

TA Tribe

ONLINE TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS TRAINING AND SUPERVISION
FOR ORGANISATIONAL PRACTITIONERS

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Focus Paper - Cracking the Code CORE CONCEPTS IN TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

This focus paper is about developing our skills as a TA Practitioner when working with other people in order to aid their development. Whether you are a coach, trainer or manager, having a deeper understanding of the behavioural aspects of script will inform your actions and give you options.

As always when meeting any TA theory for the first time, we need to apply the theory to ourselves first, then clients and/or team members second.

The main theories we will be examining are as follows:

- Drivers, particularly Driver speech patterns
- Exploration of the Assessing Cube (Hay 1995, 2012), based on Kahler (1975)
- Paul Ware's (1983) theory on Contact Doors

Whether we are leaders in organisations, or coaches, trainers, facilitators, counsellors or consultants – we recognise the value of the skill of listening.

It is indeed a skill, and when we apply it, we learn more, as Transactional Analysts we give ourselves time to assess the process, and listening enables us to connect with the speaker. Listening to someone is offering a very powerful stroke – it says I value you, I value your view, I appreciate your presence.

We can develop that skill further, by learning to recognise and “de-code” the clues given to us by the speaker (coachee, trainee, team member etc). Transactional Analysis (TA) offers a framework of concepts to help us understand how an individual may be getting in their own way, holding themselves back, repeating negative patterns of behaviour. As a TA practitioner, I am listening to differentiate between what the client is saying as their ‘presenting issue’, and the ‘real issue’ underneath it. My role is to support them to surface what is in their unconscious, to enable them to understand what is happening, and how the actions they might take to make changes.

The words people use, and the speech patterns they employ give the TA practitioner lots of information about the client’s script (conditioning received and developed in infancy). The skilled practitioner, having listened to inform their thinking, may then be able to guide

the client to uncover some self-limiting beliefs and support them to clear a path through insight to action.

In this paper, we will explore the concept of Drivers, and their positive opposites, Working Styles. Having established an introductory understanding of the way that our strengths can become our weaknesses and that this happens more when we are under stress, we will then take it a stage further by investigating [CONTACT DOORS](#). This is the work of Paul Ware (1983) who recognised that human beings invest different levels of psychic energy in the areas of [THINKING](#), [FEELING](#) and [BEHAVING](#), and that diagnosing a person's Drivers through understanding speech patterns offers a mechanism for growth and development.

We focus first on the work of Taibi Kahler (1975) who as a psychologist working with NASA conducted longitudinal research in the 1960s and 70s to establish the personality traits which would cause friction between astronauts, working over long periods of time in confined spaces. One aspect of his research was to identify five negative personality 'styles' which he called Drivers – because we feel compelled, driven, to behave in these ways, even though they are not helping us to have a positive connection with others. Julie Hay (1993) picked up this work for the organisational context and suggested each style has a positive opposite, which she called Working Styles.

The Drivers/Working styles are:

- Hurry Ups
- Please People
- Be Perfects
- Try Hards
- Be Strong

[DRIVERS AND WORKING STYLES](#)

When we are in the Working Style end of the driver, we are calm, able to think, not stressed. However, when under pressure it is as if we go into "overdrive" employing attributes that work for us most of the time, but now seem to have stopped working. This is when we are in our Driver – and sadly, many people are in this negative place for a great deal of the time.

Kahler and Capers (1977) recognised that understanding our strengths and weaknesses, how they affect our style of communication and the impact they have on others goes a long way towards explaining the dysfunctional relationships we can co-create – and how we can use our strengths to complement those of others.

Kahler (1975) asserts that we are in driver behaviour (so called because we are compelled to behave in this way) 90% of the time. In my teaching of drivers within organisations I concentrate on the behavioural aspects of the drivers and what they invite in others, and I balance that from a developmental point of view with Working Styles (Hay 1993).

HURRY UP - People with a Hurry Up driver talk fast, think fast and are highly productive people. They are always looking to accomplish a task in a shorter time, or do three tasks at once, constantly looking for the short-cuts. They work well under pressure, seeming to thrive on it – but sometimes they can cause a lot of stress for themselves and for others.

In the negative end of their driver, they can be intolerant of those who do not think as fast as they do, they do not always listen attentively (because they are too busy processing and thinking about what they are going to say next) and because they have so many plates spinning at once, they make mistakes. Those mistakes then take time to sort out

Their speech pattern is to speak quickly, using phrases like “Let’s get on with it”.

BE PERFECT - People who have a Be Perfect driver are the opposite of the Hurry Up. They are detail people who are careful and methodical, well-organised with high standards for themselves and for others. In their driver end they can be pedantic, split hairs and expect a high standard which is not always necessary. They will also “beat themselves up” long and hard over a mistake that many people will not see as important. They like structure, and they also like to be in control. They want recognition for their high standards, and always being “right” – except that sometimes, they might not be

They use words like “obviously” and “as I was saying”, and they speak slowly and deliberately, often using “brackets” to give extra information.

PLEASE PEOPLE - The Please People driver manifests itself with the person being kind, caring, nurturing and sensitive – their focus is on other people, often to the detriment of themselves. They read body language to a higher degree than most, seek the approval of others and work so hard to please, that they read your mind for you and do whatever it is they think you want – and then get upset when it turns out not to be what you wanted at all.

They use phrases like “You know” and “sort of”.

TRY HARD - Those with a Try Hard driver love learning and new ideas and have good interpersonal skills because they see others as a source of new information. They volunteer for new projects and will give 110% to set up a new system, but they easily get bored and sometime don’t finish things (they leave that to the Be Perfect in the team!). Their commitment is to trying, not to succeeding.

They use the words “try”, “struggle” etc a great deal. They have lots of enthusiasm, which is attractive, and will often be the first person to volunteer for new projects.

BE STRONG - People with Be Strong driver are task-oriented, they have a strong sense of duty, tend to see things in a black and white way and do not like to disclose personal thoughts or feelings. They can be dismissive of those who do. They see asking for help as a sign of weakness, and do not like to admit they cannot cope. They get on with the job without fuss, and see the task through to the end.

They also manifest this driver by using humour – they are quick with the one-liners to keep people at arm’s length. They de-personalise their thoughts in their speech patterns by using passive language: “It seems that” rather than “I think”.

Recognising Drivers

DRIVER	TOE OF VOICE	WORDS USED	FACIAL EXPRESSION & GESTURES	APPEARANCE	WAYS OF MAKING CONTACT
PLEASE PEOPLE	Placating, caring, concern, inflection at the end of sentence	“Kind of ...” “Sorry” “If you don’t mind...” “Do you see what I mean..” “It’s just that...”	Smiles, raising of eyebrows, hair flicking, leaning forward	Dressing to please others, as expected but with a splash of colour, e.g. necklace	Asking how you feel or asking after family members
TRY HARD	Enthusiastic, strained	“I’ll try ...” “It’s a struggle..” “I don’t know” (when they do) “How about...” Tangential – go off in another direction	Vertical lines above nose (trying to think hard)	Tend to buck the trend, dress outside of convention, big jewellery, different hairstyle	Enthusiasm for ideas and the new, reaction, rebellion
HURRY UP	Staccato, talking quickly	“I-got-to-go” “Ready yet?” Running words together, finishing your sentence for you	Drumming fingers, tapping toes, impatient, watch glancing, flicking ahead in the notes	Dressed quickly, may have forgotten something	In a hurry to find things out about you or what you are doing
BE PERFECT	Well-modulated, precise, measured	“To me ... personally” Long words, many words to ensure exact understanding	Intense, hand gestures to make meaning clear. Tidy notes, underlining, etc.	Dress cautiously, to fit in. Immaculate makeup. Tidy & neat, matching, conventional	Asking questions or giving information
BE STRONG	Monotone, flat, may use volume to ensure point made (command)	“One does...” “One is expected...” Avoiding expressing emotions, passive language, good at one liners	Poker faced (no lines often looks younger), finger on chin, stern	Functional dress, clothes aren’t important, may be untidy. If practical may have a moustache to cover top lip (stiff upper lip)	Directing others in some way or waiting to be told what to do. May seek to raise themselves up to give impression of being bigger

Speech Patterns

ACTIVITY

Identify the driver speech patterns.

	SPEECH	DRIVER?
1.	I feel a bit upset – is it okay for me to tell you what happened today? Okay, I was having a coffee break at work and I was having a chat with my colleague, Ashrif. I found out that the purchasing team are having a social evening next week, and I have not been invited. I am really hurt – I support them a lot of the time and last month went way above and beyond to get the information to them that I thought would be helpful. I feel a bit left out really.	
2.	I attended a workshop last week – it was great! Lots of people I had not seen for a while and some new people too. One of the participants shared a fantastic idea for marketing a product similar to ours which I think – oh hang on a minute! I have just had a brainwave, do you remember when we nearly lost the Bridgens account? Well, I am wondering if we could apply a different technique someone else came up with, I will try and find my notes.	
3.	<p>I think it is so important to have high standards and I make quite sure that I impress this upon my team. I tell them, I am very happy to go over the project plan a couple of times and I ask them questions all the time to make sure they have understood.</p> <p>So let me be clear ... as I said, I am happy to spend the time making sure the team are across the detail – we do not want to bring the department into disrepute! Sometimes people miss the elements in parentheses, and I find myself getting my red pen out!</p>	
4.	People make such a fuss. I don't know why they can't just get on and get the job done. If they cut out the chat and the talking about what they saw on television last night they would not need me to keep telling them to get on and do what they are paid to do. Alex is driving me up the wall – I do not want to tell the whole world what I did at the weekend. It is none of their business!	
5.	<p>You asked me about my work, well, what happens is – I have a very busy job and I find more and more to add to my list each day. I get into work and I fly through most tasks – never mind the quality, feel the width is my motto!</p> <p>Some people go about in a dream and they take forever fussing over minor details and I find it sooo frustrating! They should get their head up and see what is on the horizon! I do my best to push the agenda on during meetings. Anyway, must dash, I am late for my next appointment!</p>	

Contact Doors

Having diagnosed the Driver a person might be in, using their speech patterns, we can add another layer to our skill by exploring and applying the work of Paul Ware on Doors to Therapy (1983). While his work was with therapists, it is applicable for all those in the ‘helping professions’ such as coaching, teaching, consulting etc.

Understanding that we invest different levels of energy across the following areas of

THINKING

FEELING

BEHAVING

Ware identified that each personality (Driver) type has its own preference in terms of how they make contact, how they can be encouraged to move on in their process and how they will shut down if the practitioner goes too fast and ‘touches a nerve’.

Knowledge of the Contact Doors sequence adds yet another layer of information which guides the ‘helper’ whether coaching, conducting performance management conversations, or just generally communicating with your colleagues, friends or family.

Referring back to Drivers, each has different entry points on the Contact Doors sequence:

OPEN DOOR – the method of communication preferred by the person using their Working Style, the one they operate from most of the time.



TARGET DOOR – this is the type of communication that they respond to well, particularly if directed towards it.



CLOSED/DEVELOPMENTAL DOOR – this is the area where they will not want to go, they may bring the conversation to a close, as they shut the door on you.



This is the area however, that the person needs to work on in order to develop (so could also be thought of as the **DEVELOPMENTAL DOOR**).

How To Use This Technique

ACTIVITY

1. Listen to the speech patterns, to identify the client's OPEN DOOR.

The client works well here, it is familiar for them and they feel comfortable. The conversation will probably be smooth and continue if appropriate. It is possible to maintain contact.

Focussing here establishes rapport and it may be appropriate to go no further.

2. If your role is to help the person develop, the next stage is to encourage them to move on to the TARGET DOOR. This is an area where they usually invest less energy, but they can go there especially if mildly directed by the TA practitioner.

The practitioner needs to judge whether they stay here, or move on to the next stage. They will do this by knowing the person, by paying attention to what is in the contract, and by reading the body language.

3. The final stage can be thought of in two parts.

The first is the CLOSED OR TRAP DOOR. If a practitioner goes here first, without establishing rapport at the OPEN DOOR, and then moving them to TARGET DOOR – the individual may simply close down. A barrier goes up, and the person shuts down and they slip through the trap door.

If however, the practitioner has a contract for developing the individual, and they sensitively meet them at the OPEN DOOR, move carefully to THE TARGET DOOR and then to the final stage – it could now be called the DEVELOPMENTAL DOOR if the client is receptive to exploration at this level.

Drivers And Contact Doors

HURRY UP

	BEHAVIOUR	They like to be known as people who take action, are busy and productive. This is their open door.
	FEELING	If they can be persuaded to slow down, they will share their feelings.
	THINKING	They move so fast they do not always ‘join up the dots’ so they do not always think their actions through until sometimes, it is too late.

BE PERFECT

	THINKING	Prefer to communicate from Functional Adult – Functional Adult. Ask them for an opinion and you will get a considered one, they are “thinkers” first and “doers” second.
	FEELING	Having established a connection with the Be Perfect, they will discuss their feelings.
	BEHAVIOUR	Asking them why they did or did not do something or telling them to do something will have them changing the subject, or showing annoyance with you.

PLEASE PEOPLE

	FEELING	Likes to be asked how s/he feels about work, or anything else going on professionally and personally. They will answer questions with “I feel ...” etc and can be very sensitive about their feelings and the feelings of others. This is their open door.
	THINKING	They will tell you what they think once rapport has been established, but it is often done tentatively so that they can change it if you appear not to like what they are saying.
	BEHAVIOUR	They will get upset if you tell them that you did not like what they did (you are saying they have not “pleased” you – devastating to a Please People).

TRY HARD

	BEHAVIOUR	Happy to talk about what they have done and will put effort and enthusiasm into their tasks.
	FEELING	Once rapport has been established, usually through the means of playfulness and not by attempting to control them, then they will discuss their (target door).
	THINKING	<p>They are already “trying hard” to think and they can be very slippery in their thinking as they report it.</p> <p>The listener has the sense that the Try Hard is looping around themselves, slipping away and not quite hitting the mark... sometimes known as “tricky thinking”.</p>

BE STRONG

	BEHAVIOUR	Be Strongs are comfortable with giving and/or receiving orders. They are task focused and they get the job done.
	THINKING	This is where they will engage their ability to rationalise and solve problems.
	FEELING	They do not want to discuss their feelings with you and will retreat behind a stony façade of a facial expression.

Using The Sequence

ACTIVITY

1. Identify the Driver
2. ‘Meet’ them at their open door (stage 1)
3. After some minutes, move to their target door (stage 2)
4. If appropriate, either stay here (in order to avoid their closed door) or after some more minutes, move to their developmental door

	STAGE 1 OPEN DOOR	STAGE 2 TARGET DOOR	STAGE 3 DEVELOPMENTAL/ CLOSED DOOR
HURRY UPS	Behaviour	Feeling	Thinking
BE PERFECTS	Thinking	Feeling	Behaviour
PLEASE PEOPLE	Feeling	Thinking	Behaviour
TRY HARDS	Behaviour	Feeling	Thinking
BE STRONGS	Behaviour	Thinking	Feeling

Using the sequence is a skill and it improves with practice! Work with a coaching buddy to become comfortable with the skill and eventually start to apply it with clients.

- Can you identify the Driver the person is in? Not just by speech patterns, but by their behaviour and general demeanour?
- From the table until you have it by heart, identify their open door
- Approach them from this place – you are matching with your language so that they hear you and settle down
- Nudge the client on to the target door by asking questions or any other appropriate intervention
- Make a decision, based on the context of the contract, to either stay here, or move on to the Developmental door and support the client to do the work which will help them to gain understanding and insight into their behaviour
- Help them to consider their options for action

See below for an illustration of a coach using the sequence when working with a client who displays Please People driver.

Illustration

An example of a coach working with a client who displays **Please People** driver. Notice the coach meeting the client at their open door, moving through to the target door and on to the developmental door.

- Coach: You **seem bothered** about something, and I don't think we've quite got to the bottom of it yet?
- Client: "The thing is I always **feel** so stupid around my boss, and I'm not even sure if it is anything she does!"
- Coach: "So what do you **think** might be happening between you?"
- Client: "Well, I don't know..... it might be Well I've been **thinking** about what you said last time, you know, about those life positions I can see I have a not ok life position and sometimes it gets in my way"
- Coach: "It sounds as though you have been doing some important **thinking** about this, say more about your reflections"
- Client " Well it is, I can see it. I know I have a not okay life position – it comes up for me in all sorts of situations"
- Coach: "So put yourself in the okay/okay box – what **behaviours** would you include there?"
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- Coach: "So what are the three **action** points you are going to work on between now and our next session?"

References

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