

Trans-acting in the Workplace

Skills That Enhance Workplace Interaction

Trans-acting in the Workplace

- Interest and information about workplace interaction can be found in the following:

Team building literature and research

Organizational systems theory

Leadership studies

Exchange theory

Organization development

Human resources literature and research

Conflict studies

Clinical practice and research

Executive coaching and counseling

Workplace systems analysis

Communication studies

The field of psychology

Trans-acting

- Trans-acting refers to the interaction taking place between two or more people and utilizes specific skills and abilities referred to as the “building blocks” of interaction, regardless of the context of interaction.

Select Building Blocks

- Select building blocks believed to be related to positive trans-acting in the workplace include:

Trust and collaboration skills are two important building blocks of trans-acting

Problematic trans-actions

- Difficult interactions, lack of communication, conflict, low morale, dysfunctional behavior, inaction, passive-aggressive behavior, leadership deficits, bullying, job dissatisfaction, express the most commonly used descriptions when differences between people vary to a significant degree.
- “Problem behaviors” become a pattern of trans-acting that requires interventions if they are to change so that trans-acting takes on a more constructive or positive character.

Employee Typology

- Employees can be typed according to their use of specific communication skills.

How Employees Can Be Helped

- Understanding patterns of trans-acting between employees and employers and assessing what can be done to help everyone in the workplace improve their trans-actions with others

How Employers Can be Helped

- Understanding the basis of communication with reports and improving self-understanding of personal transactional style

Coaching and Counseling

- Individual and group behavioral assessment will aid efforts to coach and counsel individuals.

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- Pressured employee
 - High level of dissatisfaction with job
 - Have positive attitude toward workplace
 - They don't seem to be going anywhere in job
 - Evaluations are “satisfactory” or below
 - Don't have positive interactio

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- Situationally-limited trans-acting optimizer
 - **Optimal** trans-actional skills
 - Believe the **workplace is out of sync** with them and look to the workplace to change
 - Believe their **potential is not fulfilled**
 - **Try to achieve** their potential in spite of the workplace
 - **Try to change** the workplace
 - **Most critical** of managers and fellow employees
 - A **move** may not be out of the question

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- In-sync performer
 - Staff and workplace are **in sync**
 - Neither staff nor workplace operate at the highest **level of achievement** however
 - Workplace may reach some goals but success is **lack-luster**
 - **No one excels** even though in sync
 - Are **comfortable** in their jobs
 - May **not** be **totally satisfied** with their achievement

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- Low-level underperformer
 - Similar to, but differs from, aware underperformer in that **underachieving is greater** and the workplace is to blame
 - Trans-acting with peers and supers is **unsatisfactory**
 - Thinks of leaving job but has **skill deficits**
 - Periodic evaluations are the basis for **dissatisfaction and grievances**
 - Level and support for retraining is **limited** or lacking

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- **Outward-looking employee**
 - Most **dissatisfying** work situation
 - Employees see themselves as **highly competent**
 - Possess the skills for **successful trans-acting**
 - The workplace is viewed as **stultifying**
 - **Not committed** to work at a high performance level
 - They are the **most out-ward looking** of employees

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- High criticizer
 - Average level of **dissatisfaction** with job
 - Employer **doesn't set high goals**
 - Thinks that the work environment is **under-performing**
 - Work environment **doesn't support** positive transaction and skill development
 - **Critical** of agency's work output
 - **Critical** of agency's leadership
 - Have plans to **leave** the organization

“Qualifying Markers” – What to Look For (cont.)

- In-sync underperformer
 - Organization is the most **dysfunctional**
 - Employee identifies his or her skills as **low level** and has a negative opinion about the work place
 - Employee and leadership are resigned to low-level performance and **not aware** of skills necessary to increase success
 - **Not aware** of the skills necessary for successful trans-acting nor how these skills are related to organizational success
 - Level of **dissatisfaction** is high and motivation to leave job, including retirement, is low

Interventions

- Trust
 - Use of questions that try to uncover lack of trust or find out who can't be trusted.
 - What can be done to encourage trust if it is valued?
 - What happens that affects trust in the workplace?
 - Strategies:
 - Traded assurances
 - Use of focus group and action plan
 - Discuss "betrayal" hot spots
 - Baby steps to build trust activities

Interventions (cont.)

- **Collaboration**

- Finding common interests
- Put positions aside for a while
- Assessing recognition of the interests of others
- Developing common principles
- Strategies:
 - Planning future activities
 - Working together on a detail
 - Generating joint expectations

Interventions (cont.)

• Adaptability v. Inflexibility

- How willing to change is the employee?
- When is the employee adaptive and inflexible? (New tasks; old routines?)
- What kind of job do you think the employee does at balancing these two extremes?
- Who is the employee adaptable and inflexible with?
- Strategies:
 - Try switching hats: when inflexible try adaptability, etc..
 - Generate examples pushing adaptability and inflexibility to the extreme – paradox.
 - Try realistic approach, i.e. does it make sense?

Interventions (cont.)

- Communication
 - What type of communicator? (Verbal, auditory, e-mail.)
 - How are attempts to communicate received?
 - Does the decision-making structure impede communication?
 - What about intractable differences?
 - Strategies:
 - Active listening
 - Opening channels of communication
 - Periodic meetings to facilitate communication
 - Coaching and counseling

Interventions (cont.)

- Risk v. Certitude
 - What types of risks are taken in the workplace?
 - Is the workplace a “risky” place to be and why?
 - How are risk and certitude balanced?
 - How does the workplace respond to mistakes in judgment?
 - Strategies:
 - Practice risk taking and certitude – increase comfort level
 - Locate fear “hot spots”
 - Construct list of workplace activities and rank them based on risk and certitude for the employee

Interventions (cont.)

- Emotion v. Rationality
 - How does the employee balance these two?
 - Is one relied on more than another when interacting with others in the workplace?
 - How does the employee describe him/herself as far as emotion and rationality?
 - How do others characterize the employee on this continuum? (Does the employee know the answer to this question?)
 - Is there any evidence of inappropriate responses?
 - Strategies:
 - Paradox
 - Searching for appropriate balance using real life examples.
 - Switch hats to illustrate the inappropriateness of responding to any situation using only one.

Interventions (cont.)

- **Autonomy v. Group**
 - How does the individual test taker balance autonomy and group demands?
 - Does the test taker believe that he or she is valued for individual thinking?
 - How do others in the workplace respond to individual thinking?
 - How strong is the commitment to “group think”?
 - **Strategies:**
 - Facilitate a discussion exploring when individual behavior is appropriate and when the group’s wishes are more important.
 - Discuss topics in which the employee believes others demand too much conformity
 - Explore what the employee believes should occur in an ideal workplace.

Interventions (cont.)

- Ego Strength
 - Do circumstances exist when one is asked to “back down” from a position?
 - Does the employee have a high regard for him/herself?
 - Is it important for the employee to prevail in an argument?
 - Does the employee believe that others have a positive or negative opinion about his/her strong ego?
 - Strategies:
 - Probe as to whether others in the workplace appreciate the strong ego of the employee.
 - Discuss when a strong ego is helpful or harmful in the workplace.
 - Discuss whether the employee ever is unsure of him/herself.

Interventions (cont.)

- **Future v. Past**
 - How does the employee balance thinking about the importance of the past and importance of the future?
 - When does the employee rely on the past and when is the future relied upon?
 - Is the workplace, according to the employee, rooted in the past or forward thinking?
 - **Strategies:**
 - Given a series of tasks or topics, how does an employee balance the past and the future?
 - Discuss people in the workplace and whether they are inclined to base their actions on the past or future and why.
 - Considering the mission of the organization how is the past and future balanced by those in the workplace?

For more information, contact:

- Dr. Peter R. Maida

[Link to Dr. Peter Maida's email](#)

Cell: 202-285-2510

Office: 202-730-0864, 0864

Fax: 202-730-1826

SKYPE: peter.maida89

FACETIME: 202-730-0864