TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

When people interact in assertive or non-assertive ways, there is a social transaction in which one person responds to another. The study of these social transactions between people is called Transactional Analysis (TA). Transactional analysis was developed by Eric Berne for psychotherapy in the 1950s. The objective of TA is to provide better understanding of how people relate to one another, so that they may develop improved communication and human relationship.

KEY IDEAS IN TA

Ego States

According to TA, a transaction is a stimulus plus a response. For example, if you say to one of your staff, "You really did a fine job on that project" that is stimulus: and he says, "Thanks", that is a response. Thus, transactions take place between people. They can also take place between the – "people" in our head. If we have a sudden impulse to say something to someone, we may mentally hear a voice telling us not to say it and then second vice agreeing. These people in our head are called ego states.

The personality of a person is the collection of behaviour patterns developed over a period of time that other people begin to recognize as that person. these behaviour patterns are evolved in differing degrees from three ego states - Parent, Adult and Child. These terms are capitalized so as not to be confused with their lower-cased counterparts. Thus, a parent (mother or father) has parent, adult and child ego states; and a child (son or daughter) also has parent, adult and child ego states. These ego states have nothing to do with chronological age, but only psychological age.

As Berne states, "Although we can not directly observe these ego states, we can observe behaviour and from this infer which of three ego states is operating at that moment". The three ego states are usually diagrammed as shown in figure below:

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P
A
C
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The parent ego state is a result of the "messages" (conditioning) people receive from their parents, elder sisters and brothers, school teachers and others during their childhood. These
messages can be thought of recorded on "little cassette tapes" in people's heads. They are in place, stored up, and ready to go—all you have to do is push the right button and you may get the message almost like dialing a number on the telephone. Push another button and you get a different message. After the message is given, the tape wound up and ready to go again. For instance, if a boy was eating his dinner and was playing with his food, a very common parent might say, "stop playing with your food and finish your food. Where did the father learn to say this? He probably learned it from his mother and father, who learned it from their parents and now he is playing it to its kids. Many of us were taught when we were young that it is good to clean our plate and bad to leave food on our plate. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, many of us probably still feel guilty today if we leave food on our plate. Thus, a person is operating from a parent ego state when he or she mentally plays back 'old tapes' from childhood. These recordings say such things as 'it is right! it is wrong! it is bad! it is good! you should! you should not!' Our parent ego state is the evaluative part of us that evokes value laden behaviour but this value laden behaviour is not necessarily "real value"—it is learned value.

There are two kinds of Parent ego states: (i) Nurturing Parent and (ii) Critical parent. The Nurturing parent is that part of a person which is understanding and caring about other people. Behaviour coming from the nurturing parent may set limits on and provide direction for people behaviour. It will not put the people down and make them feel not OK as individual. Critical parent behaviour attacks people's personalities as well as their behaviour. Critical parent makes people feel that they are not OK. When people are in their critical parent ego state they are very evaluative and judgmental. They are always ready to respond with a 'should' or 'ought' to almost anything people tell them.

The Adult ego state evokes behaviour that could be described simply as logical, reasonable, rationale and unemotional. Behaviour from the adult ego state is characterized by problem-solving analysis and rationale decision-making. People operating from the adult ego state are taking emotional content of their child ego state, the value-laden content of their parent ego state and checking them out in the reality of the external world. These people are examining alternatives, probabilities and values prior to engaging in behaviour.

The child ego state is associated with behaviours that appear when a person is responding emotionally. A person's child contains the 'natural' impulses and attitudes learned from child experiences. There are several forms of the child ego state. However, two kinds of ego states viz. happy child and destructive child are commonly relevant in their behaviour. People behaving from their happy child are doing things they want to do it but it is not destructive to others. However, people in their destructive child are also doing things but their behaviour is either destructive to others or to themselves, or to their environment. In understanding the difference between these two types of child ego state, it helps to remember that behaviour by itself is not happy or destructive. Whether a person's behaviour is coming from a happy child or destructive child depends on the transaction feedback from others. For example, if Bharat is a draftsman and is singing while he works, he may be a happy child but if one of his co-workers tells him that he is having trouble because of his singing and still he keeps on singing, he has moved from happy child to destructive child. It is healthy for people to have a functioning child ego state i.e. spontaneous, emotional and sometimes dependent.

**A Healthy personality**

All people behave from three ego states—parent, adult, child at different times. A
healthy person has a personality that maintains a balance among all three – according to Abewagner, "Nurturing Parent, Adult and Happy Child". This means that these people are able to lead the adult ego state take over and think very rationally and engage in problem solving. At other times these people are able to free the Child ego state and be spontaneous and emotional. At other times healthy people are able to defer to the Parent ego state and learn from experience. While a balance amongst all three ego states seems to be most healthy, this is especially a problem when the Adult ego state is not in the executive position and peoples' personality is being dominated by the Critical Parent or the Destructive child. When this occurs in people, it poses problems for their managers in the world of work.

More specifically, child dominated people who are mainly coming from Destructive Child do not engage in much rational problem solving. They learn in their early years that they could get things by screaming, hollering being emotional. It is difficult to reason with them in such circumstances. Rather than solving their own problems, these people want their managers or some other persons to tell them what to do, where to do it, how do it or what is right, what's wrong, what's good and what's bad.

Parent dominated people who are mainly coming from Critical Parent also do not engage in much emotional problem solving because they already know what is right and what is wrong. They seem to have an answer for everything.

**Strokes**

Berne observed that people need strokes, the units of interpersonal recognition, to survive and thrive. Understanding how people give and receive positive and negative strokes and changing unhealthy patterns of stroking are powerful aspects of work in transactional analysis. Stroking is the recognition that one person gives to another. Strokes are essential to a person's life. Without them, Berne said, the "spinal cord will shrivel up." It has been shown that a very young child needs actual physical strokes in order to remain alive. Adults can get by on fewer physical strokes as they learn to exchange verbal strokes; positive strokes like praise or expressions of appreciation, or negative strokes like negative judgements or put downs. Therefore, the exchange of strokes is one of the most important things that people do in their daily lives.

**Games**

The essential aspect of games is that they are crooked or covert exchanges of strokes. A game is a recurring series of covert transactions with a beginning, middle and end, and a payoff. The payoff is a hidden advantage which motivates the players to participate. Transactional Analysis became a nation-wide fad in the 1960's due to the best selling success of Eric Berne's book, Games People Play. In this book he assigned engaging names ("Now I've got you," "Kick me," "I only trying to help.") for different games. For instance when Jane plays "Why Don' You, Yes But" she asks advice from another but rejects every suggestion so that everyone ends up exasperated. It is the type of conversation which occurs over and over again, especially in therapy groups. It is devious and covert: on the social level, it appears to be a conversation in which a person in the Adult ego state is asking a question to one or more people who are also in their Adult ego states. What makes it a game is that none of the suggestions are really accepted. The reason for that is that, at the psychological and much more meaningful level, what is really going on is that Jane may need advise but needs strokes even more. Because these strokes are being given in a roundabout way they are not as
satisfying as direct strokes would be. This is why the game ends on a note of depressed frustration.

**Payoffs**

There are a number of payoffs of this game; every game pays off at three different levels: (i) The biological pay-off of a game is strokes. Even though games end badly, all the players get a considerable number of strokes – both positive and negative – out of playing them. (ii) The social pay-off of a game is time-structuring. People are able to fill time which otherwise might have been dull and depressing with an exciting activity. (iii) The existential pay-off of a game is the way in which the game confirms the existential position of each player.

**Life position**

In the process of growing up, people make basic assumptions about their own self-worth as well as about the worth of significant people in their environment that may or may not be channelised to other people later in life. Harris called them combination of an assumption about oneself and another person a life position. Life position tend to be more permanent than ego states. They are learned through out life by way of reinforcements for, and responses to expressed. These assumptions are described in terms of 'okay ness'. Thus individual that they are either OK or not OK and other individuals are assumed to be either OK or not OK.

Four possible relationship resulted from this life position.

1. I am not OK, You are not OK (neither person have value)
2. I am not OK, You are OK (you have value but I do not have)
3. I am OK, You are not OK (I have value but you don't have)
4. I am OK, You are OK (we both have value)

**I AM NOT OK, YOU'RE NOT OK:**

People tend to feel bad about themselves and see that the whole world as miserable. People with this life position usually give up. They do not trust other people and have no confidence in themselves.

**I AM NOT OK, YOU'RE OK**

People with this life position often come from their child ego state. They feel that others are more capable and generally have fewer problems than they themselves do. They tend to think that they always got the short end of the stick. This is the most common life position for people who have high expectations for authority. They see their world as "I don't have any control or much power, but those people seem to have all the power and rewards and punishment."
I AM OK, YOU’RE NOT OK

This type of people often come their Critical Parent ego state. They tend to be down on other people for at least two reasons. First, they often regard other people as source of criticism. They feel that if they are not exactly perfect or right, people will be excessively critical of them. Second, they want to break away or rebel from some authority figure and become more independent, but they are either not sure how to go about this or they have had pleasant experiences in attempting it in the past.

I AM OK, YOU’RE OK

This life position is considered as healthy position. People with these feelings express confidence in themselves as well as trust and confidence in other people in their environment. Their behaviour tends to come from their Nurturing Parent, Adult and Happy Child ego states, while seldom being evoked from their Destructive Child or Critical parent.

TA may be used to explain why people behave in specific patterns throughout their life. This analysis enables people to identify patterns of transactions between themselves and others. Ultimately, this can help us to determine which ego state most heavily influencing our behaviour and the behaviour of other people with whom we interact.

Two types of transactions may be useful for managers to know: Open (complementary) and blocked (crossed). There are many combinations of open transactions; however the basic principle to remember is that the ego state should get response to continue the transaction. When response to a transaction is the expected and predictable one, communication can continue. Open transactions are Adult to Adult, Child to Child, Parent to Child, Parent to Parent. Not all open transactions are beneficial. What we want to strive for in our relationships are OK open transaction-Happy child to happy child, Nurturing parent to Happy child. Adult to Adult, and Nuturing Parent to Nurturing parent. Not Ok transactions involve any of the loss healthy ego states, for example, Critical parent to Nurturing Parent, rebellious child, or complaint child. Examples of both OK and not OK open transactions are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transaction 1</th>
<th>Transaction 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happy Child</td>
<td>Critical Parent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Happy Child</td>
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![Diagram of transactions](image-url)
As illustrated in transaction 1, if a manager says to one of his staff members from the Nurturing parent, "I want you to be more careful in writing your reports because I found a number of typographical and grammatical errors in this report, and his staff member responds from his happy child, OK sir, I did not notice all those mistakes then we have a completed communication in which information has been easily shared and everyone still feels OK about themselves. If, however, as illustrated in transaction 2, this manager was coming from Critical Parent and said something like, "How can you be so stupid? the last report you gave me had all kinds of typographical and grammatical errors. I don't see how you can possibly do your job if you don't know how to write a decent report," and his staff member responded from happy Child back to the manager's Critical Patent by saying "I am sorry, I will try not to make those mistakes next time", we have a completed communication in which information is shared with minimum effort, but the staff member feels put down by his boss and does not feel OK.

A blocked transaction is one that results in the closing, at least temporarily, of communication. Unlike open transactions, the response is either inappropriate or unexpected, as well as being out of context with what the sender of the stimulus had originally intended. This occurs when a person responds with an ego state different from the one the other person was addressing. In other words, if occurs when the stimulus from one ego state to another ego state, such that the sender feels misunderstood, confused, or even threatened. When this occurs, sharing and listening stops, at least temporarily. For example, if John asks a coworker a question from his adult ego state like what time is it, Ram?" he would expect Ram to respond from his adult ego state and share information about time. If, however, Ram responds from his Critical Parent and answers, "don't ask me", then a blocked transaction has taken place, as illustrated below:

The example illustrated that in a blocked transaction the lines of communication get crossed and stop effective communication. Blocked transaction can either be helpful or destructive to the development of people. The preceding example was a destructive transaction because the Critical Parent response to John's question leaves him with not OK feelings. Destructive blocked transactions occur between people when either responds to the other from the Critical Parent or the rebellious or Destructive Child.

When people argue, a destructive blocked transaction is usually involved. By analysing open and blocked transaction, it is possible to determine the various strength of the three ego states. This is in turn provides an indication of which life position the individual has selected.
We can thus gather data on individuals in a way that will help to predict future patterns of behaviour.

**The Stroke Economy**

One of the harmful aspects of the Critical Parent is that it has a set of rules that govern the giving and taking of strokes (Don't give, ask for, accept or give yourself strokes). The effect of these rules, called the stroke economy, is that people are prevented from freely stroking each other and taking care of their stroke needs. As a consequence, most human beings live in a state of stroke hunger in which they survive on a deficient diet of strokes - in a manner similar to persons who are starved for food - and spend a great deal of time and effort in trying to satisfy their hunger. Positive strokes, sometimes called "warm fuzzies," such as holding hands or saying "I love you," give the person receiving them a feeling of being OK. There are also negative strokes, which are painful forms of recognition such as sarcasm, putdowns, a slap, an insult or saying "I hate you." Negative strokes make the person receiving them feel not OK. Still, even though unpleasant, negative strokes are a form of recognition and prevent "the spinal cord from shriveling up." For this reason, people prefer a situation of negative strokes to a situation without strokes at all. This explains why some people seem to intentionally hurt themselves in their relationships with others. It is not because "they enjoy hurting themselves" but because they can't get positive recognition, and choose painful negative strokes to having no strokes.

People can learn to exchange strokes freely, open the hearts and give and ask for strokes without shame or embarrassment. Different strokes appeal to different people and everyone has their special, secret wishes. There are many kinds of positive strokes - there are physical strokes and verbal strokes. Physical strokes can be hugs, kisses, holding, caresses, strong or light, sexy, sensual or just friendly, nurturing or slightly teasing and so on. Verbal strokes can be about a person's looks - their face, body, posture or movements or about a person's personality - their intelligence, loving nature sensitivity or courage. In any case, people need
and deserve strokes and if they ask for them they will usually find someone who has just the strokes they want and is willing to give them.

**APPLICATION OF TA**

**Stroking** – Stroking is defined as any act of recognition for another. People seek stroking in their interaction with others. It applies to all type of recognition, such as physical, verbal and eye contact between people. Strokes may be either positive, negative, or mixed. Positive strokes, when they are received contribute to a person's sense being OK. Negative strokes hurt physically or emotionally and make us feel OK about ourselves. There also is a difference between conditional and unconditional strokes. Conditional strokes are offered to employees if they perform correctly or avoid problems. A Regional manager may promise" I will give you a choice posting if you achieve the targets of advances, deposits and recovery and turn around the branch". Unconditional strokes are presented without any connection to behaviour, although they may make a person feel good (for example, "you're a good officer").

**TA and Leadership** – when managers transact primarily from a single ego state, they limit their choice of leadership styles. For example, the person with a dominant Parent ego state will tend towards a more autocratic style. If the Child state is dominant, the free-rein style may be used extensively. However, a supervisor who feels "I am OK-You're OK" and who has a well developed Adult state, is more likely to collect data prior to making a choice of style. The style chosen by the adult state generally will allow ample freedom for employees to participate in the decision process.

**TA and conflict resolution** – There are several natural connections between TA and the approaches to resolving conflict. the Parent ego state may lead to the use of a forcing strategy, while the child state may smooth over conflicts or try to avoid them. The "I am OK – You're OK" person is more likely to seek a win-win outcome, applying the Adult ego state.

**Benefits of TA** – Organisations that have used TA approach were found moderately successful training in TA can give employees fresh insights into their own personalities, and it also can help them to understand why others sometimes respond as they do. A major benefit is improved interpersonal communication. Employees in organization can sense when crossed communication occurs and then take steps to restore complementary communication, preferably in the Adult-to-Adult pattern. The result is a general improvement in interpersonal transactions.

**Conclusion**

Transactional analysis is the study of social transaction between people. One useful approach is the classification of Parent, Adult and child ego states. An Adult-to-adult complementary transaction is especially desirable at work. Crossed transactions tend to cut off communication and produce conflicts. TA is essentially a learning experience through which an individual discovers how to sort out the data that goes into his decisions. This approach is useful to improve the interpersonal communication in organization and in social life. I'am OK, You're OK life position shows acceptance of self and others. TA gives employees fresh insights into their own personalities.
SOURCE:

1. I'M OK, YOU'RE OK By Thomas A.Harris, M.D.
2. Organisational Behaviour, Human behaviour at work by John W.Newatrim and Keith Davis.

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