

GAMES

This is a pack of Games handouts that I have written, adapting both original source material and my own experience. Psychological Games are played out of awareness. We all play games and we can all learn how to spot them and how to communicate more cleanly.

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GAMES

REPETITIVE CONFLICTS

1. FAILING AT CLOSENESS

People will often settle for receiving negative strokes, instead of a total absence of recognition and this can lead them to engage in negative transactions which then lead to negative outcomes. These types of repetitive and negative transactions with others are known as *psychological games* (Julie Hay 1988). We tend to play games out of awareness, because the interactions are so familiar to us. Games can be played in seconds or can be repeated over many years.

Eric Berne defined psychological games as "...an ongoing series of complimentary ulterior transactions progressing to a well defined predictable outcome." (Games People Play, Berne, 1964)

Spotting when games are being played (instead of people just miscommunicating) is the best way to avoid them. The more of these which are present the more likely it is that you are involved in a game:

- 1) **Switch** – is there a moment when the interaction seems to change and the roles are reversed? This is the key element needed to establish a game is being played.
- 2) **Repetition** – do we say "here we go again" or "why does that always happen"?
- 3) **Predictability** – can we predict what will happen, or is the sequence of events inevitable?
- 4) **Ulterior Transactions** – are there hidden agendas, or secret messages hiding underneath the overt behaviour?
- 5) **Negative Payoff** – do people end up in lose-lose or win-lose positions, feeling bad?
- 6) **Out of Awareness** – we do not realise at the time that we are involved in a game, because the interaction is 'normal' to us and the negative payoff is simply 'part of life'.

2. DEGREES OF GAMES

Berne wrote about three *degrees* of games:

- I. **First** degree, which we play in public. For example, the game of *uproar* (a discussion leading to an argument) in a meeting.
- II. **Second** degree, which we play in private. For example, *uproar* as a blazing row behind closed doors.
- III. **Third** degree, which tends to result in serious consequences. Such as bodily harm or legal penalties. For example, *uproar* between a manager and a subordinate, which results in the latter's dismissal.

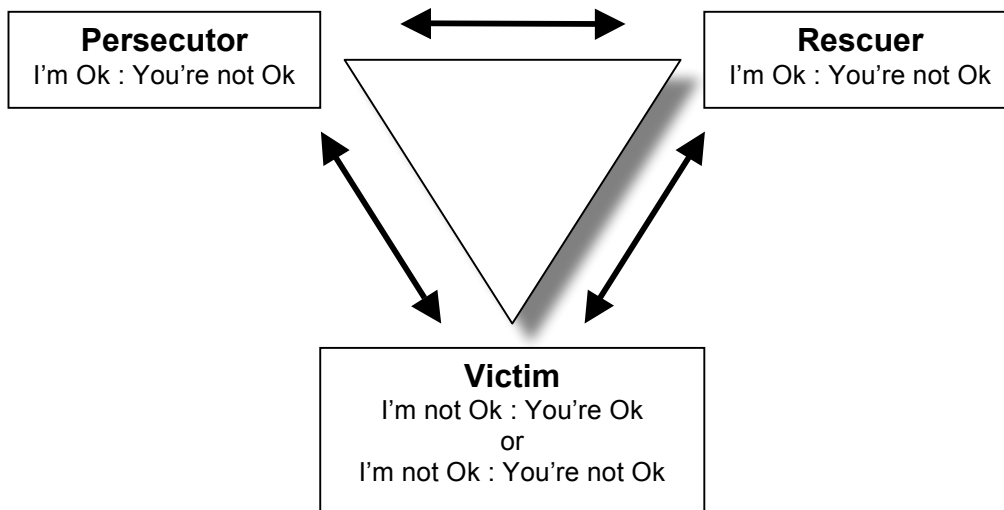
3. THE PAYOFF FOR PLAYING GAMES

People can play games to generate a payoff for themselves and the current thinking is that these are all unhealthy. Therefore, people play games to:

- Generate many intense strokes, which although negative, feel better than being ignored.
- Reinforce our beliefs about ourselves, others and our relative positions within the world. These can be seen in our life positions, such as I'm not Ok : You're not Ok.
- Avoid something, perhaps a serious conversation about an uncomfortable issue.
- Provide us with the chance to repeat a sequence from our past, which we developed to protect us from something. As a result we continue to think and feel in our established ways and avoid coming to terms with our psychological pain.
- Tell our friends exactly what happened, in exciting detail and with lots of repetition. What other excitement would we have to report on anyway?
- Subsequently replay the game in our mind's eye and re-experience our feelings and thoughts. We may even keep ourselves awake at night. What else would we do with the time anyway?

4. THE DRAMA TRIANGLE (Stephen Karpman, 1972)

Stephen Karpman realised that games were similar to theatrical dramas and the scenes which really captured the attention of the audience tended to contain the elements of a game. He devised the Drama Triangle as a tool to help people analyse games. Each person involved in the game plays a part on the triangle and may switch parts as the game is played.



An example of how the drama triangle can be used is given below. Do you know anybody who plays this game?

Scene: Sharon & Derek

A regular game of "Yes, *but*..."

- I. Sharon never asks for help if she gets stuck. That would be a 'straight' way to resolve her problems. Instead she sits up and sighs loudly (she moves onto the drama triangle and takes up position as the victim).
- II. Derek gets up and walks to her desk when he hears her sigh. He offers her suggestions (as the rescuer – he accepts the invitation to play).
- III. Sharon dismisses them all with the comment: "Yes, *but* you haven't thought about that" (as the persecutor – she has now switched from being the victim and Derek has moved to victim).
- IV. Eventually Derek gets frustrated and shouts at Sharon: "Well, if you know all the answers, you sort it out!" (He switches from victim to persecutor and Sharon switches back to victim).
- V. Sometimes Sharon finishes the game by telling Derek that: "You are useless and full of useless ideas". (She stays in persecutor and he stays in victim).
- VI. When this happens, Derek responds by hanging his head and returning to his desk in silence. (He ends up in victim, with Sharon ending up as persecutor).
- VII. Whatever happens, Sharon and Derek both receive lots of negative strokes from each other. These are their payoffs for playing the game. If only they knew how to deliver straight strokes and ask for help, they could have a much healthier working life and avoid all that conflict!

5. AVOIDING GAMES

- Acey Choy, 1990, developed a version of a *Winner's Triangle*. Persecutor becomes *Powerful* (can change things, negotiate and be assertive) – Rescuer becomes *Responsible* (willing to help when asked, has genuine concern for others) – Victim becomes *Vulnerable* (acknowledges own problems and can solve them with help).
- Games are always played from either Parent or Child. Stay in Adult to avoid them or respond to the Child need which is being expressed, in a healthy way.
- Give other people straight strokes, ask for the strokes you really need and then stroke yourself for avoiding the game.
- If you find yourself in a game simply cross the transaction (e.g. from Adult) or voice your intuitions.

Ref: Tactics, Newton & Napper, 2000 / TA for Trainers, Hay, 1996 / Richard Maun

GAMES

TYPES IN ORGANISATIONS

Games are played in all parts of life. Some are particularly common in organisations and these are shown below. However, this list is not exhaustive and you may find it interesting to spot and name some types of games which are played in your organisation.

I spy with my little eye...

- Yes, but** Helpful suggestions are always countered with a “yes, *but...*” response. The underlying communication is about who is cleverest. The person with the problem is trying to show that they have exhausted all possibilities, whereas the person suggesting solutions is trying to show that they can improve on everything already considered. Try using “yes, and” or “and, if” instead.
- Harried** Rushing about with too much work, to earn the right to mutiny or collapse as a martyr. The other players are setting themselves up to feel disappointed or let down (again!). The ulterior (secret) message is that we are the only person capable of doing the work. Their secret agenda is to reassure themselves that no-one is *that* capable and they may encourage us, and then watch us collapse.
- Lunch Bag** Similar to *Harried*, except we use our lunch bag as a pretext to avoid taking a break away from our desk. When our colleagues return from their lunch we complain about the calls we took in their absence and how “it’s alright for you to leave me alone”. We get to feel self righteous and they feel guilty that we were left on our own.
- NIGYYSOB** A classic game, often played in meetings. It stands for *Now I’ve got you, you son of a bitch!* This game is also known as *Gotcha!* The first player keeps asking the other player questions until they catch them out. For example, a supervisor explains an idea and their line manager shows interest. The manager asks more questions until he spots a flaw in the supervisor’s idea and pounces! The supervisor, who was feeling flattered at the interest shown, suddenly feels confused and embarrassed. This game is often played in front of an audience (in a meeting) who are then invited to persecute the victim, perhaps by using this as a pretext to dismiss all of their other ideas. This game is about being one-up and people use cunning to show how clever they are in contrast to the other person. In doing so, they win the audience over to their point of view.
- Uproar** This is similar to NIGYYSOB because its ulterior (secret) agenda is about “I win, you lose”. A player starts a discussion and then escalates it into an argument. We tell the other person (or people) what we really think of their views and raise the psychological pressure considerably. At the end of the game the loser is left battered and bewildered at this severe turn of events. This game is also known as *Kick me*, particularly for people who usually end up on the losing side.
- Rapo** We may offer the services of our department, only to complain bitterly when we see the scale of the requested help. This game is about moving from an apparent invitation to an affronted refusal. We feel we are being taken advantage of and our payoff is to retain our cynicism of how people rip us off when we offer help. Our colleague (or customer) is baffled by our reaction as we had lead them to believe our offer gave them *carte blanche*. Their payoff is to remain cynical about our lack of genuine desire to help. For example, have you ever offered a relative some food and then complained at how much they ate? *Rapo* is usually associated with sexual games, where someone appears to flirt and then gets offended when someone else oversteps a boundary which has not been made clear to them.

Ref: TA for Trainers, Hay, 1996 / Games People Play, Berne, 1964

EXERCISE

Gotcha at the Great Giggling Pin Company

Please read the example of a game in action and have a go at the questions that follow.

You attend a regular month-end meeting, where staff discuss their results and their plans for the next month. The following is an extract from a confrontation which regularly occurs. In fact, the other people in the meeting often place bets to see how long the meeting will last before something like this happens:

Managing Director:

So, Jenkins, I like your plan to sell more Giggling Pins. Tell me more.

Jenkins:

Well, Mr Major, I think I can decrease the price and sell them in bulk.

Managing Director:

(Excitedly) Excellent – how many units can you sell?

Jenkins

(Confidently) I think we could ship an extra 5,000 next month.

Managing Director

That's great Jenkins! Will you sell them to existing customers?

Jenkins

(Dismissively) No way! I'll find new ones, to widen our customer base.

Managing Director

Oh? *(Pauses in surprise)* No! You can't do that – it will take 6 months to find just one new customer. Surely you knew that?

Jenkins

But that's not what you said last week...

Managing Director

(Angrily) What! That was for regular priced products, not this half baked scheme you've just dreamed up! Does any one have any more ideas they wish to share?

The room falls silent...!

Question 1.

Draw the drama triangle - where do Mr Major and Jenkins start?

Question 2.

When does the switch happen?

Question 3.

Draw the drama triangle as it looks after the switch

Question 4.

How could the game have been avoided?