Time structuring, group imagoes – some ideas on application

The following are some additions that I made recently to the workbook on Group Processes that we use for the developmental TA programme leading to an MSc (as well as CTA) of which I am Academic Dean.

For more information about time structuring and imagoes, see Hay, J (2009) *Transactional Analysis for Trainers* Hertford: Sherwood Publishing

And for the original information see Berne, E (1961) *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* New York: Grove Press; and Berne, E (1963) *The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups* New York: Grove Press

Time Structuring and the Individual Client

There are two ways in which we might apply the concept of time structuring when considering our work with an individual client: first, how do we establish our relationship with that client; and second, how might analysis of the client's time structuring patterns serve to increase the client's self-awareness and hence allow them to identify more options for better relationships. It may be that analysis of the first will in itself provide useful information about the second; if used for that purpose it will be important that we allow the client to determine the ways in which time is structured when they are with us, rather than imposing our own preferences or seeking to 'make' the client more comfortable by structuring the time in ways that minimise any discomfort they may experience.

The prompts in the table below are suggested as a way of matching the practitioner's structuring of time during initial contact with a client to the anticipated contract for the professional work to be undertaken. In each case, the left hand of the scale indicates active manipulation of time structuring to invite the client to relax whereas the right hand of the scale calls for a more cocreative stance towards time structuring.

There are various ways in which we can help an individual client to explore their own time structuring patterns; in addition to prompting them to identify specific instances of each mode, we might suggest

Practitioner leads	**Prompt Question**	*Client leads*
Telling, teaching, advising	What style/approach do you offer and/or might client expect?	Non directive, questioning, facilitative
Tasks, how they do their work e.g. management	What content will client expect to talk about?	Personal, relationships, how they get on with people
Organisational, institutional, employer may be paying	What is the context for your contact with the client?	Individual, client has arranged to see you and will be paying
Short term, ends when specific issues have been resolved, skills acquired	How long might the contact last?	Long term, focus may change as time goes by, deeper issues may be addressed

they draw a pie chart or produce a histogram rather like Dusay's (1972) egogram idea. In that case, the same 'rule' would apply – the total time available is a constant so concentrate on doing more of one in order to reduce the level of another.

Time Structuring for Team Coaching

As when coaching an individual, there are two ways that we might use a knowledge of time structuring to enhance our work with a team: when developing our relationship with them and as a concept for adding to their awareness and understanding of their group dynamics.

The comments above about time structuring in the training room can be converted to apply in similar ways to team coaching or facilitation:

Have you scheduled enough breaks so that those who want time *alone* can have it, without the need to psychologically withdraw whilst still physically in the room?

Have you allowed enough time when the team comes together for them to engage in *rituals* and then some *pastiming* before the *working* starts?

Have you planned some *playing* with activities where the team can enjoy being together without the need to complete tasks?

Have you considered, and contracted with the members of the team, about how far it will be appropriate, and desired by them, to develop *closeness*?

What ground rules have you agreed with the team, as part of the contracting, so that you and they will be able to challenge any potential *game* interactions?

How have you defined, and contracted for, your role – how will you engage in or stay remote from the various elements of the team's time structuring? If you adopt an 'outside facilitator' role, what might the impact be on the team dynamics and the dynamics with you? If you 'join' the group, what impact might this have whilst you are with the team, and what impact when you are no longer with them?

To help a team gain an insight into their time structuring patterns, you might have them complete a version of an interaction chart, as shown overleaf. This might be done as a team activity, or perhaps each team member completes their own chart and then these are reviewed and combined. You may wish to make notes of what you observe, from the moment the team members begin to interact, so that you can provide feedback about aspects that are discounted.

Participant Instructions: Use this chart to note examples of the various modes of time structuring that occur in your team. Afterwards you will review this with other team members, with a view to producing a group chart – which can form the basis for action plans to improve the time structuring patterns within the team.

For each example, make a brief note of what was said or done, with whom or if alone, and when. Use as many columns as there are team members. Give more examples where you notice a lot going on.

Imagoes of the Client and the Coach (or other practitioner)

Although Berne was writing about group imagoes, we can apply the concept to a 'group' of two, especially if we consider that there are likely to be other stakeholders who may exist within the mental images of the client and us. For example, the client may be situating their image of us within their family or work setting, so that they unconsciously perceive us as if we are a family member, alongside their mental images of other members of their family. Or perhaps we fit within their imago of their work team. Either way, it is possible that they perceive us as a rival

parent or rival manager, or maybe as the only parent or manager if such a role is not filled in reality.

We too may have an unconscious imago and fit the client in as if they were a member of our own family of origin. For organisational coaching, maybe we also hold an unconscious image of the client's manager as if they were our own father, mother or grandparent. Using the concept of imago can be another way of understanding the notion of projection; we may not be perceiving the real client and they may not be perceiving us.

We can help the client to bring their imagoes into awareness. We might invite them to draw, or otherwise represent, their imagoes for a range of different situations, so they can check for similar patterns. One of the imagoes could be the one that includes us as their coach or counsellor.

Imagoes and Team Coaching

If you are working professionally to coach a team, they will each have an existing imago of their group, and they will be adjusting

that to incorporate you in some way. It can be helpful to have them draw, or otherwise create a representation of, their imagoes and then to produce a joint version. The following are some of the areas that you might then ask them to consider, and/or may need to bring to their awareness:

How do their individual imagoes compare to the team group imago?

What stage of imago development are they at? If they are a new team, you can invite them to think about what imago they choose to develop. If they are an existing team, do they have an attached or an alienated imago – is the latter why they have called you in to work with them?

Who do they have in the leader slot? Are there different slots for different leaders? (e.g. Berne 1963 responsible, psychological, effective leader – who is on the organisation chart, who do they all look to for support, who gets the work done?)

Where do they position you vis à vis their imagoes? If inside the imago boundary, might this be confusing because you are

Team member names: Time structuring modes:	Myself				
Alone	Example: When:	Example: When:	Example: When:	Example: When:	Example: When:
Rituals	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:
Pastiming	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:
Working	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:
Playing	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:
Games	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:
Closeness	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:	Example: With whom: When:

not a team member? Might some see you as a rival leader, or the only leader? If outside the imago boundary, what are the implications – might they ignore you, or conversely react to you as an all-knowing external entity?

Finally, check out your own imago of the team. Have you unconsciously recreated your family of origin? Or an imago of a previous group that you worked with or were a member of? What unconscious biases might you have about any of the team members?

References

Dusay, J (1972) Egograms and the 'constancy hypothesis' *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 1972, 2(3), 37-42