

## WHAT IS TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Transactional Analysis was founded by Dr. Eric Berne – an innovative and creative thinker who brought together some of the most effective ideas in psychotherapy (analytic, cognitive behavioural, phenomenological) into a powerful body of theory and practice.

It is best known and practiced as a theory and method of psychotherapy. It is also employed in a wide variety of other contexts, most notably counseling, coaching and education, and some of its models are taught on professional trainings, such as social work, teaching and youth work, no doubt, due in no short measure to the deceptive simplicity of its models and their easily transferable and practical uses.

## TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS AS AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH

Transactional Analysis, in recognition of its multifaceted nature, is best described as an integrative approach to psychotherapy. Unlike an “eclectic” approach, in which a practitioner chooses the best or most appropriate ideas and techniques from a range of theories and models, an integrative approach, brings together different theories and models, from a variety of approaches and models them into a new theory or model.

Whilst staying true and respectful to his psychoanalytic roots, Berne, in developing his integrative theory wanted to speed up the process and to “fill a gap” (1961, p.244), that he believed existed in, and detracted from the effectiveness of classical psychoanalysis.

Feeling that in practice, psychoanalysis was limited by its failure to acknowledge and work with the ‘here and now’, rather than just ‘the past’, and in particular, that it ignored the therapeutic benefits that a concentration on the conscious, as well as the unconscious mind, could bring, he wanted, according to Cornell and Hargaden,(2005) to “Humanize the psychoanalysis of his day” (p. 8) and to create a “social psychiatry” (Berne, 1961, p.12) that accounted for the social and cultural context of the individual.

To achieve the above, he innovatively linked and developed ideas from psychoanalysis, with ideas from the other two major streams of psychology, behaviourism, and humanism, and created a powerful therapy that incorporated theory and techniques from all three.



## WHAT IS RELATIONAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS?

Relational Transactional Analysis is a term that has evolved in recent years to describe a paradigm shift in the theory and practice of transactional analysis, which mirrors similar shifts that have been occurring in the wider psychotherapy, counselling and psychological fields.

Over the past two decades within TA, there has been a move away from a focus on cognitive insight as the path to psychological change, towards an appreciation and emphasis on the working through of, the conscious and more significantly the unconscious relational dynamics that arise between the therapist and the client. Relational TA therefore is a framework or way of thinking about the work, about the role of the practitioner and about methodology.

Many of the original models of transactional analysis, which are still in existence today, are concerned with the process of strengthening the Adult ego state – the ability to function successfully in the here and now and take control of self-defeating behaviours. Naturally as part of our training we teach these models. These relate mainly to cognitive behavioural processes however – and therefore rely on a capacity to think consciously about things and take charge of the situation.

Although they are often effective and supportive of increased levels of functioning, these kinds of approaches are often not adequate when dealing with deeper injuries to the self, which tend instead to manifest through powerful unconscious transference and countertransference processes, which cannot be tamed, controlled or mastered in quite the same way.

Relational TA therefore, is interested in those processes and methodologies that appreciate, contextualise and seek to understand and engage with the language and power of the unconscious. These processes require quite different models and frameworks and within our training we teach such models to support practitioners as they engage with clients at this more fundamental level of relating, uncovering and analysing as they do so, any unhelpful relational patterns that the client has developed.

Relational TA practitioners therefore have a range of TA models to draw upon, those that work at the cognitive behavioural level and those that work at a more psychodynamic level. Different relational TA practitioners will and do, draw quite differently upon these models, which is one of the things that makes relational TA so exciting and diverse, what they all have in common with each other however, and therefore what unifies them, is a set of concepts which are a central feature of their work, these include:

- The importance that is placed on relationship, in all its forms – with the self, with the other and with the inter-subjective (what happens when we get together).

- The belief that the most profound change happens through experience (as opposed to cognitive insight), and most powerfully through relational experiences that embody and enact different meanings from those that relationships once did for the client.
- The central focus of bringing to light the unconscious relational patterns that shape all of our experiences of ourselves and of our selves with others.
- A recognition that providing different relational experiences from those that are expected and/or longed for by the client, can be extremely exacting for both parties, and within this the practitioner as well as the client will be called upon to extend, challenge, change and get to know them-self in some new way.
- The belief that the practitioner is an active participant in the work and is not and cannot be a neutral observer within this - both parties are actively involved in the process of finding new and more authentic ways of relating with each other.
- That central importance that is placed on the way that the practitioner uses the pushes and pulls of their own subjective experience (or countertransference) with the client, to inform when and what intervention will best enhance the client's knowledge of self and of the other.
- An appreciation for the fact that certainty is neither possible nor necessarily desirable in the search for meaning.
- That the client is seen as and is treated very much as an adult, who is capable of a reciprocal, adult relationship with the practitioner. Within this the maternal metaphor in which the practitioner acts as a temporary replacement for unsatisfactory parents, there to meet their client's unmet relational needs, is made problematic.

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