

Transactional Analysis



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Open mind; new thinking and shared thinking

Open heart; deep genuine empathy for the whole system

Open will; practical application supported by development partners

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It has always been my belief that if we each take responsibility for our impact and are honest enough to hear feedback then we can grow as people and as leaders. Transactional Analysis helps us to understand our responses to the communication and behaviours of others and to reflect on why we respond the way that we do. We can all get hooked by the communication and behaviours of others, especially if they reconnect with old tapes and patterns of behaviour. Leaders need to minimise the impact of the assumptions that they have about others, maximise listening, and importantly maximise the impact of leadership communication.

In the early 1950s Dr Eric Berne developed a theory about personality development tied to communication, which he called 'transactional analysis' (TA). It is a very useful and fascinating framework for analysing the behaviour of both ourselves and other people.

Complete the following questionnaire to learn more.

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Personal Styles Questionnaire

The personal styles questionnaire begins to give you some insight into how values and beliefs and the associated thinking and behaviour patterns have an impact on your communication preference. This is an overview only and it is important to realise that there are advantages and limitations to **all** the preferences.

Please approach this in your “work” frame of mind, especially how you are with colleagues, people you lead and your leader. For each statement allocate a score to show how much the behaviour is like the way you behave - go with your gut reaction and enjoy it!

Scoring Guidance

0 = Not true for me

1 = Sometimes true for me

2 = Generally true for me

3 = Nearly always true for me

1. I am firm in terms of behaviour that I consider acceptable/unacceptable
2. I tend think things through thoroughly before making a contribution or taking action
3. I believe that I should do as I am asked
4. I behave sympathetically towards people with problems
5. I really enjoy being with other people
6. I enjoy taking care of people
7. I enjoy solving problems in a systematic and logical way
8. I am comfortable telling people what to do
9. I let people know how I really feel without embarrassment
10. I follow social norms in terms of expected behaviours
11. I can sometimes be unpredictable
12. I frequently find myself supporting new people or people new to a role
13. I can stay calm in a crisis
14. When I know I’m right I insist that others listen to me
15. I ask a lot of questions
16. I am passionate and excited about my work
17. People seem to expect me to know the answer
18. I pride myself that it is my role to take care of my people

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19. I am uncomfortable with upset or conflict
20. I keep on thinking logically even under pressure
21. My working style is systematic, methodical and organised
22. It is important to me that I fit in
23. I will often do things myself, rather than taking the time helping others to learn
24. I can quote my previous experience when problems occur
25. People tell me I'm creative and inventive
26. I prefer to take control rather than follow someone else's lead
27. I can get over involved with people's personal lives
28. I'm over-emotional compared to others around me
29. I expect my manager to set my terms of reference
30. I take all points of view into account when making a decision
31. I encourage people to test their own capabilities
32. People complain I'm bossy
33. I spend time enjoying myself
34. I will go out of my way to look for what's good in people
35. I'm noted for my even temper and balanced comments
36. I need people to understand how I am feeling to gain reassurance
37. I have taken on the work of others
38. I often over analyse and get absorbed in detail
39. People do as I tell them
40. I have agreed to and followed through on things that I didn't agree with

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Scoring the Questionnaire

Transfer your scores to the table below against the appropriate question numbers.

Q	Score	Q	Score	Q	Score	Q	Score	Q	Score
1		4		2		3		5	
8		6		7		10		9	
14		12		13		11		15	
17		18		20		19		16	
24		23		21		22		25	
26		27		30		29		28	
32		31		35		34		33	
39		37		38		40		36	
TOTALS									
	CP		NP		A		AC		NC

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You have completed the TA Personal Styles Questionnaire. Berne believed that we are always operating from one or other of the states - in the way we habitually think and behave in response to life's stimuli. There are three 'ego-states' in which we think and behave as the Parent (CP Controlling Parent, NP Nurturing Parent), the Adult (A) or the Child (AC Adapted Child and NC Natural Child). These states are developed over our life and the influences, footprints and experiences form our values and beliefs, our thinking, including our thinking about leadership and our associated leadership behaviour.

We all operate in all the states, but we may be in some more than others. There is nothing wrong with being in a particular state: no one state is 'better' than the others. However, we may find it more helpful in achieving our outcomes to be in a particular state at a particular time - what we need is to get our state right for the current situation, constantly asking if we are in the right state for the transaction we are dealing with.

We are often asked about the perfect score. There is no such thing, only the patterns of communication that are effective, engaging those you lead to also taking ownership and responsibility for the future. The numbers represent the frequency with which you use each of the communication preferences. The bigger the gap between your top preference and the next represents the strength of the preference.

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Parent State

The parent in TA is the set of recordings in a person's mind of imposed, unquestioned, external events perceived between birth and age 5 years. They are derived mostly from parents' (or parental figures') speech and behaviour - admonitions, punishments, cuddles, encouragement. Berne says they are permanent and cannot be erased, and at intervals throughout our lives they will be played back and influence our behaviour.

It is sometimes described as **'Life as it is taught'**.

When behaving in our parent state we can be judgemental, tradition-oriented, regulatory and conventional; alternatively, we may be supportive and protective. We think, feel and do as the 'parent figure' did - with views of right and wrong, good and bad, and how we should behave, e.g.; 'be strong', 'don't show your feelings', 'do as you're told', 'feel responsible'. The parent state can be broken down into two aspects: **controlling and nurturing parent**.

The types of behaviour we display when we are operating in our parent state are:

As a Controlling Parent (CP)		As a Nurturing Parent (NP)	
Behaviours Sets limits/boundaries Disciplines Keeps traditions Judges Criticises Makes rules	Words should always never ought must	Behaviours Gives advice Coaches/develops Protects Comforts Encourages Nurtures	Words let me don't worry it will all be fine what do you need? I can show you how to...
You as a Controlling Parent When do you think and behave in this way?		You as a Nurturing Parent When do you think and behave in this way?	
How does this help you?	When is this appropriate with your team?	How does this help you?	When is this appropriate with your team?
You as a Controlling Parent When you think and behave in this way...		You as a Nurturing Parent When you think and behave in this way...	
What assumptions are you holding about others?	What is the impact on engagement, innovation and customer focus?	What assumptions are you holding about others?	What is the impact on engagement, innovation and customer focus?

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Child State

The child in TA consists of recordings of *internal* events (feelings) experienced in the first five years of life in response to external events. Berne says that, like parental recordings, those in the child are permanent and can easily be triggered by events in adult life so as to influence behaviour. When behaving in our child state we think, feel, do as we did when we were small - we are *free/natural*, creative, experimental, joyful, playful - we are obedient, rebellious, insecure, anxious, scared - **adaptive** so our needs are met. It is sometimes known as '**Life as it is felt**'. The child state can be broken down into two aspects: **natural/free and adapted child**.

The types of behaviour can display when we are operating in our child state are:

As an Adapted Child (AC)		As a Natural Child (NC)	
Behaviours Obedient Conditioned/conventional responses Insecure Anxious/scared Sullen/rebellious	Words No chance/I'll try Please/thank you Sorry/I don't care! I can't do that/I won't do that I'm only a... The organisation says...	Behaviours Asks questions Natural/free Creative/Innovative Experimental Joyful Lacks boundaries Selfish	Words I'm wondering? I'm curious? I want to mine won't scared fantastic
You as an Adapted Child When do you think and behave in this way?		You as a Natural Child When do you think and behave in this way?	
How does this help you?	When is this appropriate with your team?	How does this help you?	When is this appropriate with your team?
You as an Adapted Child When you think and behave in this way...		You as a Natural Child When you think and behave in this way...	
What assumptions are you holding about others?	What is the impact on engagement, innovation and customer focus?	What assumptions are you holding about others?	What is the impact on engagement, innovation and customer focus?

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Adult State

The third state, adult, is the last one to develop, beginning at around 10 months of age. It is formed from data acquired and computed through exploring, thinking out and testing ideas. We use the data stored in our parent and child states as information with a similar standing to that which we experience in the 'real' world - comparing and testing it to make it fit other knowledge. We then store it in the adult, leaving the parent and child recordings unaltered. It is sometimes known as '**Life as it is tested**'. When behaving in our adult state we operate in the 'here and now'; are rational and unemotional. We seek information, respect other people, and are assertive and considered in our communication.

As an Adult		You as an Adult When do you think and behave in this way?	
Behaviours Asking questions to gather data/information Analytical Rational and logical Non-judgemental Unemotional Detached	Words When/where/what Who/why Facts/alternatives Results/reasons Check it Solutions	How does this help you?	When is this appropriate with your team?
You as an Adult When you think and behave in this way...			
What assumptions are you holding about others?		What is the impact on engagement, innovation and customer focus?	

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Thinking about your interaction with others - Effective Transactions

Positive Nurturing Parent - communicates the message "You're OK". When in this mode the person is caring and affirming.

Positive Controlling Parent - communicates the message "You're OK". This is the boundary setting mode, offering constructive criticism, whilst being caring but firm.

Positive Adapted Child - communicates an "I'm OK" message. From this mode we learn the rules to help us live with others.

Positive Natural Child - communicates an "I'm OK" message. This is the creative, fun loving, curious and energetic mode.

Adult Accounting mode - communicates "We're OK" messages.

The Adult is able to assess reality in the here and now. When in Adult mode it is possible to choose which of the other effective modes to go into, dependent on the situation. When stable in this mode we are then able to respond appropriately, rather than flipping into archaic or historic ways of being, thinking and behaving which could be inappropriate and unhelpful.

Thinking about your interaction with others - Ineffective Transactions

Negative Controlling Parent - communicates a "You're not OK" message, and is punitive.

Negative Nurturing Parent - communicates a "You're not OK" message. When in this mode the person will often do things for others which they are capable of doing for themselves. When in this mode the person is engulfing and overprotective.

Negative Adapted Child - expresses an "I'm not OK" message. When in this mode the person over-adapts to others and tends to experience such emotions as depression, unrealistic fear and anxiety.

Negative Natural Child - in this mode the person runs wild with no restrictions or boundaries. In this mode they express a "You're not OK" message.

When we are dealing with others, operating in particular states is likely to generate particular responses from them. For example, a controlling parent is likely to 'hook' an Adapted Child (or possibly another controlling parent). Let's look at a specific transaction between two people. If a facilitator of a learning sessions says to you after an exercise: 'That was a very disappointing piece of work: I would have expected better from you' (from their Controlling Parent state) - what is your response likely to be? First, examine how are you feeling - it is quite likely that you are feeling a mixture of emotions. Perhaps, you feel upset and worried and may respond with: 'I'm so sorry, I just could not get the hang of what you wanted - I was trying hard, really' perhaps in a rather distraught or whining voice. On the other hand you may feel rather rebellious: 'Who does she think she is, commenting like that?' You may then well respond: 'What was wrong with it?' in an angry and resentful voice. Both of these responses are from your adapted child state. It might just 'hook' your own Controlling Parent state so that you respond with 'You should not speak to me like that.'

None of these responses is particularly helpful if the outcome that the facilitator was looking for was an improvement in performance. What would have been helpful is to have engaged in a discussion about what was really good about the work (positive nurturing parent) ask questions about what they think would improve (positive natural child) and agree a way forward (positive adult).

However, there may be times when operating from a Controlling Parent state is just what is required. For example, if you're facilitating a group session and despite previous interventions the group has not made the required decision and there is only a limited amount of time left, then you might say: 'We must take a decision in the next five minutes. I propose we take a show of hands.'

The transaction can work the other way round. If you operate, for example, from your Adapted Child state, saying in a group session discussing the timetable for the introduction of a new computer system 'Oh dear, I don't think I shall be able to persuade my colleagues that we can meet the deadline', probably in a rather pathetic voice, you will usually hook some form of parental response. For example, the response may come from a Nurturing Parent: 'Don't worry, we'll help you' or it might hook a controlling parent who responds:

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'There's no choice: you must meet the deadline,' probably in a rather irritated manner. Neither of these responses would be very useful to you. What you need is to discuss ways of persuading your colleagues or renegotiating the deadline. Again, this is a transaction better undertaken with both parties in their adult states using positive Natural Child to generate new ideas and possibilities.

We are often asked whether there are ever times when it is helpful to operate from an Adapted Child state, as it sounds rather unattractive. The answer is definitely 'yes'. If you are really in trouble, under pressure or frightened, you may want the support and protection offered by someone operating in their Nurturing Parent state. The only problems that can arise are that people get locked into habitual transactions - you get used to always going to your manager whatever the nature of the problem or decision required, and lose your confidence to make these judgements yourself. Or your manager gets used to giving you very detailed instructions, checking up frequently to see how you are getting on, and stops expecting you to take any decisions. We saw a classic example of this locked behaviour when we did some work with a team that was experiencing difficulties - we call this the Nice but Useless Team. Everyone said how supportive the manager was, she always had an open door, wanted to know how you were and how things were going. However, they felt that sometimes she did not have her eye on the ball and the team lacked direction.

The manager said what a super team she had, they were always so helpful. However, she felt under great pressure because they kept coming to her with all their minor problems and decisions and she simply did not have time to do her own work. When we described the model to them the whole team immediately identified what was happening - the manager was operating in Nurturing Parent state and the whole team in Adapted Child state.

Someone operating in Natural Child may 'hook' a Nurturing Parent who will respond lovingly and tolerantly to the probably exuberant behaviour in situations where there are no constraints, e.g. no work to be done or lessons to be learned against a tight deadline. In the work situation, such behaviour can 'hook' a Controlling Parent response in the person who gets fed up with other members of the group 'who are just larking around and not pulling their weight'. Alternatively such behaviour might hook another Natural Child response: 'Fantastic idea, let's try something really way out' - such behaviour can be very infectious - which can be very useful when you want the group to be acting creatively.

The Natural Child state can also be a very useful learning state - particularly when you want the group to think outside their normal boxes, be willing to experiment and open their minds to new and perhaps rather radical ideas. As adults, we often learn best when we are having fun!

Someone operating in Adult state is most likely to 'hook' an Adult response. If someone is being very rational, reasonable and calm it is quite difficult to respond from either the Parental or Child states. However, it is not helpful always to respond to a Parent or Child stimulus with an Adult reaction straight away. If someone is very upset or worried, our building rapport skills will tell us that we need to enter their world and understand how they are feeling before leading them out of it. So an appropriate response could be to match their voice and body language (remember the 'little goes a long way' maxim) but asking questions about what is causing the problem. The very act of the person's having to think about the answers to those questions, means that he or she starts to go into analysis mode and move towards a more Adult state.