

CONTRACTING

This is a pack of contracting handouts that I have written, adapting both original source material and my own experience. Contracting is a key skill, that is important when working with clients, coaching people, or when taking on new tasks, roles, or responsibilities.

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CONTRACTING

AGREEING GUIDELINES

1. BACKGROUND

Contracting is one of the basic principles of Transactional Analysis and reflects the philosophy that people are OK and, with the right information, can solve their own problems. Clear contracts are needed in order for people to operate effectively within groups and organisations. To be effective, the contracting process needs to be transparent and the people involved need to have the power to make their own choices. Contracting involves mutual and self respect and enables all the information to be placed 'on the table' for all to see. Contracts also need to be effectively communicated to all parties.

What contracts do you have with people you interact with? Where are there gaps to be filled?

Flexibility is King.
Spotting when contracts need to be amended is critical.
Each time people shift their needs or are subject to new internal/external pressures they need to amend contracts or establish new ones.

2. THE THREE CORNERED CONTRACT

This is a useful model to help people see with whom they are interacting. Each side of the triangle needs a 3-level contract to ensure the interactions and activities are in line with expectations.



Contracts can be multilateral, bilateral or unilateral. In the model above, you and your line manager may have contracts with a customer, and your team with a supplier or another team. This means that other triangles can be added to show where more contracts exist or are needed. When we consider bilateral contracts between two people there may be a third person who is paying them or directing their activities.

3. CONSTRUCTING RESPECTFUL CONTRACTS

Healthy contracts reflect the philosophy that people are OK and can solve their own problems with the right information. To be effective they need to involve four key requirements (defined by Claude Steiner). **1) Mutual consent** – both parties must agree to the contract. **2) Consideration** – some form of recompense is given in return for someone's time or work. **3) Competency** – the practitioner must have the skills to perform the contract and the client must be able to understand the contract and have the resources to complete it. **4) Lawful object** – it must be within the law and conforming to ethical principles laid down by professional bodies.

When looking at each axis of the three cornered contract we need to consider three levels: administrative, professional and psychological. The psychological level is often overlooked. This can result in 'volcanic explosions' later on if people are unable to contain their rising emotions.

Alternatively people in organisations may withdraw from the process (often without telling you) because they have unresolved issues clouding their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Therefore a robust and effective contract will clearly address all three elements:

FIRST LEVEL – ADMINISTRATIVE
This is sometimes known as the Procedural or Social level. It includes all practical arrangements, such as dates, times, locations, task responsibilities, payments and other considerations. Getting the administrative level clear provides protection for all involved. It can be helpful to write it down, for example in course handbooks or letters of acceptance. Ask What or When?
SECOND LEVEL – PROFESSIONAL
This relates to the aim of the work to be done together. It implies that the trainer is competent to provide the service. It includes how the trainer and the clients will contribute to the process. For example, trainers bring their knowledge, skills and experience and clients bring their willingness to learn, prior knowledge and experience. This level includes goals and objectives. Getting this contract right gives clear permission for change. Ask How?
THIRD LEVEL – PSYCHOLOGICAL
This is also referred to as the Secret, Hidden or Undiscovered contract and refers to the underlying dynamics between the trainer and the clients. It can be difficult to make overt, but if it is not clarified then the objectives will not be met and unhealthy situations are likely to develop. For example, if there are unresolved issues which are sabotaging the process. A healthy contract is based on mutual trust and respect and is enhanced by Mutual Consent. Clarification of the psychological level gives power to all parties. Such power leads to healthy growth and development. Ask Why?

4. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

The contracting process starts with information gathering. Think about which ego state you need to be in for you to contract successfully. Then start building a contract with open questions, such as:

- What outcomes do you want? / What do you want from this?
- How can we make this so that it's the most use to you?
- What would make this the best [e.g. training day] you've had?
- What do we need to do to get us there / to manage it?
- So where are you? / What things need to be put 'on the table'?

Using 'we' instead of 'you' helps to encourage participation and helps to prevent people from feeling that they have 'been done to'. Spend time on the **psychological level** so that people know what's happening and feel safe. Consider elements such as fears, worries, confidentiality, commitment, permissions, expectations and hidden agendas. If people feel exposed or unsafe they may not honour the contract. Encourage people to voice their feelings and if there are unhelpful processes going on then ask people to 'name them'. Two 'sabotage questions' can be used to help facilitate the process:

- **What could I do to make it not work? / How might we go wrong?**

Look out for 'rumble smiles' which will help you to identify when you have hit the mark. Also remember to consider the 'local culture' as this will influence people's perception of "what's ok around here".

Take away message: Meaningful contracts require careful construction.

CONTRACTS

ELEMENTS OF A TRAINING CONTRACT

At the start of a training workshop use a flipchart to establish and agree a contract between yourself (as the trainer) and the delegates. Use the following as a guideline to cover the key areas:

Workshop Title

Length of time for the workshop
Include break times

Mobile phones / Toilets

Practice

Process = Exercises and discussion

Handouts + Can take own notes

Goal =

Respect Others Views

Confidential - within this room

Confidential - be responsible for self disclosure

It's Ok to practice

Not good / bad = about appropriateness

It's Ok to admit ignorance

It's Ok to share

It's Ok to question

It's Ok to make your own choices and take away what you need to

