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Developing TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS COUNSELLING



Series Editor
WINDY DRYDEN

IAN STEWART

**DEVELOPING
TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS
COUNSELLING**

Developing Counselling, edited by Windy Dryden, is an innovative series of books which provides counsellors and counselling trainees with practical hints and guidelines on the problems they face in the counselling process. The books assume that readers have a working knowledge of the approach in question and, in a clear and accessible fashion, show how the counsellor can more effectively translate that knowledge into everyday practice.

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DEVELOPING TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS COUNSELLING

Ian Stewart



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Preface

In this book, I offer you 30 practical suggestions on how to develop your effectiveness in using transactional analysis (TA).

I am assuming that you already know the basics of TA, and that you want now to expand your skills in using it in counselling or psychotherapy. I assume too that you are already seeing clients, or that you are actively in training to do so.

While TA provides the book's core model, you will find much of the material immediately useful even if you work mainly within another approach. The section in Part II on 'Contract-making' offers ways to enhance contractual work in any modality. The Process Model, also described in Part II, provides a powerful system for client assessment and treatment planning that is equally effective inside or outside TA.

New material in this book

Like all the authors in the *Developing Counselling* series, I was briefed by the series editor to consider especially the needs of the newer counsellor. Also, I was to focus on helping people 'avoid common errors'. I set out to choose my 30 suggestions with that in mind, feeling slightly apprehensive that I might end up ploughing through old-hat accepted wisdom.

As I planned the book, however, I was surprised to realise that the information I was choosing for the 30 hints was *not* standard, run-of-the-mill stuff. Far from it: most of it is new. Much of the material in Part II is appearing here for the first time in book form. Some of the 30 suggestions have never been published before, while others have appeared only in the professional TA journal literature. Still others are well-established in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) but have not been applied to TA until now.

It seemed odd to me at first to realise that I was writing mainly about new material, while at the same time addressing 'common errors'. But on thinking about it further, I realised that this is not paradoxical at all. Why should certain errors be 'common errors'?

Because the literature available until now has given little guidance on how to avoid them. I hope this book will help remedy that.

This is the only book at present in which you will find the material on the *Process Model* (Points 17–24) applied to counselling and psychotherapy¹. The suggestions on the use of time-frames and verb tenses (Points 2, 27 and 28) are new in the TA literature. Much of the material on contract-making (Points 9–16) also appears for the first time in print in this book. This includes the *Outcome Matrix* model (Point 10); the distinction between an *action contract* and an *outcome contract* (Point 9); and the idea of a *finishable contract* (Point 12).

How this book relates to TA Counselling in Action

My book *Transactional Analysis Counselling in Action*, published by Sage in 1989, was also a practical guide to the use of TA in counselling and psychotherapy. In choosing the 30 suggestions for the present book, I have started from the principle that I would not duplicate the material in *TA Counselling in Action*. Instead, I have designed this book to be a complement to the earlier one, while still standing alone as a practical guide in its own right.

In *TA Counselling in Action*, I focused especially on the application of three TA models: the script matrix, the Discount Matrix, and the Racket System. I also added my own model of treatment planning.

In the present book, therefore, I have concentrated on other models. In particular, I have given thorough coverage to the Process Model, which I had to leave out of the earlier book for reasons of space. In the few instances where the material in the two books overlaps, this is because I say something in the present book that extends the practical usefulness of the topic concerned.

Thus this book and *TA Counselling in Action* stand alongside each other. My hope is that you will gain from reading the two books together. At the same time, you can read each book on its own without loss of usefulness.

1 A currently-available reference on the Process Model for non-clinicians is Taibi Kahler's book *The Mastery of Management*, published by Kahler Communications Inc., 1301 Scott Street, Little Rock, AR 72202, USA. Kahler's earlier booklets *Managing with the Process Communication Model* (1979a) and *Process Therapy in Brief* (1979b), and his book *Transactional Analysis Revisited* (1978) are now out of print.

'Counselling' and 'psychotherapy'

Different organisations have different ways of defining the distinction between 'counselling' and 'psychotherapy'. In this book I shall follow my usual practice, and treat the distinction as a matter for individual choice. The suggestions here apply to all ways of using TA to help personal change, whether that process be called 'counselling' or 'psychotherapy'. Throughout the book, I use the word 'counselling' in this extended sense.

When I use the term 'therapeutic', I mean it in its generic sense of 'curative'. This curative quality can be found either in counselling or in psychotherapy.

Pronouns, genders and names

I, Ian Stewart, am 'I'. You, the practitioner, are 'you'. Clients, and other people in general, are 'she' or 'he' at random. In the examples I use to illustrate the 30 suggestions, all clients' names are fictitious.

Thanks and acknowledgements

I wish first to acknowledge the generosity of Taibi Kahler. His *Process Model* provides the basis for an entire section in Part II of this book (Points 17–24). When I asked Taibi for permission to quote his work at length, he not only granted that permission, but sent me a detailed set of notes on his latest thinking.

Thanks also to my long-time colleague and fellow-director of The Berne Institute, Adrienne Lee. She and I have co-designed so many workshops and trainings that I find it difficult now to know which of the ideas in this book started in her mind and which in my own. I wish to thank her in particular for developing most of the material on the brief script questionnaire (Point 6).

I am grateful, too, for ideas and suggestions from the graduates and trainees of The Berne Institute. In particular, useful suggestions for this book have come from Diane Beechcroft, Steve Dennis and Maureen Lynch.

Every time I present training, do supervision, or run a workshop, I learn something new from my trainees, supervisees or audience. I thank all of them for what they have taught me. In this book, I hand some of their wisdom on to you.

Ian Stewart

I

Principles of TA

An Outline of TA Theory

My aim in this first section is to give you a sketch of the theory of TA. I am assuming that you already have a working knowledge of TA ideas, and that you will use this introductory section simply as a brief aide-memoire. At the close of Part I, I shall list some sources for further reading on TA theory and practice.

Structure of TA theory

Eric Berne (1961, 1966, 1972) constructed TA theory in a sequence of four components, each of which builds on an understanding of the one before. They are:

- structural analysis (the ego-state model);
- analysis of transactions;
- game and racket analysis;
- script analysis.

In this sketch of TA theory, I shall begin with these four steps of Berne's sequence. Then I shall outline three further areas of theory that have been developed since Berne's death. They are:

- drivers and the Process Model;
- impasses and redecisions;
- discounting and redefining.

a. The ego-state model

Berne (1966: 364) defined an *ego-state* as 'a consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behaviour'. Though Berne did not use the word 'thinking', it is clear from context that he meant thinking to be included as part of 'experience'.

In other words, an ego-state is a set of consistently related behaviours, thoughts and feelings. It is a way in which the person experiences herself and the world at any given moment, and in which she manifests that experience externally in her behaviour.

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Berne's model comprises three distinct types of ego-state, known colloquially as *Parent*, *Adult* and *Child*.

At times, the person may behave, think and feel in ways which she 'borrowed' uncritically from one of her parents, or of others who were parent-figures for her. When she does so, she is said to be in a *Parent ego-state*.

Sometimes the person may regress to ways of behaving, thinking and feeling which he used when he was a child. Then he is said to be in a *Child ego-state*.

If the person is behaving, thinking and feeling in response to what is going on around him here and now, using all the resources available to him as a grown-up person, he is said to be in an *Adult ego-state*.

The initial capital letters – P, A, C – are a device to show that we are referring to the ego-states – Parent, Adult, Child. A small letter beginning the word shows we mean a real-life parent, adult or child.

Traditionally, the three types of ego-state are pictured in a diagram made up of three vertically-stacked circles, each labelled with its initial letter. Figure 1.1 shows examples of this.

When we use the ego-state model to understand various aspects of personality, we are said to be employing *structural analysis*. The model is alternatively known as the *structural model*.

It is important to register that 'being in a Child ego-state' does *not* simply mean that the person is 'being childlike'. It means that she is replaying thoughts, feelings and behaviours that she first employed at a specific age in *her own childhood*.

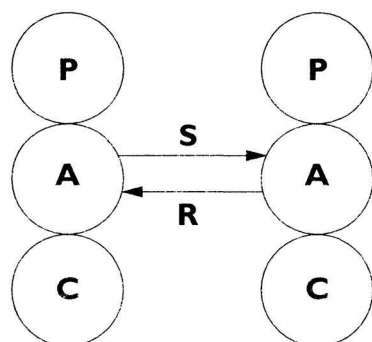
Likewise, 'being in Parent' does *not* simply mean 'being parental'. It means that the person is using thinking, feelings and behaviours that she copied uncritically, as a child, from *her own* parents or parent-figures.

Second- and third-order structural analysis

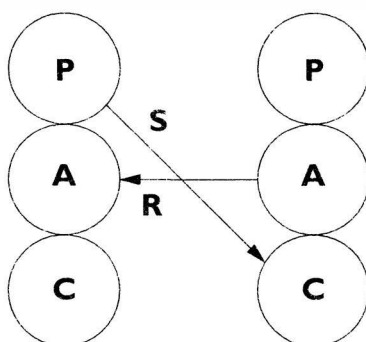
In structural analysis, Parent or Child ego-states may sometimes be further subdivided. This is called *second-order* or *third-order* analysis, depending on the fineness of detail of the additional subdivisions.

In the case of Parent, second-order analysis involves distinguishing the various individual parent-figures that the person has introjected, and mapping the Parent, Adult and Child ego-states of each individual parent-figure.

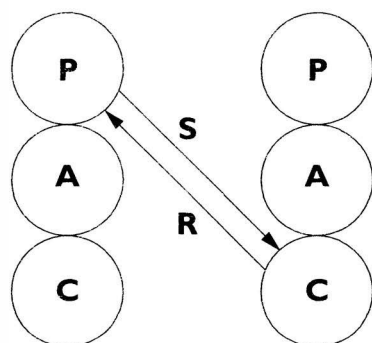
For second-order analysis of Child, one of the person's Child



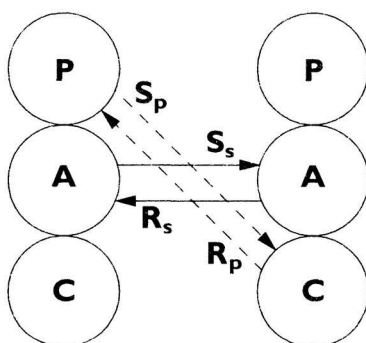
(a) Adult-Adult complementary transaction



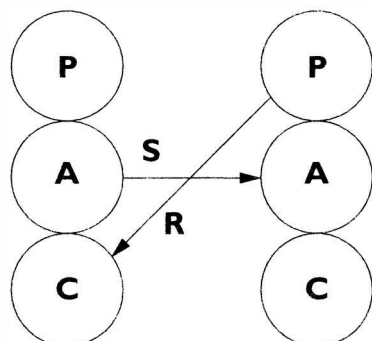
(d) P-C, A-A crossed transaction



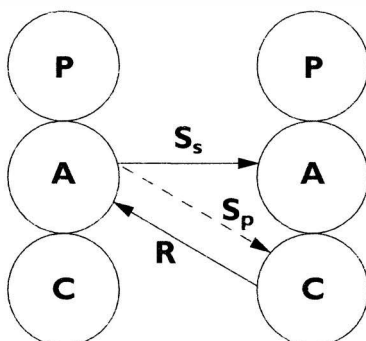
(b) P-C, C-P complementary transaction



(e) Duplex ulterior transaction: social level A-A, A-A; psychological level P-C, C-P



(c) A-A, P-C crossed transaction



(f) Angular ulterior transaction

Figure I.1 *Types of transaction*

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ego-states is analysed in terms of the Parent, Adult and Child ego-states that the person displayed when she was an actual child of the age in question. For example, suppose I regress to a 6-year-old Child ego-state. When I was an actual child of 6, I already had Parent, Adult and Child ego-states that were appropriate to a child of that age. Second-order analysis of my 6-year-old Child, then, maps out these age-appropriate ego-states, which I may still experience and express in adulthood.

Third-order analysis carries this process one stage further. For example, it might entail making an analysis of the still 'younger' Parent, Adult and Child ego-states that go to make up the Child ego-state in my 6-year-old Child.

b. Transactions

If I am communicating with you, I may address you from any one of my three types of ego-state: Parent, Adult or Child. The theory assumes also that I can 'aim' my communication for you to receive it in one of your Parent, Adult or Child ego-states. You have the same set of options in replying to me. This exchange of communications is known as a *transaction* (Berne 1966: 223–7; 1972: 20).

Examples of transactions are shown in Figure I.1. The arrows on the diagrams are known technically as *vectors*. They indicate the origin and the 'aim' of each communication.

In a *complementary transaction* (e.g. Figures I.1a and I.1b) the vectors are parallel and the ego-state addressed is the one which responds. Such communications have an easy, predictable feel to them, and the exchange may go on indefinitely.

A *crossed transaction* is one in which the vectors are not parallel, or in which the ego-state addressed is not the one which responds (e.g. Figures I.1c and I.1d). When a transaction is crossed, communication is interrupted and something different is likely to follow.

In an *ulterior transaction* (e.g. Figures I.1e and I.1f), two messages are being conveyed at the same time. The *social-level* message is what the communication is 'supposed to mean' on the surface. It is shown by the solid vectors. The *psychological-level* message is what the communication really means. It is indicated by the dotted ones.

Where the social-level and psychological-level messages contradict each other, there is said to be *incongruity* in the communication. In such cases, the behavioural outcome of the

communication is determined at the psychological and not at the social level (Berne 1966: 227).

The use of the ego-state model to analyse sequences of transactions is often referred to as *transactional analysis proper*. The word 'proper' is added to show that we are talking about this branch of TA in particular, rather than TA as a whole.

Whenever I transact with another person, I signal recognition of her and she returns that recognition. In TA theory, any act of recognition is called a *stroke*. People need strokes to maintain their physical and psychological well-being. If the person is not receiving a satisfying number of *positive* (i.e. pleasant) strokes, he may unwaveringly revert to childhood strategies to gain *negative* (painful) strokes, following the principle: 'Any stroke is better than no stroke at all'.

c. Games and rackets

In childhood, the person may notice that in her family, certain feelings are encouraged while others are prohibited. To get her strokes, she may decide to feel only the permitted feelings. This decision is made without conscious awareness. As a grown-up, she may at times continue to cover her authentic feelings with the feelings that were permitted to her in her childhood. These substitute feelings are known in TA as *racket feelings* (English 1971, 1972).

TA assumes that authentic emotions are four in number. In traditional colloquial language, these are 'mad, sad, scared and glad'. ('Mad', here, is used in its American sense of 'angry'.) These four emotions, however, are not always authentic. It is possible also to feel racket anger, sadness, scare or happiness.

The person may employ stereotyped sequences of behaviour to 'justify' experiencing racket feelings (e.g. habitually 'losing' a car key and feeling anxious). Such behaviour patterns are called *rackets*.

A *game* is a repetitive sequence of transactions in which both parties end up experiencing racket feelings. It always includes a *switch*, a moment when both players suddenly change roles (Berne 1972). People play games without being aware they are doing so.

d. Script

Eric Berne (1972) suggested that every person, in childhood, writes a life-story for himself. This story has a beginning, a

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middle and an end. The person writes the basic plot in his infant years, before he is old enough to talk more than a few words. Later on in childhood, he will typically add more detail to the story, and the main plot is likely to have been laid down by the age of 7. The incidental details of the story may be revised or elaborated during adolescence.

In grown-up life, the person is usually no longer consciously aware of the life-story he has written for himself. Yet, especially at times of stress, he may often act it out. Without being aware of it, he may set up successive episodes in his life so that he moves towards the final scene he decided upon as an infant. This preconscious life-story is known in TA as the *life-script* or simply the *script*.

The concept of script ranks with the ego-state model as a central building-block of TA. *Script analysis* means the use of various procedures to help uncover the preconscious material that makes up the person's script.

Berne (1972: 84) suggested that the script is predicated on one of four *positions*. These are deeply-ingrained convictions about the worth of self and others, which the child adopts at an early stage of development. The four positions (often known today as 'life positions') are:

- I'm OK, you're OK;
- I'm OK, you're not-OK;
- I'm not-OK, you're OK;
- I'm not-OK, you're not-OK.

The *script matrix* (Steiner 1966, 1974) is a model that shows how parents may pass *script messages* to the child. A blank script matrix is shown in Figure 1.2. The messages passed down from the Parent in the parent to the Parent in the child are known as *counterinjunctions*. These typically comprise 'oughts and shoulds', parental value-judgements, and verbal commands about what the child should or should not be or do. Counterinjunctions are messages that the child receives in later childhood, when she has developed a good command of language.

Script messages passed from the Adult in the parent, and housed in the Adult of the child, are called *program messages*, and typically begin 'Here's how to . . .'.

Messages passed from the Child of the parent, and received in the Child of the child, are called *injunctions* if they are negative and restrictive (e.g. Don't Exist, Don't Be You), and *permissions* if they give the child positive choices (e.g. It's OK to Exist, It's OK to Be You). These Child messages are typically received by the

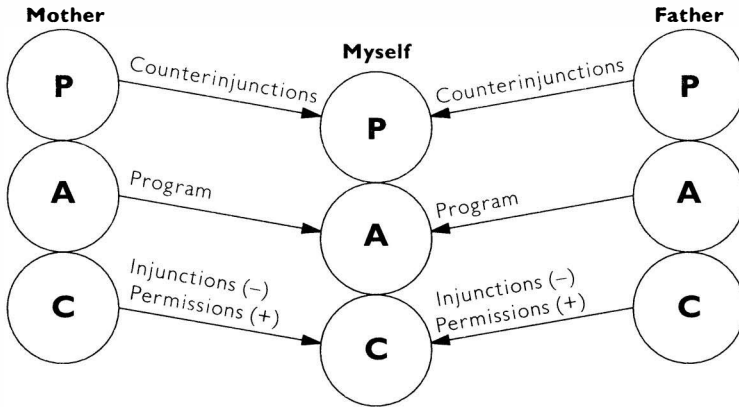


Figure I.2 The script matrix (Source: Stewart and Joines 1987: 129)

child during earlier childhood, before she has full command of language. They are initially transmitted non-verbally by the parent, though they may be reinforced verbally later. Injunctions find their origins in unmet Child needs in the parent, and are usually passed on to the child without the parent's awareness.

Mary and Robert Goulding (1979: 34–9) have listed 12 injunctions that turn up time and again in script analysis. They are:

- Don't Exist
- Don't Be You (sometimes, Don't Be the Sex You Are)
- Don't Be a Child (or, Don't Enjoy)
- Don't Grow Up (or, Don't Leave Me)
- Don't Make It (Don't Succeed)
- Don't (i.e. Don't Do Anything)
- Don't Be Important
- Don't Belong
- Don't Be Close
- Don't Be Well (or, Don't Be Sane)
- Don't Think
- Don't Feel.

The parents' messages cannot *make* the child develop a particular script, though they can exert a powerful influence upon it. In the last analysis, the child *decides* which of the messages to follow. These *early decisions* are arrived at with a young child's powers of reasoning and reality-testing.

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The word '*scripty*' is often used to describe behaviours, beliefs and feelings that the person engages in while playing out her script.

e. Drivers and the Process Model

Work by Kahler (1974, 1979b) has revealed that five messages among the counterinjunctions are of special significance to the *process* of script – that is, to the issue of *how* the script is lived out over time. When the person hears one of these *driver messages* in internal dialogue, she will externally exhibit a typical short-lived pattern of behaviour that is characteristically attached to that driver message. These 'behaviour packages', which typically last for about half a second at a time, are known as *driver behaviours*.

Following TA tradition, Kahler used colloquial language to label the five drivers. He called them *Be Perfect*, *Be Strong*, *Try Hard*, *Please You* and *Hurry Up*.

Driver behaviours are not specific to any culture, language, age group, educational background, or other feature of personality. There is some evidence that persons from different cultures may show the five driver behaviours with differing relative intensities, but everyone shows all five drivers from time to time. No other driver behaviours but these five have yet been discovered.

Driver behaviours are significant for several reasons. First, they appear to be a 'gateway into script'. Immediately before a person engages in scripty behaviour or experiences a racket feeling, she will always show one of the driver behaviours. The drivers themselves are external indicators that the person is replaying a specific script belief internally. I shall say more about the applications of this in Point 17.

Second, observation of drivers is the key to quick and reliable diagnosis of many other aspects of the script. It is the basis of the diagnostic system known as the *Process Model* (Kahler 1979b; Ware 1983). I shall describe this in detail in the third section of Part II (Points 17–24).

Script process

The detailed *content* of each person's script is unique to that person, though various broad categories of script message can be distinguished (see the section on 'Script' above). By contrast, script *process* seems to fall into a relatively small number of

distinctive patterns (numbered at six or seven, depending on the TA writer quoted). For reasons that are not fully understood, these patterns also appear to be uniform across cultural boundaries.

A person's process script type is closely correlated with her driver behaviours. I shall discuss process scripts, and their link with drivers, more fully in Point 20.

f. Impasses and redections

The *rededecision school* of TA combines the theoretical framework of TA with concepts and techniques from Gestalt therapy (Goulding and Goulding 1978, 1979). A central notion of the rededecision approach is that of the *impasse* – a 'stuck place' in which the person experiences two conflicting urges, but does not act on either, and uses a lot of energy in remaining stuck.

Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, had characterised the *impasse* as an internal struggle between 'topdog and underdog' (Perls 1971). Robert and Mary Goulding framed Perls' ideas in TA terms by suggesting that the intrapsychic struggle was being fought out between two different ego-states. Thus, the person might experience a conflict between an internal Parental voice urging him to 'Work hard!' and his Child response of 'Don't want to!'.

In the Gouldings' model of personal change, the *decisional* nature of script is stressed. It is assumed that, because it was the child who made the original script decision, it will be in the Child ego-state that the person can most powerfully change that decision in the here-and-now. Such a new decision in Child is called a *rededecision*.

g. Redefining and discounting

The young child decides on a life-script because it represents the best strategy that the child can work out to survive and get his needs met in what often seems a hostile world. When the person is in a Child ego-state, he may still be believing that any threat to his infant picture of the world is a threat to the satisfaction of his needs, or even to his survival. Thus he may sometimes distort his perception of reality so that it fits his script. When the person does this, he is said to be *redefining* (Mellor and Sigmund 1975b).

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The sum total of the person's perception of the world at any given moment – including both those aspects which he is redefining and those which he is not – is called the *frame of reference* (Schiff et al. 1975).

One way in which the person can ensure that the world seems to fit her script is to selectively ignore information available to her about a situation. Without conscious intention, she blanks out the aspects of the situation that would contradict her script. This is called *discounting* (Mellor and Sigmund 1975a).

As a part of maintaining their scripts, people may sometimes get into relationships as grown-ups which replay the relationships they had with their parents when they were children. This is done without conscious awareness. In this situation, one of the partners in the relationship may play the part of Parent and Adult, while the other acts Child. Between them, the two people then function as though they had only three instead of six classes of ego-state available. Thus both parties are discounting some of their ego-state options. A relationship like this is called a *symbiosis* (Schiff et al. 1975).

These ideas form the basis for the theory and practice of the *Cathexis* (or *Schiffian*) school of current TA.