or finds at work each day.

Applied at a deeper level, TA is used in organizations as a problem-solving tool. Instruction, specifically designed for organizational settings, is given in all the basic concepts of Transactional Analysis. People are taught how to apply and use them to improve inter-personal relationships. In this respect, I would claim there is no inter-personal problem which could not be analysed and understood using TA.

When used in this way benefits are once again accrued by both the organization and the individual. For the organization, the uncovering and dealing with psychological games means less timewasting and the release of previously mis-channeled energy towards more creative tasks.

From my own experience very dramatic changes in working relationships can be seen. This is especially noticable in team-building workshops where I use TA in a specific and structured way.

For the individual, the awareness of his games, rackets and basic life position can add a whole new perspective to his working life. Usually this awareness is enough to bring about the changes in behaviour that make life more comfortable.

He now has at his disposal a range of concepts and ideas which offer the possibility of analysing, in a satisfactory way, most of his day-to-day problems, both inside and outside the work environment.

This is confirmed by a recent survey I conducted. In response to questions related to self-awareness and the handling of difficult situations, almost 80 per cent of respondents said they were better or much better after attending my TA workshop.

It is a small step from using TA for improving awareness to its use for personal growth and improvement. As far as I know, this is the point at which most organizations draw the line, although there are the odd exceptions. One of them is the large pharmaceutical company in which I ran regular problem-solving group meetings. This group would meet outside working hours to discuss and work on personal problems related to people's working and social situations.

### **Problems of Application**

If TA can give people the tools with which to analyse and solve their problems, why aren't more organizations using it? I don't have a definitive answer to that question, but I do have opinions based on personal experience.

Firstly, there is a large amount of cynicism expressed towards TA, most of which I believe masks an underlying fear of the unknown. That TA was developed as a psycho-therapeutic system is enough to scare off most reactionary business managers. Even the words Transactional Analysis create something of a barrier.

Secondly, the very simplicity of the concepts (TA's greatest strength) causes quite a problem. Because it is easy to learn it is also easy to teach, and this is well within the capability of most training managers. What is more difficult is the effective demonstration of TA as an analytical system. This is something that needs a good deal of experience and specialised professional training; something a large number of teachers of TA (inside and outside organisations) seem to be lacking.

Finally, there is the almost unchangeable attitude of "prove it to me first". (This stance is very often the initiation into one of the psychological games TA seeks to bring attention to). As I mentioned earlier, this lack of solid objective data makes proof more difficult. Of course, lack of evidence of effectiveness is a criticism that can be levelled at most forms of training, and in the end its a matter of "try it and see".

### **The Future of TA in Organizations**

Like most innovations, TA will have a life-cycle that will start slowly, take off and hit a peak, drop away and then plateau out. It is my opinion that TA has not yet reached a peak level of use in organizations in this country. I understand that in The States that peak has been passed and the period of steady decline is in progress.

Looking to the future, I would foresee a rise in the number of companies taking up TA as a communication system. As this becomes more common I anticipate a move into TA as a tool for growth and self-awareness. I see this area growing as the statutory requirements relating to employees rights become more stringent.

The days of hire and fire are disappearing fast. This means an organization can no longer get rid of the 'difficult' employee. The company is stuck with him and his personal problems; whether they originate at work or at home. Given that situation, they are likely to face up to their growing responsibilities in this area. Then analytical models like TA will be accepted and used for the benefit of both the organization and the individual.

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