Psychology in Community Management

These are the slides to my speech about „Psychology in Community Management" at the Community Manager Conference 2010 in Leipzig. I added some comments for convenience.

About me

Wilfried Henseler

**Online Games
Consultant**
Freelancer

Producer
Frogster Interactive Pictures
Frogster Online Gaming

Co-Producer
Frogster Interactive Pictures
Spellborn International

**Community
Coordinator**
NCsoft Europe

**Mentor
World Design Team**
Simutronics
Hero Engine

Community Manager
Frogster Interactive Pictures

Feel free to connect with me on Linkedin (http://de.linkedin.com/in/whenseler) or Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/whenseler)

Psychology in Community Management

- Introduction to the topic
- It's intended as a starting point
- Intended for long term community relations, not for emergency situations
- This is not about manipulation!
- Never try to manipulate a community!

I like to show you a bit of a different perspective on communities. If you like to dig deeper into the topics, there is plenty of information available on the internet or in books.

Psychology in Community Management

- Part I: How does the brain work
- Part II: Transactional Analysis

Part I

HOW DOES THE BRAIN WORK?

How does the brain work?

- Huge database
- Stores information
- The brain does not forget

How does the brain work?

- Once you have learned how to swim, you can not unlearn it anymore

How does the brain work?

- The brain also stores the feelings and emotions connected to swimming
- You can not unlearn this either

How does the brain work?

- Huge database
- Stores information
- Stores emotions
- Connects information and emotions
- The brain does not forget

While I cheated a bit with the example of swimming, because muscle memory works different, the point is that the brain connects information and words to emotions and does not forget any of them – even when we don't notice it all the time.

How does the brain work?

- Just reading the word „swim" brings back all connected memories and emotions, even when we don't notice this
- An evening with talking about our latest beach holiday may set us into a good mood
- An evening with talking about issues we had at work may set us into a bad mood
- The pure talk – and the emotions while talking – again accumulate to our brain database
- We tend to like people when we liked what the talk with them reminded us about

All words trigger emotions, even when it is a tiny effect we barely notice at all, it adds up on the long run and has an impact on if we like topics or persons and also products or communities.

The magic of words

- Every single Word can work for you or against you
- Try to always use positive words and avoid all negative words
- Talk a lot about positive topics
- Be aware of the words you chose, not just the topics

If something is „good" use the postive words, don't describe it as „not bad". Be cautious with irony, it can be fun but it often requires negative words.

The magic of words

You can trigger emotions on purpose by not just giving out an information but connecting it to a story

When the movie „Jaws" came to the cinemas, many people became affraid of going swimming at the beach. „Shrek" on the other hand changed the way we see Ogres. In the „old days" of MMORPGs, server downtimes were often connected to hamsters powering the data center. You can't complain about a hamster. Using background stories in forums is a very powerful tool.

The magic of words

- Placing a single word into a different context can connect it to specific emotions
- Be aware of this connection and the emotions
- This is often referred to as "anchoring"
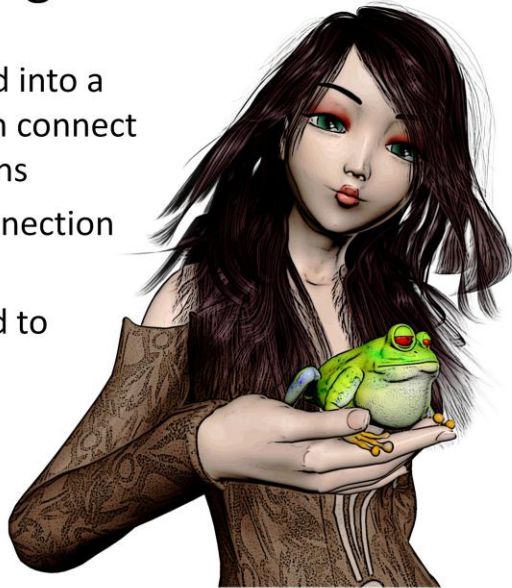
If you need to sell a frog, try connecting it to a princess.

Part II

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Transactional Analysis is used in psychoanalysis, it defines an Ego-State model to investigate how a person communicates. We use different states in our communication. The state is not related to one person in general but everybody can use all states and switch between them.

Transactional Analysis

Child state

a state in which people behave, feel and think similarly to how they did in childhood

Transactional Analysis

Adult state

The Adult is the 'grown up' rational person who talks reasonably and assertively, neither trying to control nor reacting

Transactional Analysis

Parent state

a state in which people
behave, feel, and think
like their parents acted
(or other parental figures)

Transactional Analysis

Natural flow of communication (transactions):

C-C, A-A, P-P (complementary)

C-P, P-C (crossed)

People tend to adapt to the state of others

As community manager you probably like to stick to the *A* state. A forum under heavy moderation is often a lot in *P* and/or *C* state.

As CM you usually don't communicate 1 to 1 but 1 to many.

The communication between two people is called a transaction. Two ego-states, one for each person, are involved in each transaction. Communication in general works best if both use the same ego-state, so a child-state talking to a child-state for example. We (and communities) tend to adapt to the ego-state of other persons, so to encourage the use of adult-state a CM should use adult-state himself whenever possible. Crossed transactions often result in confrontation and bad feelings.

An example would be the moderation of a thread in a forum. If someone crosses the line, we tell him to stop and most often close the thread. It often ends in a P-C transaction and we know the next replies to this can't be good, so we close the thread. A CM mostly can't adapt to the state of others because it isn't a 1:1 communication but he always talks to the whole community – that's why it's best to stay in adult-state.

Transactional Analysis

Child

- Free Child (FC)
  - Curious and exploring
  - *Wouldn't it be totally cool if we could place a cookie jar in the middle for everyone????*
- Adapted Child (AC)
  - Reacts rebellious
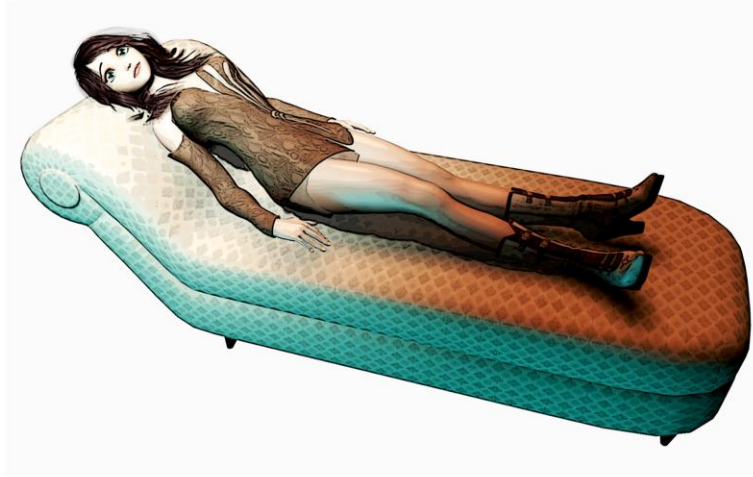 - *Give us cookies or we will leave!!!!*

Parent

- Nurturing Parent (NP)
  - Caring and concerned
  - Mother-figure
  - *You shouldn't ask for cookies, cookies aren't healthy*
- Controlling Parent (CP)
  - Tries to control and transfer believes
  - *Respect the rules and don't ask for cookies!*

Transactional Analysis divides the child and parent ego-states into more detail. The Free Child is most often a good thing, as they add some fun and enthusiasm to a forum. The Adapted Child usually isn't. Some Nurturing Parents don't hurt as they care for the original poster and try to help, Controlling Parents on the other hand try to force their beliefs on someone else in a mostly negative way. When a CM is in moderation mode to stop complaints, he often slips in CP state. Often it's required to do so but it still hurts the community and can cause negative impacts – especially in the long run if used too often.

(There are many articles on the web discussing the definition and examples for ego-states in Transactional Analysis in great detail)

Transactional Analysis

Putting the community on the couch

With the tools of Transactional Analysis we can now put the whole community on the couch.

One way to do this is by sorting every thread into one of the ego-states. This can be done quickly by just looking at the starting post of each thread and the ego-state it was created in. Notice that ego-states are pretty much independent from the topics, one can heavily complain about a topic and still remain in an adult state by being objective and constructive when criticizing. Transactional Analysis, on purpose, is not about if the people like you or a product, it is a way to measure the general health of the discussions.
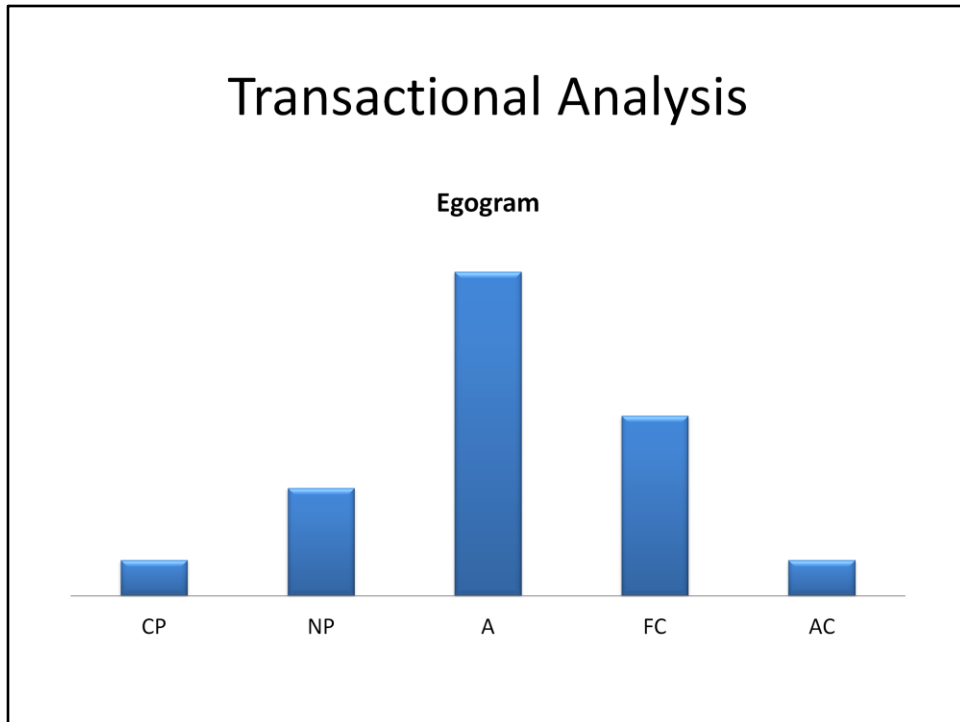
We can then draw an Egogram by adding up the numbers of threads for each ego-state. This is a healthy community, most communication is done in an adult state, free childs are second and nurturing parents third. The goal should always be to get this picture in the long run – it may differ depending on your community and your intentions for it (a medical forum would differ a lot from a child game forum for example).
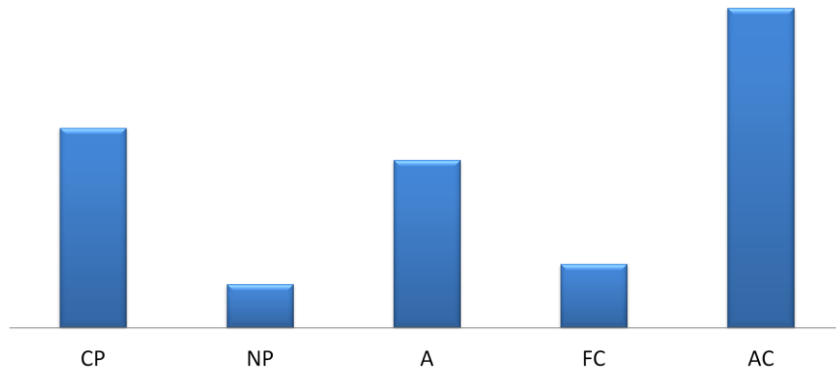
In a Free2Play MMO it's a lot harder to have a healthy community than with P2P MMOs.

Transactional Analysis

Egogram

CP · NP · A · FC · AC

This egogram shows issues with the community. A way to work with egograms is to sit down each month and discuss what can be done to improve – not just as community managers but with the whole team. While I used it here for an overview on the forum, you can also use an egogram in single threads. A good example would be an MMORPG forum where there is a patch each month. You can try different things to communicate in the patch thread each month and analyze the thread with TA to see which worked best. Remember again that TA is not about if people liked the patch, it's about how healthy the discussions are – constructive complaints are perfectly fine in that sense. Analyze different threads and see what works to improve even more in the future and talk in the meetings about how to achieve this.

Psychology in
Community Management

Thank you very much!

whenseler @ mmplay . de
http://www.linkedin.com/in/whenseler
http://www.facebook.com/whenseler

Thank you for watching and I hope I could show you a little bit of a different perspective when working with communities. As mentioned before, there is a lot about TA on the internet, if you like to dig deeper into the topic. Feel free to add me on Linkedin (http://de.linkedin.com/in/whenseler) or Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/whenseler) if you like.