

CHOOSING A HELPING STRATEGY (2)

by Julie Hay

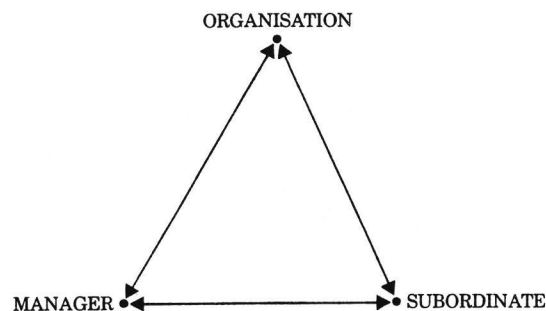
In her first article on this subject, Julie Hay identified the range of strategies available to a Manager who wishes to help a subordinate. She put all-managerial action at one end of the range and all-subordinate action at the other. Then she began to consider the factors which influence a choice between these strategies.

In an "ideal" world of non-directive counselling, Manager and subordinate will share the same perceptions; these will include a belief that the Client (subordinate) seeks to solve his or her own problem, and that the agent (Manager) is there to facilitate this process. However, when both work within an organisation, that organisation places constraints on them. Both have contracts with the organisation:

Explicitly – an employment contract that defines their reward from the organisation in return for doing their allocated job in accordance with defined organisational requirements.

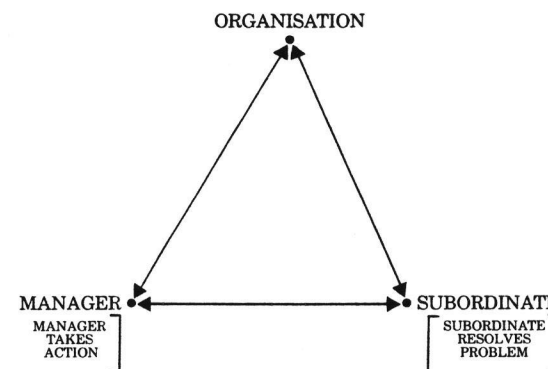
Implicitly – reflected in the organisational culture, the management style, the company policies.

In his article "The Three-cornered Contract" (Transactional Analysis Journal, 1975, 5), English suggests that we need to consider another side to the contract. The subordinate has a contract with the organisation; so does the Manager; and there will exist another between Manager and subordinate – which may be heavily influenced by the other sides of the triangle:-



If we now combine this framework with that we considered in the first part of this article, we see the effect of the triangle on the choice of helping strategy. For example the contract between the manager and the organisation includes

responsibility for ensuring that the contract between the subordinate and the organisation is fulfilled, with emphasis on the behaviour of the subordinate. The effect of this requirement is to incline the Manager towards the left-hand end of the continuum: you can more confidently predict an outcome if you "do-it-yourself"; there is far more risk involved in allowing subordinates to resolve problems.



Add to this the organisational pressures on utilisation of staff resources, beliefs about "proper" boss/subordinate relationships, concerns about job prospects and making mistakes...and it becomes surprising that some Managers still choose to operate towards the right-hand end of the continuum.

Awareness of this model makes it clearer to Managers that a *choice* of helping strategy is called for. A conscious decision becomes possible, with strategies involving reduced managerial action being seen as more appropriate when:

- Managers are dealing with personal or domestic problems rather than work-competence difficulties.
- They want their subordinates to develop problem-solving abilities of their own.
- They recognise the longer-term disadvantages of overly-dependent subordinates.
- They are working within an organisation which includes staff development amongst the criteria for assessing managerial performance.