

# THE USE OF TIME

(Derived from the Berne's Model)

*Oryoki: "just enough"*



by Valerio-San

Luciano Traquandi

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*This model is powerful, it helps the understanding of human behaviour and group dynamics, starting from an observable clue: how people use their time*

The Fundamentals of Berne's Use of Time:

- a) we use our time not only because we have an «external «activity to perform, but also as a way to satisfy our **psychological hungers** for *recognition and structure*.
- b) we have 6 ways to use our time and with different ratios we invest our time in all of them. **Only one out of six is productive, the other ones are not, but they're still necessary.**
- c) everybody adopts these ways, but the **modalities of application can differ**. There are meaningful differences in these modalities from country to country, in general they depend upon the culture of the group.

***BERNE'S MODEL: THE 6 WAYS***

- *isolation (unproductive)*
- *rituals (unproductive)*
- *pastime (unproductive)*
- ***ACTIVITY (the only PRODUCTIVE use of time)***
- *games (relational games) (it produces damages)*
- *intimacy (act of intimacy) (Outcome not predictable)*

## The 6 ways to use time at work

### 1) ISOLATION

In this use of time the attention is not connected to the reason of the work, like making an engine, thinking about a project, filling in an invoice.

In isolation, we don't have any human contact or relationship (social activity), even though we are in a crowd (or in a meeting). Either one is physically alone or his mind is somewhere else .

**Communication during isolation is zero (absence of any interaction).**

It is impossible to prevent this from happening now and then. Besides, isolation has three positive aspects:

- Recovery or improvement of the reality analysis
- Protection from an excess of stimuli (anti stress shield), as a pre-emptive precaution
- Facilitation of Creativity, which needs a deep contact with the inner self

### 2) RITUALS

**Rituals do not include productive investments of one's own time, they do not contribute to the real activity..**

Rituals are all those behaviours which are repeated with some regularity by the same people. The outcome of a ritual in term of work is zero. Rituals can involve groups of individuals, maybe even the whole company. They differ significantly according to the culture of origin. Coffee breaks, Gymnastic exercises, Company songs, Reports with no purpose are all examples of rituals.

The company sometimes organises rituals, in some cases these are "spontaneously born» and maintained.

It is extremely difficult to change rites, no matter how silly or useless they can appear. You will be aware of a rite when you try to change or remove it because of people's resistance to change it.

In reality, some processes which seem to be activities could be rituals. Regular meetings have an important ritual component.

The risk is when the work itself becomes a ritual, as it creates a dangerous rigidity.

*Rituals are useful to:*

- reinforce networking
- create stability
- reduce anxiety and feelings of lack of structure
- facilitate change management (something has to remain stable, the ritual, when everything else around you changes)

**They satisfy the hunger for structure**

### 3) PASTIME

During pastime, the **real activity** is still zero and one experiences a limited social contact. Pastime can take different forms: having a coffee with a colleague, gossiping, talking about sports or politics. There is managerial gossip, which appears to be businesslike but isn't, and which is called «making strategies». The risk of a pastime is zero and it introduces an element of uncertainty in a too predictable context

Pastime is indispensable to:

- Making acquaintances safely, helping networking and informal organisations
- Regenerating our own "spirit", morale, personal energy.

It could be useless and dangerous to suppress bare pastime. Pastime would pop out in other ways and it would be difficult to distinguish it from real work (hidden pastimes)

Pastime communication has specific characteristics which can be funny (such as in the case of gossips) or serious (Wall Street trend). In any case, the content is only a pretext for social interactions.

### 4) ACTIVITY (*Bernian Activity*)

Activity represents the crucial way of using time at work. It occurs when time is, for instance, devoted to making engines, selling products, designing an aircraft, filling in an invoice to be sent to a customer etc.

The activity could be defined as a request addressed by the nature of the work to the skills, abilities, competences, experiences of the worker or professional. The aware application of these factor is the Bernian Activity. In this sense an automatically performed works, whatever is the sort of it and its outcomes, is non a Bernian activity.

As an exercise, in the future just try to find out when and how your or others' apparent activity "hides" other ways of using time which are unproductive but necessary.

*Questions could be:*

- How much of a meeting is pastime? How much is ritual?
- Are great debates about economic events, financial indices, competitors' performance real activity or hidden gossip?

## 5) "GAMES" (Or Games)

This modality of use of time in the Bernian model can be usefully associated to the concept of conflict, as some conflicts fall in the same category of games.

The question that is controversial both the theorists and the pragmatists is an old one: is the conflict something we should avoid, prevent, fix or reduce (the negative school)?

On the contrary the conflict is necessary, inevitable, even a resource for organisations and even human being in their private dynamics?

The two philosophies of course have their supporters, both in term of theories and techniques, "their books".

The question here will be answered differently, starting from the assumption that there are sane conflict and games.

It is indispensable a definition of the two terms, first.

Roughly, it could be said that a sane conflict is a phenomenon that you can afford to ignore, live with, or even welcome.

A game or a pathological conflict is instead a human dynamics where the person involved, but mostly the leader responsible of the environment where the conflict arises cannot ignore it and that he inevitable has to tackle.

Accepting this partition, now the problems are two:

- 1) how can we distinguish a sane conflict from a pathological one?
- 2) In case we found a game, are there strategies, remedies to solve it or at least reduce at the least possible level?

We need a diagnosis first and second, if it exists, a "therapy".

It will not be explained explicitly how to diagnose a sane conflict, which should be interpreted in a subjective way once a game is clearly individuated.

## THE 7 CLUES DIAGNOSTIC METHODS

We can individuate a game when the following indicators appears.

### *a) The double level*



A double level is a necessary but non sufficient condition for the existence of a game.

A double level is a form of communication which implies two simultaneous level. The first level is called Social Level (SL), to mean that it is evident “socially”, every person attending to this dynamics receive this first level and generally it share the same perception of the other attendees.

The second level is called Psychological level (PL). It is not so evident as SO, as SO is so strong and bright to obscure it. Besides, to be perceived, this level needs an interpretation and the availability of previous information and the forecast of successive events.

Being so subjective and competing with the objectivity of SL, PL can easily be denied. But, the real meaning of the whole transaction is carried by the Psychological level.

An example is when people summon a meeting to deal with an important organisational problem but this is an arena for power manoeuvres, although they remain hidden and always justified or masked in term of “real problems”, the Social Level. It easily understandable how the players of such a double level have a double roles on the two levels.

Some organisational cultures are more or less inclined t o double level communication, which per se is not (yet) a serious reason to diagnose a game.

### *b) incongruence*

This clue is a marker that indicates when the game starts. It is a temporary clued, it will fade away but it could reappear.

It is possible to recover this factor if not visible any longer through a careful investigation with people involved in the conflict.

Incongruence is the presence of contradictory messages.

One kind of contradiction is when the body languages (behaviour) denies the verbal language (oral or written)

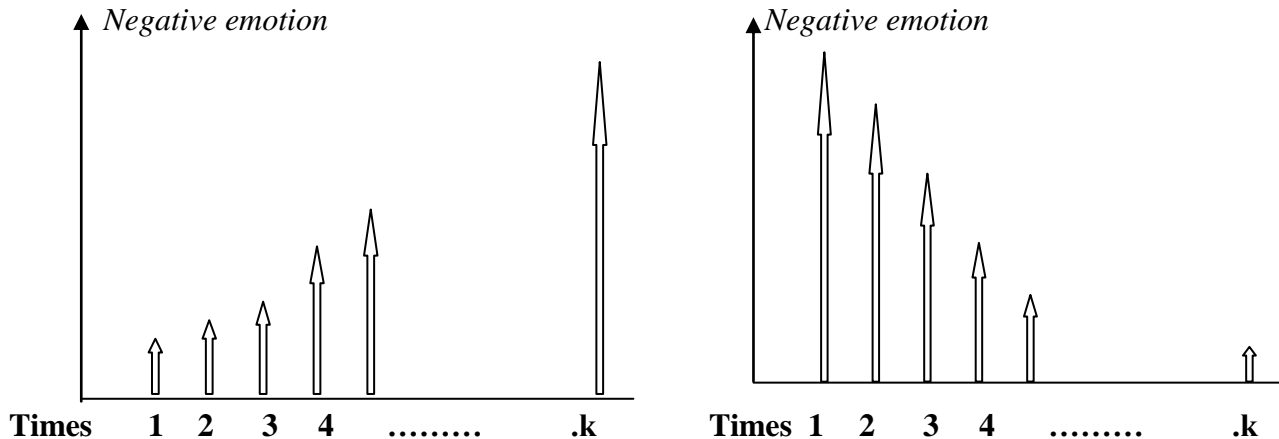
For example, people showing satisfaction when the events are negative or dissatisfaction when they are positive are a classic form of incongruence

## ***Repetition***

The first time an interpersonal clash happens, whether between two individual or several people, it is not a game.

If a similar process recurs, more and more, this is a sign of repetition, a further clue of pathology.

The repetition is associated with the increase of an unpleasant emotion. If the emotion is negative but attenuating from time to time, it is not the kind of repetition we mention here.



The number of repetitions is “k”, the last occurrence of the game

The conduct is then not to dramatise or intervene the first time of occurrence of a conflict, which could never re-appear or exponentially smooth.

A low “k” is generally preferable than a high “k”, if we are in presence of the growing effect.

Sometimes the game is inevitable but we still can choose between low and high “k”.

### ***c) Triangle***

It is the indirect communication which convey a message not directly to the addressed person but through an intermediate one, the angle of the triangle.

The triangle can be extended to an unlimited chain of “angles” which shift the message from the originator to the target. The process induces an amplification and distortion, reducing the social responsibility of the initial sender.

### ***d) Accomplices***

The participants to the game are contributing in a determinant way to carry on the process, as if there were a “shared plan” (partially unconscious). It is not possible to define a partition between the “good player and the bad player”, as every person is an “accomplice”.

Besides, the roles are variable and who we generally call the victim has on the contrary an important role and the power to change the scene, where it will play a different role.

### ***e) Audience***

It is the non necessary presence of people. For example, to summon a meeting with people that are non relevant for a discussion involving a restrict group of persons.

The audience constitutes the energy of the game, which will be discharged at the end of the conflict (the phase “k” of point c). A big audience (in term of quantity but also quality of the attendees) creates a higher seriousness of the conflict.

If one person is an audience and leaves the scene, he reduces the importance of the conflict.

The audience is a temporary role, quickly it becomes an “accomplice” and then he cannot leave the conflict till its end.

### *f) The end of the conflict*

The duration of a game can vary, it can last also years.

The final act of the conflict is associated to a damage of economic nature. What characterises a game is that there are only losers.

If at least one winner exists, the whole process is called “manoeuvre”, which is less dangerous than a game.

It happens as if there is a sort of plan to end in this non rational way a negative process

### **Why games?**

Although illogical, there are some explanations of the diffusion of game within organisations.

Conflicts are generally associated to a high level of stability of the groups (whole companies).

They act as a sort of gravity centre, as they make memorable the events of the group and creates chances for intense participation.

### **6) INTIMACY, The solution of a game**

The first possibility to prevent the involvement is to avoid to enter the game.

If requested to be an angle of the triangle, it is possible not to continue the chain. Somebody else will be used for the same function but not who interrupt the triangle chain.

A second possibility when one is invited to be the audience, with the inevitable destiny to become an accomplices.

The solution of a game when one is involved or a game prevention is achieved through an “**act of intimacy**”

An act of intimacy is here intended an action on the clue a) (double level)

It consists in removing the social level, making accessible the psychological level.

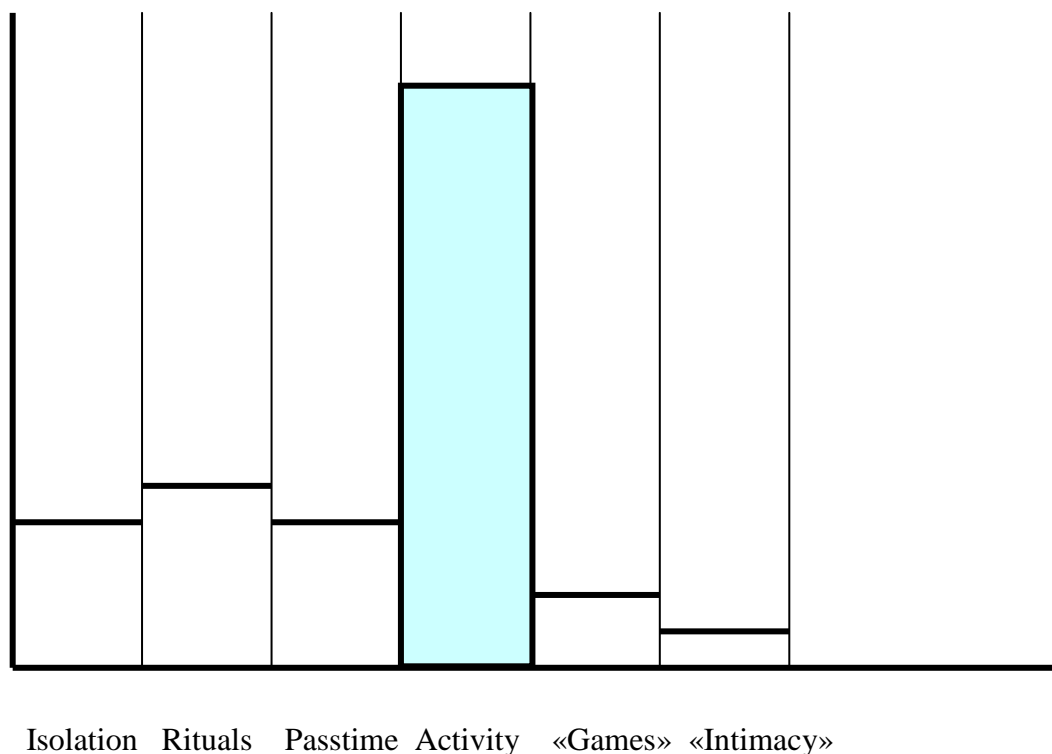
This act is not a strategy, it is not considering the risks or the opportunity which it implies, it is an act with no other meaning than the act itself, a form of gratuity.

The consequence are unpredictable, it could be positive or negative for the person which acts intimately, but the game, as far as that person is concerned, it is interrupted.

It is also a powerful way to speed up people dynamics, saving a consistent amount of time and an anti-stress factor. A good level of intimacy in group makes their members able to endure stressful situations for others. The risk of intimacy is high on the short term but resulting favourable for the person and his environment of the longer term.



## Berne's grid for the use of time



*An example on how personal time can be scattered during a working period*

### Use of time and the Multicultural approach

It is of great help to understand how people typically use their time at work, under the strong influence of their culture. The meaningful factors are:

- The distribution profile, using the grid above (how much time is devoted to each one of the 6 ways)
- Modalities people use to implement each one of the 6 ways
- The border definition between two ways; for instance, a pastime could be clear (talking about Ferrari's performance) or hidden within a pseudo-activity

Specifically, it is important to understand «alien rituals» and to respect them even when incomprehensible to us (without necessarily adopting them...)

Generally, the use of time that is typical in a national culture (or in any subgroup) gives us a lot of precious information on how to survive in that Country (group)