

Transactional Analysis

What is it?

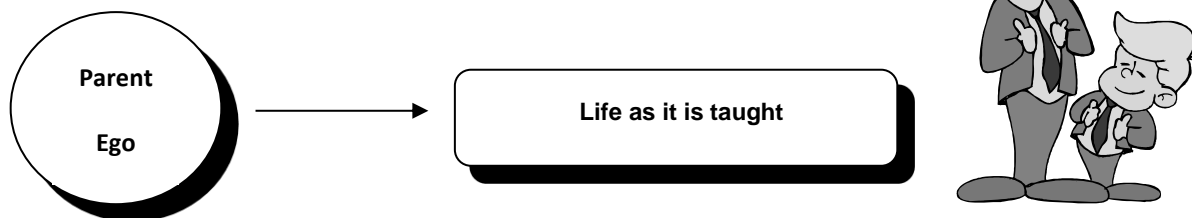
Transactional Analysis (or TA as it is often called) is a model of people and relationships that was developed during the 1960s by Dr Eric Berne who realised that people often behave as though there is more than the one person in the same body.

It gives us a way of understanding ourselves and other people, interactions (or transactions) between people and the underlying reasons for certain behaviours. According to Berne, individuals possess 3 'Ego States'.

What's an Ego State?

An ego state is simply a consistent set of related behaviours, thoughts and feelings. It is the way we use part of our personality at a particular time. There are three distinct ego states called the '*Parent*', the '*Adult*' and the '*Child*'.

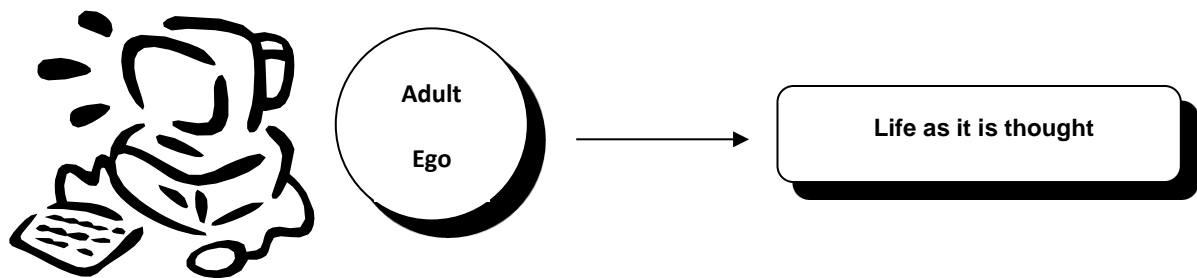
The *Parent* Ego State explained:-



The *Parent* can be seen as the 'tape recording' of all the things taught to us at a very early stage, primarily from parents and other authority figures that influenced us. The tape recording includes attitudes, opinions and how to behave. It is available for instant replay at any time, such as when we respond to the here and now by calling on it to deal with a situation.

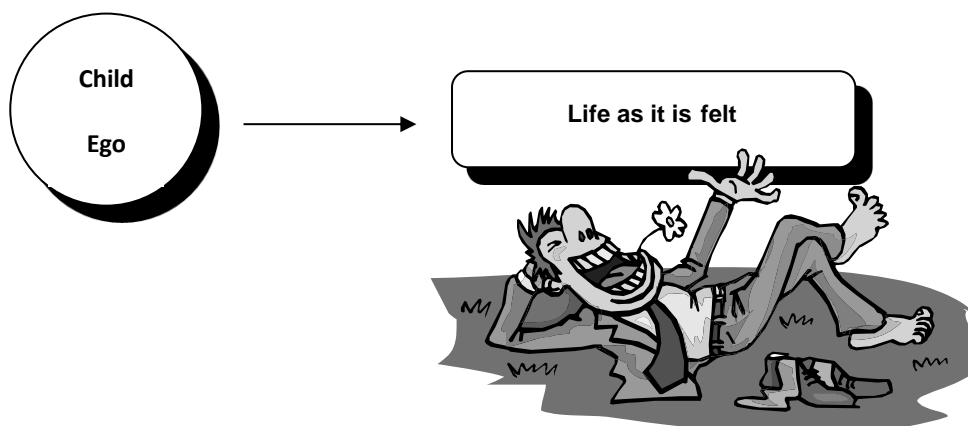
When we operate in the Parent Ego state, sometimes we can be **critical and judgmental**, (-like your parents might have been, so we might use phrases such as, "Other people are never to be trusted and will take advantage", or "Under no Circumstances...", so very authoritative, but at the opposite end of the scale we might behave in a **nurturing and caring** way, so you might say phrases like "Take care now" and "Don't worry about it, it will be OK".

The *Adult* Ego State explained:-



The '*Adult*' Ego State is not related to a person's age - it is the ego state we are operating from when we are objectively appraising reality, using information from all sources to get to a view, without our *Parent* interpreting it for us. When we are in our *Adult* Ego State we tend to ask the traditional questions of "Who?", "What?", "Where?", "When?" and "Why?", and are prepared to take fresh information on board, evaluate it and come to a decision based on it as to how to proceed. Here we make the choice. In some ways the *Adult* can be likened to a computer.

The *Child* Ego State explained:-



Generally speaking, when we are being inquisitive, selfish, affectionate, playful, creative, mean, manipulative, etc, or are simply having fun, we are operating from our *Child* Ego State, so you might hear or say things like "Let's try it and see" or "No, I won't do that" like a typically sulking child or spoiled brat!

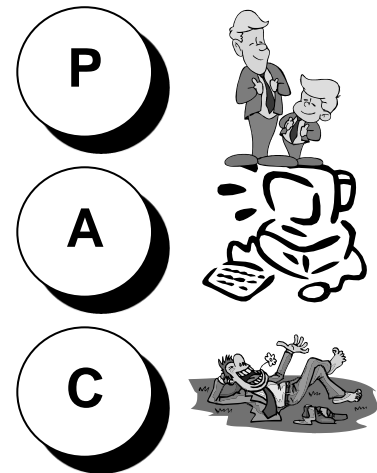
This consists of all the urges and feelings which come naturally and spontaneously, and also the 'replay' of our early experiences, how we responded to them and the feelings this caused. It is this 'replaying' which occasionally causes us to feel, act, talk and respond in the way we did when we were a child of a certain age.

In many ways the *Child* Ego State part of us is one of the most important, for it operates strongly, and sometimes unexpectedly, in organisational life. Many of our most important decisions and discoveries in life are influenced by our *Child*.

The PAC Model

A summary of the model is that when people are acting, feeling and thinking as they observed their parents to have done, they are in the *Parent* Ego State. Their *Parent* decides for them, without reasoning, how to respond to the here and now problem and other people. When they are appraising reality, gathering facts and making objective judgements, they are in the *Adult* Ego State, and when feelings predominate and they feel and act as they did when children, they are in the *Child* Ego State.

There are no absolute rights or wrongs about behaviour from any one of the ego states. What is appropriate depends upon the nature of the interaction. Importantly too, the boundaries between the states are not rigid; rather, people tend to move from one ego state to another, again depending on the situation. For example, there are occasions when it is appropriate to have fun or release stress and tension, occasions when an analytical, considered approach matters - such as when making important life decisions - and occasions when responding automatically is necessary - such as telling someone not to do something which is about to cause an accident. For this reason it is usual to show the ego states in the diagrammatic form opposite.



Adapted from 'Human Aspects of Management'

By Derek Biddle and Robin Evenden

Key Learning Points about the PAC Model in Use:-

The key things to note when applying this model to your behaviour during times of conflict and difficult conversations are as follows:-



- Be mindful of which ego state particular clients play – they don't necessarily play one role consistently and can often switch from one state to another quickly.
- You should act in the Adult ego state in the main with maybe some parts Parent ego state where it's really necessary to nurture. Definitely steer clear of the Child ego state at all costs!
- Remember, it's particularly easy to be dragged down by someone else acting in their Child ego state and to match their level by bickering or arguing unnecessarily.