IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Nathan L. Walls

BIO / BACKGROUND

- Software Engineer at WebAssign

- Previously: Dev manager for ~3.5 years at WebAssign

- Previously: Developer at McClatchy Interactive and The Sacramento Bee

BIO / BACKGROUND

- Focused on automation, development/QA tooling

- Personal life: Family, kung fu, hiking, some photography

OVERVIEW

- A Contrived Example

- Problems

- An Assertion

- Examples and Tactics

OVERVIEW

- Model 1: Transactional Analysis (TA)

- Model 2: Situation, Behavior, Impact (SBI)

- Applications

- Desired Outcomes

- More Info

A CONTRIVED EXAMPLE

- Lots of folks make New Year's Resolutions

- How many people make New Year's Resolutions for other people?

- How effective is that going to be?

PROBLEM?

YEAH, PROBLEM

- Those other drivers didn't meet my expectation

- They suck

PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

MY PROBLEMS

- I had expectations

    - … that I didn't communicate to anyone else

    - … and chose to be frustrated about when they weren't met

MORE PROBLEMS

- Avenues for feedback

  - Flashing lights

  - Honking horn

  - Gestures

  - Yelling in the car

- Why would anyone else find this effective?

THE ASSERTION

- Communication is DevOps Practice Zero

EXAMPLES AT WORK

- Project objectives

  - Does everyone know what they are?

  - If something bad happens, how is it discussed?

- Quarterly/Annual goals

  - Do you know how you're being evaluated?

EXAMPLES AT WORK

- Interpersonal or Interteam disputes / conflict resolution / misunderstandings

  - Overt

  - Unspoken

- Someone thinks you're doing a knock-out job, but doesn't tell you

PREVENTATIVE TACTICS

- 1:1 meetings w/ manager

- Weekly team meetings

- Team building

- Project status meetings

- Grooming

- Email

- Daily standup

- Retrospectives

REACTIVE TACTICS

- Call a(nother) meeting

- Draft email (angry, passive aggressive, etc)

- Avoidance (dancing around the problem)

- Disinvite "that person"

- Punt to a different team

- Complaint sessions

- Business cancels project

- Quit

THE ASSERTION, REVISITED

- Communication is DevOps Practice Zero

  - We have lots of opportunity and avenues for communication

  - Very few of us know how to best make use of those communication opportunities

  - There are a range of different communication styles, personalities and expectations

 - We all believe we're right

WE HAVE WORK TO DO

SCOPE

- Two overlapping models that can help improve communication – specifically feedback – between individuals. These can be applied within your team or between teams

- Caveats

  - Surface level

  - There are other models and other approaches you can take

- Ideally, we align tomorrow better than we do today through iterating these practices

MODEL 1: TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

- Model of Psychology

  - World view

  - Ego states

  - Transactions

- Founder: Eric Berne, MD

TA: WORLD VIEW

- People perceive reality through their life experience, shaped by their beliefs

- Everyone believes their perception of reality is "correct"

- World views don't always align, which can lead to conflict

- Example: Engineering world view versus Architect world view (versus Electrical Contractor)
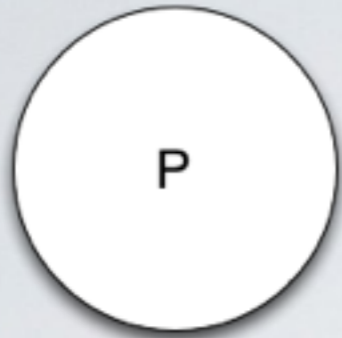
- Parent: Behaviors, thoughts and feelings copied from parents or parent figures
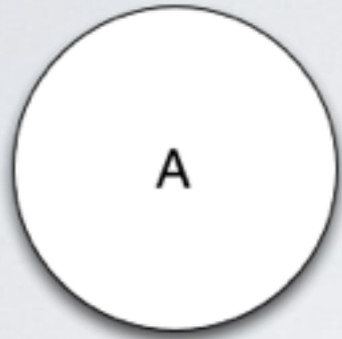
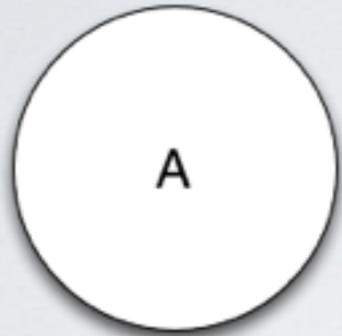- Adult: Behaviors, thoughts and feelings which are direct responses to the here-and-now
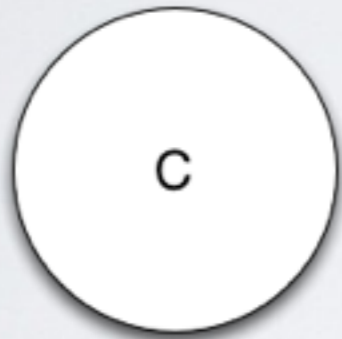
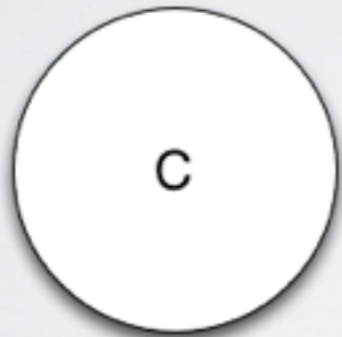- Child: Behaviors, thoughts and feelings replayed from childhood

TA: EGO STATES

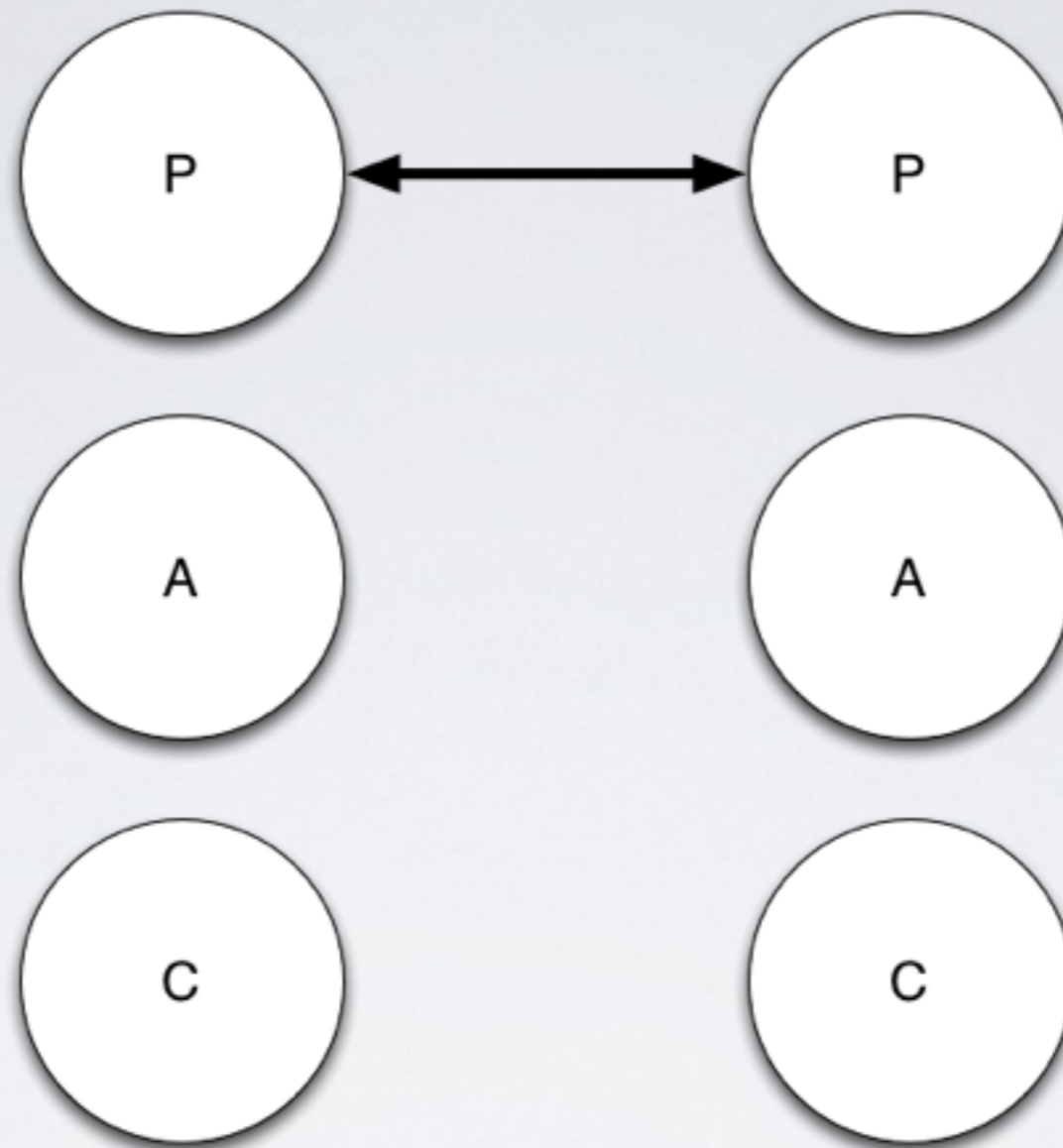Definitions from: *TA Today,* p. 12

- Parent: Walter

- Adult: The Dude

- Child: Donnie

TA: EGO STATES

The Big Lebowski
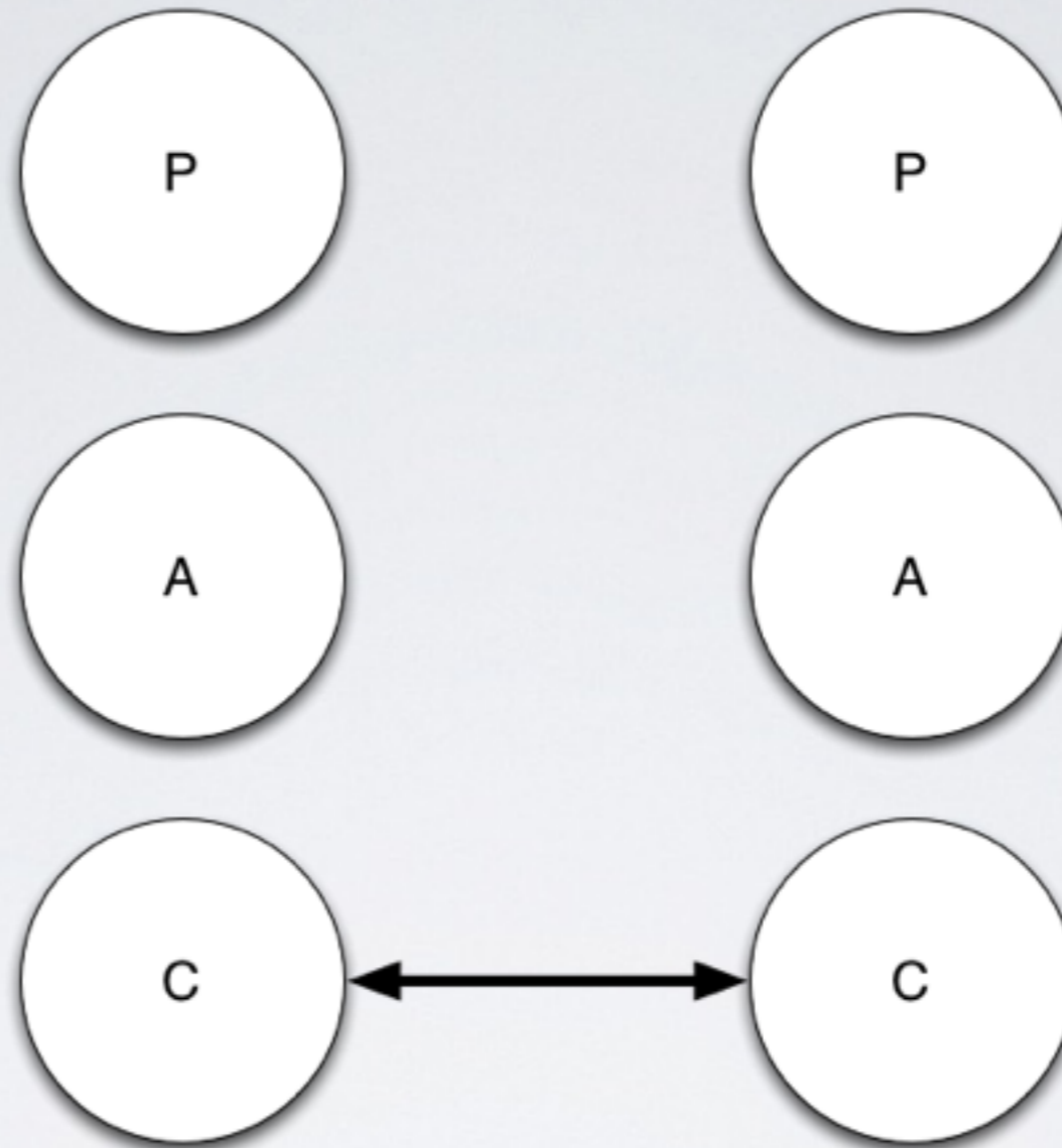
TRANSACTIONS: TWO PEOPLE HAVING A CONVERSATION (ROUGHLY)
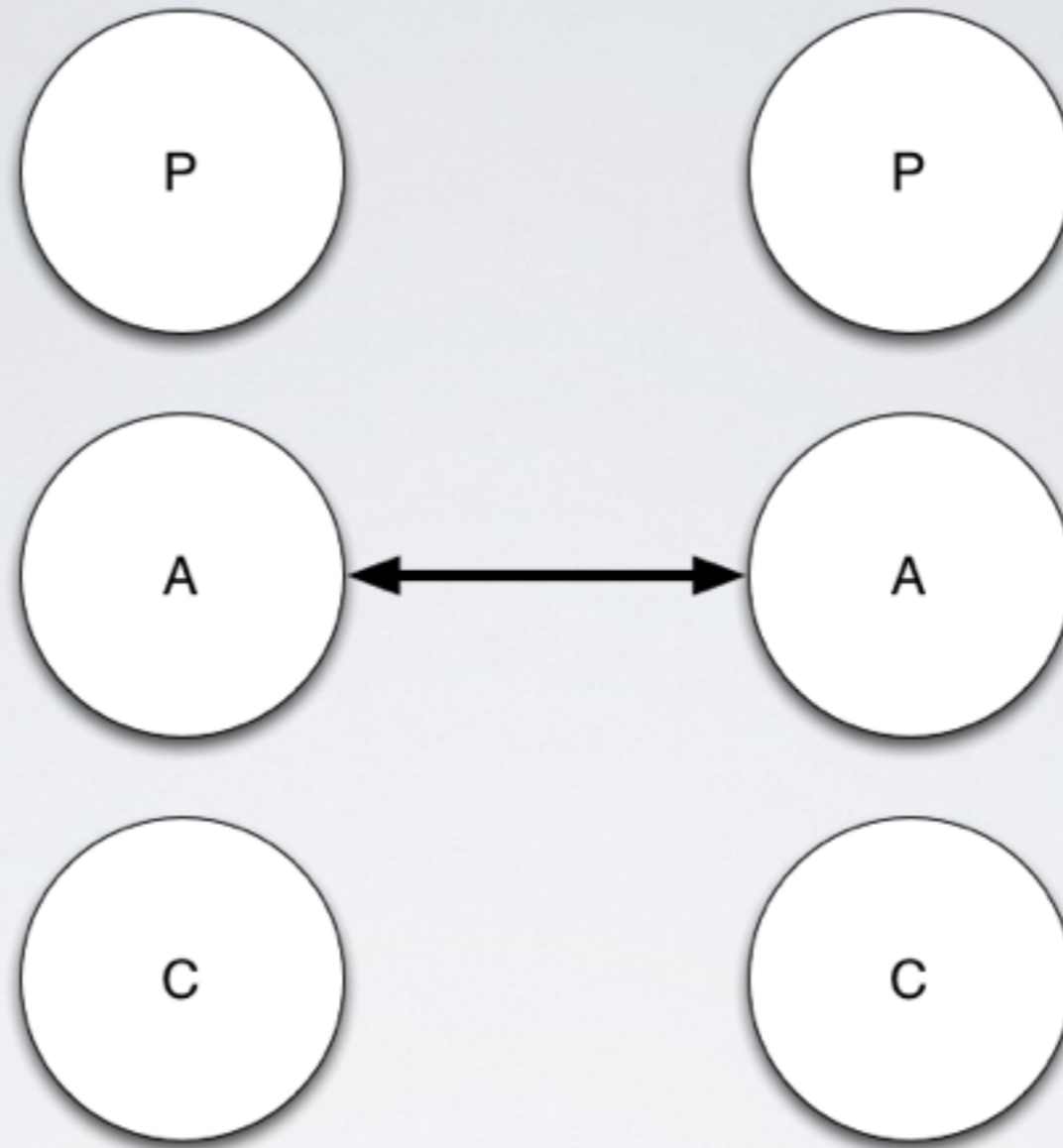
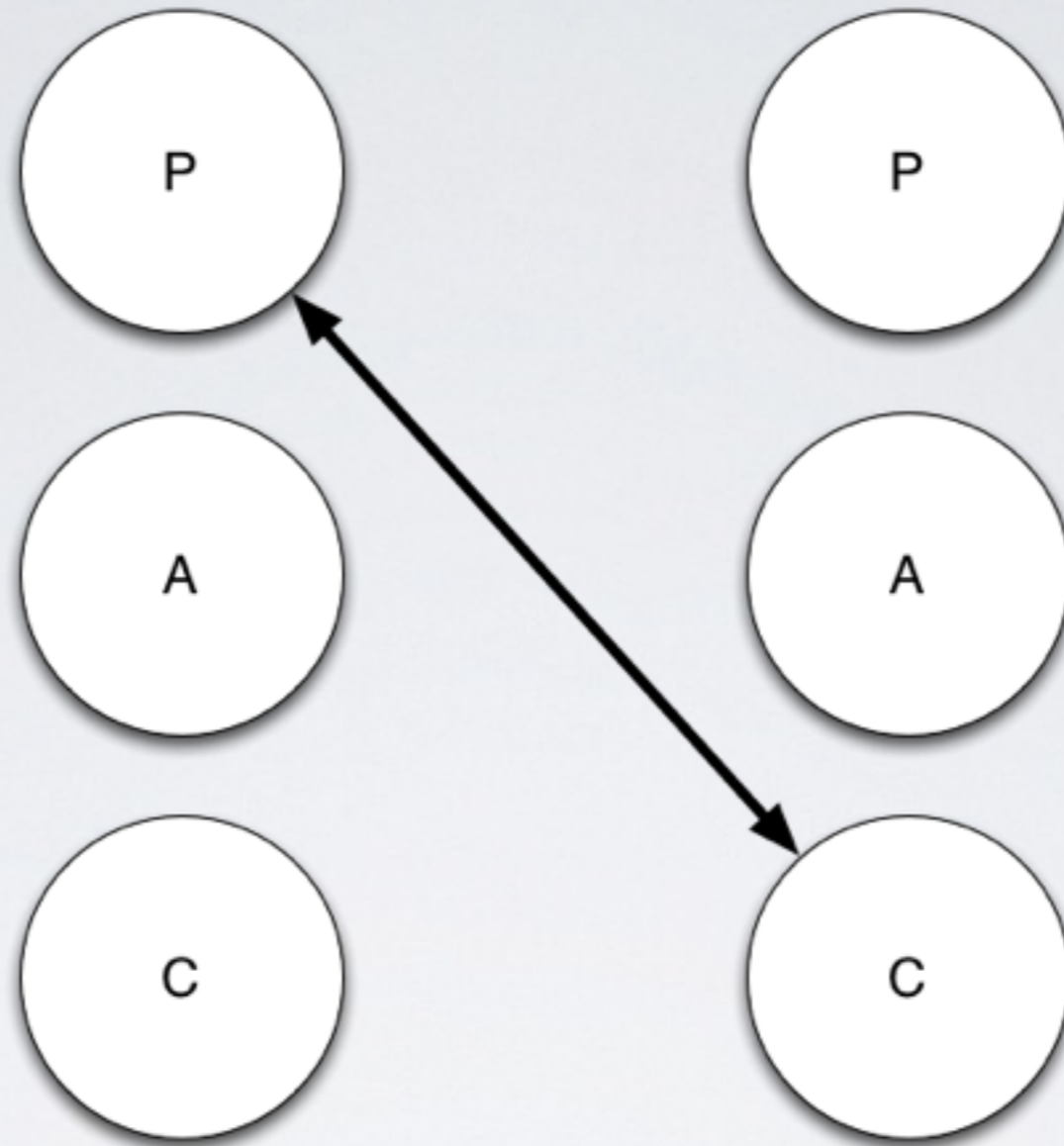# TA: PARENT TO PARENT

Head butting, "past timing"

TA: CHILD TO CHILD

Exploration/Playtime/Joking/Mischief

TA: ADULT TO ADULT

What we generally expect as professionals

TA: PARENT TO CHILD

"OVER THE LINE!"
"Is this your homework, Larry?"
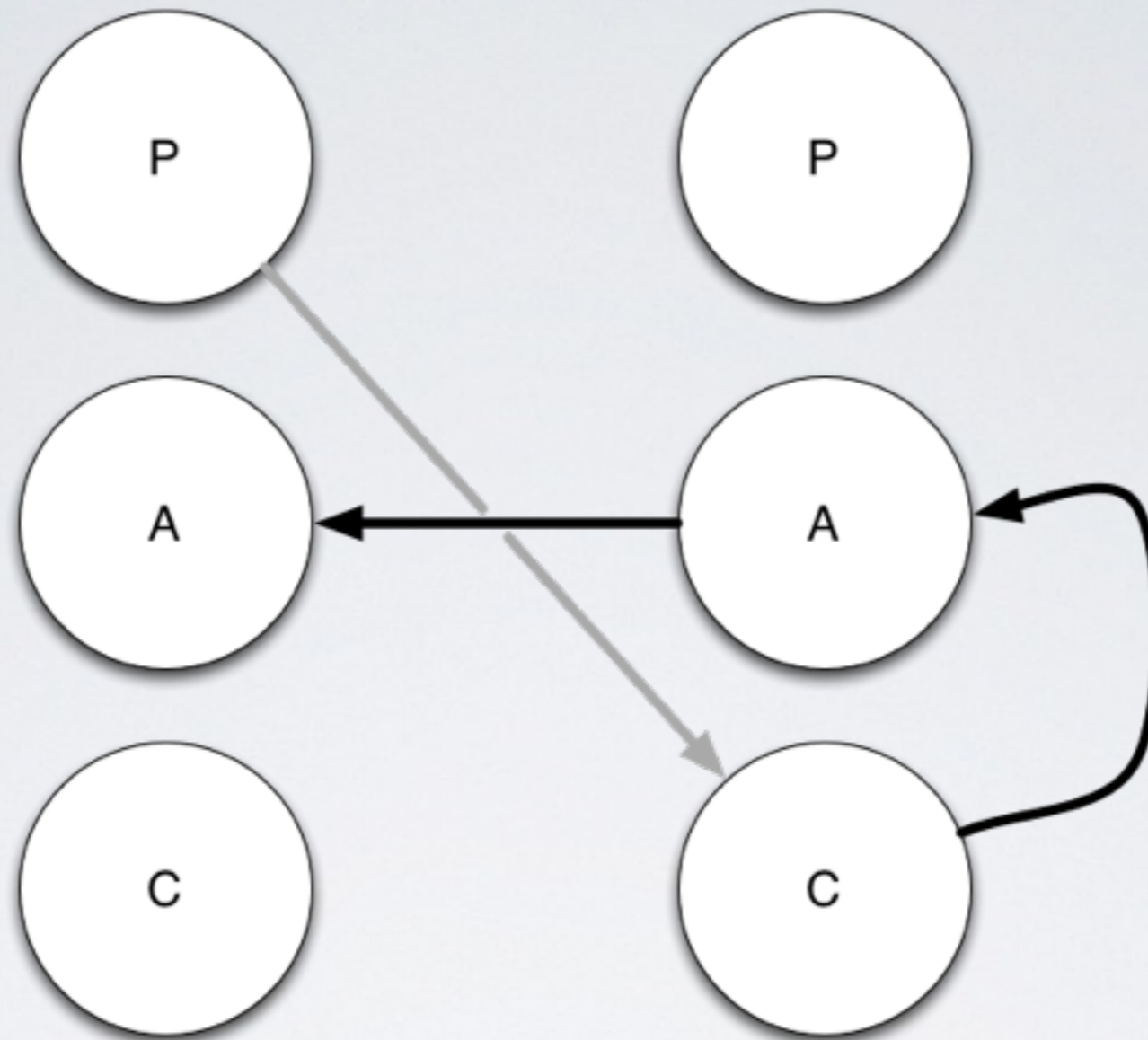
TA: CROSSED TRANSACTION

Magic

COMMUNICATION

- We can shift through any of the three ego states quickly, depending on the situation

- We have a "preferred" ego state (Parent or Child) when faced with challenging stimuli

- Successful conflict resolution/mitigation/avoidance requires an Adult ego state

  - It's fantastic for praise, too

- How to focus feedback into an Adult ego state?

MODEL 2: SITUATION, BEHAVIOR, IMPACT

- You have feedback you want to give to someone, positive or negative

- You want the feedback to be effective

  - Specific

  - Actionable

  - Respectful

  - Honest

- Developed at Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, NC

SBI: SITUATION

- Where and when a noteworthy event happened

  - Could be a meeting, email, conversation

  - Include specifics

- CCL: "Anchored in Time and Place"

SBI: BEHAVIOR

- You're talking about what's observable – behavior – not assigning motive or judging

- What would an independent observer have seen?

- Be specific

SBI: IMPACT

- How that person's behavior in that situation impacted you

  - Your feelings

  - Actions you took

  - Actions + feelings of others (if you have that information and it's relevant)

- Then, let that feedback sink in

- Bridge to what you're asking for (if you're asking for something)

SBI EXAMPLE #1

Last Thursday, at the end of the project meeting, you said you had completed the release manifest. I later found out the manifest was missing several components and I had to chase down the missing pieces after hours.

I'm frustrated and angry because I had to miss a meetup I was really looking forward to in order to make the delivery deadline.

SBI EXAMPLE #2

I wanted to let you know that yesterday's hardware upgrade went very smoothly. I saw you put a lot of time and effort into making sure all the steps were well-understood by the team. I also saw we had a very thorough mitigation plan.

I trust your work around release preparation. I have the confidence to spend my attention on our other initiatives. Thank you for helping me with that.

APPLYING TA + SBI TOGETHER – BENEFITS

- Good communication is not always pleasant, but it is professional

  - Expressing a feeling you had is not unprofessional

  - Acting on that feeling might be

- Avoid morass of asserting and questioning motive

- Useful to give meaningful positive feedback

- Helpful to identify where coworkers are at and help guide them to productive outcomes

APPLYING TA + SBI TOGETHER – WHERE + HOW

- Draft what you're going to say

- Rehearse what you're going to say

- Check your approach with a trusted peer

- Deliver feedback for an individual to that individual

  - Give them time to absorb what you're saying

  - Discuss next steps together (Adult - Adult)

APPLYING TA + SBI TOGETHER – WHERE + HOW

- Delivering feedback to another team

  - Find a point person on the other team to deliver feedback to first

  - Meet as teams to discuss, if appropriate

APPLYING TA + SBI TOGETHER - CAVEATS

- You own your feelings + actions, not theirs

- Everyone's perspective is unique

- Monolithic feedback is an anti-pattern

  - TA: Stamps / cash-in

  - Not sufficiently actionable

  - Too late

THE ASSERTION, REVISITED

- Communication is DevOps Practice Zero

  - We have ample opportunity to communicate

  - We approach communication as a craft

  - Through iterating our craft, we raise the effectiveness of our communication

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Tighter communication loops

- Increased clarity

- Increased levels of trust

- Higher job satisfaction

- Higher achievement of business goals

BE A FORCE FOR GOOD

- Be an ambassador for better communication to your team

MORE INFO

- Transaction Analysis info

    - *TA Today* – James Stewart, Vann Jones

    - *Games People Play* – Eric Berne, MD

    - Southeastern Institute – http://www.seinstitute.com (Chapel Hill)

MORE INFO

- SBI info

  - CCL Job Aid PDF: http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/community/SBIJobAid.pdf

  - SBI explanation: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/situation-behavior-impact-feedback.htm

MORE INFO

- Center for Creative Leadership

  - Onsite training in Greensboro

  - Website (articles, presentations)

    - http://www.ccl.org/

MORE INFO

- DevOps + Empathy: http://blog.ingineering.it/post/72964480807/empathy-the-essence-of-devops

- Slides forthcoming: wallscorp.us/presentations/

CREDITS

- Blaine Hartford of Durham, NC introduced my wife and me to TA. It's from his teaching that a lot of this talk is adapted

- TA definitions from *TA Today*

- Graphics adapted from Blaine Hartford's materials and *TA Today*

- SBI information from Center for Creative Leadership

FEEDBACK, PLEASE

- This is a first draft

- I would love feedback through comments on the Meetup page

THANK YOU!