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Transactional Analysis: Psychology Applied at Workplace

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Abstract

Transactional Analysis is a theory developed by Dr. Eric Berne in the 1950s. TA provide guidance on the interactions of people and help in improving the human social environment. Originally it was used in psychoanalysis as a direct therapeutic approach but later it has been used extensively in the workplace over the past many years. His work was mainly focused on the operation of one-to-one relationships. TA needs to be considered carefully as a way of helping us to better understand people's learned behaviors. It's a method to improve communication, it outlines how we develop and treat ourselves, how we relate and communicate with others and suggest interventions which will enable us to change and grow. Berne theorized that each person is made up of three ego states: child, adult and parent. These ego states is a system of communication with its own language and function. The child state rely on the language of emotions, the adult state rely on language of logic/ rationality and the parent state rely on the language of values. Dr Berne's book "Games People play" highlight understanding about the complexity of "overt" and "covert" interpersonal communications. Berne theorized that verbal communication, particularly face to face, is at the center of social relationships. In TA each interaction is called transaction and the outcome of these transactions can be measured with fundamental unit of social action called stroke. So, if a transaction is any social interaction, a stroke is each social action considered individually. According to Dr. Berne we seek strokes as recognition for our transactions. A stroke occurs

When one person recognizes another person either verbally or non-verbally. It may be negative or positive. As transactions occur, we tally up these strokes and at the end of the day by this tally we decide as to how we feel about ourselves and alter our behavior. All personal relations and business pinned around effective communication for personal/ project success, hence it is particularly useful to understand how this theory works. TA is based on the philosophy that people can change and we all have a right to be in the world and be accepted.

This paper presents a unifying framework about TA which encompasses both personal and professional behavior and which is widely used in psychotherapy, organizations, educational and religious settings. Transactional Analysis is truly an international theory relating to a diverse range of culture.

Keywords: Transaction, TA, Transactional Analysis, Communication, Strokes, Ego States

Introduction

Transactional Analysis (TA) can help you to manage yourself and your relationships with other people. TA is a psychological theory which explain how individuals think, feel, behave and interact with others, often form patterns that are repeated through life. It helps in understanding what happens within and between people. TA ,fundamentally a psychoanalytic approach, assumes that unconsciously our early childhood experiences profoundly shape how we live our lives.   However, ideas from TA can be used at cognitive level which may increase your awareness and make sense of your situation from a new perspective. With this you begin to think differently about your situation and you may then respond or act differently. In this way TA can also be regarded as a cognitive-behavioural approach which can help us to think and behave more effectively by helping us to better understand people learned behaviors.

To Understand TA, One Should Understand The Following

1. Ego States,
2. Life Position and
3. Analysis of Transactions and strokes

All of the different parts of Berne's theory (and there are several) can be seen in this diagram below. This diagram holistically shows that each part of the TA theory relates to another part, building from the more covert "Ego States" theory at the base of the diagram to the more overt or visible behaviors such as the way we structure our time and engage in relationship games at the top.

Figure 1:Different Parts of TA Theory

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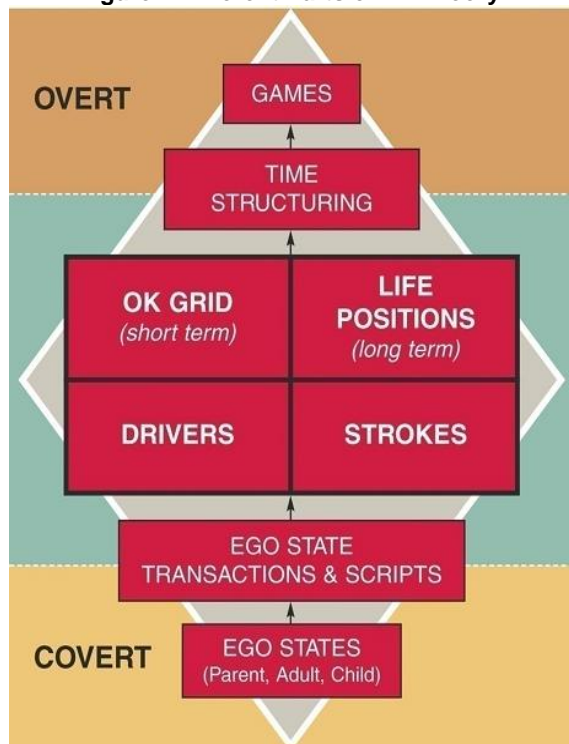
Ego States

According to Dr Berne people can interact from one of three "Ego States" – Parent, Adult or Child – and that these interactions can occur at overt and covert levels. These are not easily seen until you have trained yourself for the same therefore these are reflected in diamond shaped diagram .

Parent Ego State (Taught)

This state contains the attitudes, feelings and behavior incorporated from external sources, primarily parents. In outward behavior it is divided into two parts:

1. nurturing parent: concerned with caring, loving, helping
2. controlling parent: criticizing, censoring, punishing

A person in his/her parent state responds automatically, almost as if the individual has a memory recording playing in his or her head.

Adult Ego States (Thought)

The Adult ego state is about being aware and spontaneous which means a person in Adult Ego State rely on his/her thoughts, feelings and behavior in the here and now at any one time. This ego state has nothing to do with the person's age and past experiences, rather it combines behavior of collecting information, organizing and analyzing. It operates dispassionately and without emotions and assumptions. The Adult in us is the 'grown up' rational person who talks reasonably and assertively, yet neither trying to control nor reacting aggressively towards others. The Adult is comfortable with himself/herself and is, for many of us, our 'ideal self'.

Child Ego states (Felt)

As name reflect it contains all the impulses that come naturally to an infant. There are three types of child we play:

Natural child is aware of himself/herself. They are open to new ideas, they are playful and vulnerable.

Another is a cute professor. This child is curious and exploring. He/she always tries out new things, such as child often annoys the parent.

The third one is Adaptive child who tries to adapt himself/ herself to the surrounding by changing or molding according to situation. At times they rebel against forces which are not befitting.

Ego States is a System of Communication

Accordingly to Dr. Berne we all have three alter ego personas and depending upon the situation we all interchange into these ego states of Child, Parent and Adult. Each Ego States follow a system of communication with its own language and function; the Parent's is a language of values, the Adult's is a language of logic and rationality and the Child's is a language of emotions. According to Berne, effective functioning in the world depends on the availability of all three intact Ego States (although the Adult State is ideally the "access door" to the other two).

Conflicts and disagreements part of life, both professional and personal ,which keep arising due to our expectations and wants. We don't realize that each person has a different belief system. Without negotiation, such conflicts may lead to argument, resentment and dissatisfaction resulting in poor relationship and low performance. The negotiations become necessary and the point of negotiation is to try to reach agreements without causing future barriers in communications. It is very important to adapt to a suitable ego state to resolve differences and to get the best deal. People who are good in negotiation skills seem to have mastered transactional analysis.

Self-Directed Learning

Manage Yourself and Your Relationships

There are five possible ego states – Critical Parent, Nurturing Parent, Adapted Child, Free Child and Adult. Depending upon the situation we opt different ego state. When someone is in a particular ego state their thoughts, feelings, words and body language are generally consistent with one another.

Critical Parent Vs Nurturing Parent

One thing that both Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent ego states have in common is that both are about controlling the other person.

In any conversation ; wagging your finger at any other person, speaking in a harsh tone, pointing out the wrong they have done and telling them how they should have behaved, then you are operating from a Critical Parent ego state.

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However, when you look after other person , ensure their safety and wellbeing, and give rationale along with proposed action then you may have adopted a Nurturing Parent ego state.

Adult Ego

The Adult ego state is not usually subdivided within TA but it is a very resourceful state to operate from. Adult ego expect you to be aware of your own and other's emotions and focusing on the here and now, looking to collaborate with others and to solve problems, thinking logically.

Indicators of Different Ego States

There are several ways to tell what ego state you are (or some one else is) using. Pay attention to tone of voice, body posture, gestures, choice of words, and emotional state.

A soft and soothing tone is a sign of a Nurturing Parent ego state, on the other hand, harsh and critical or threatening tone indicate a Critical Parent ego state. An Adult ego state is reflected from even and clear voice tone, while an especially cheerful or emotion-laden tone of voice is sign of Free Child ego state. The Adapted Child usually sounds whiney or like a good girl (or boy) saying just what is expected of her or him.

Similarly, there are gestures that signify that someone is using Parent (the warning, wagging finger), Adult (thoughtful expression, nodding head), or Child (jumping up and down).

There are also specific words that tend to come from one ego state more than from the others. For example , Parent ego state use expressions such as "Pay attention now" or "You should always do it this way," while language belonging to the Adult ego state is likely to sound evenhanded ("This information might be useful to you") or simply factual ("Will you tell me what time it is?"). The Child is most likely to use short expressive words like "WOW!" "Yeah!" or "Let's go!" When you pay attention to these behaviors and to how you feel, you will be able to tell what ego state you or someone else is using.

Benefits of Understanding Ego States

You can use your knowledge of ego states in a social situation to maximize your chances of making new connections.

Develop your nurturing parent find out ways to help your stressed colleagues by employee engagement programs, training, workshops etc. Reassure yourself by saying things like, "This might be fun. Let's do it!" Leave your Critical Parent at home. Smile at people. When others talk to you, use your Nurturing Parent to make supportive comments and to offer strokes. Use your Adult to ask questions, showing the other per- son that you are interested in him or her. Allow your Natural Child to be intuitive, to explore and to figure out people or situation. Let your Child ego state connect with others making atmosphere light by sometimes finding humor in ordinary situations as well. You might find others opening up to you. We all need warmth and positive strokes; if you offer some of them to others, it is likely that some will come back your way. These elements of nurturance, support, a show of interest, and playfulness are often how relationships begin. Change

does not necessarily come quickly or easily. Change takes practice; but once you start making changes it will move your life in a positive direction.

Life Positions-Ok Corral

The Thinking ,feeling or behavior of a person is result of his past experiences based on which he develops a philosophy towards work from early childhood which becomes part of his identity and remains with him for lifetime unless some external factor changes it. These positions are called life time positions or "existential positions" because they influence how we view our own and others existence.

There are four "Life Positions" or types of behavior that can be plotted on what Berne called the "OK Corral" or Grid as can be seen below:

Figure 2: OK Corral
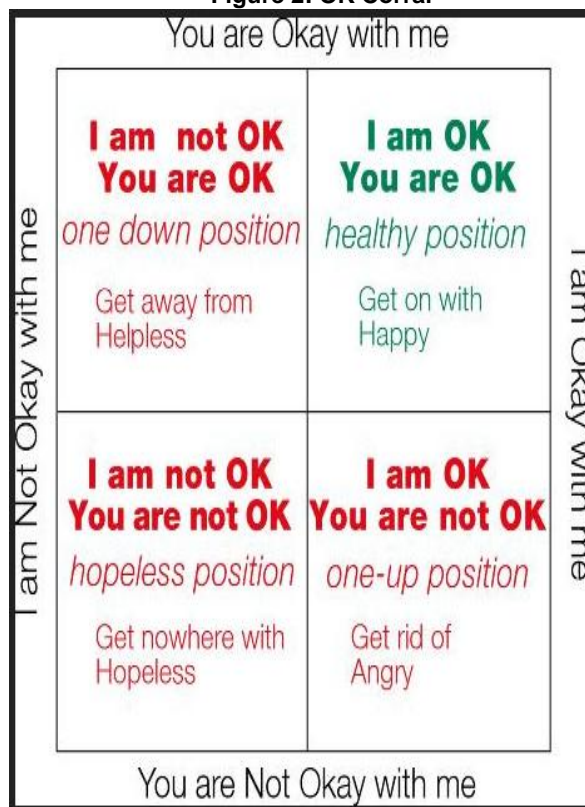
I am OK, You are OK

This represents adult ego state of a person who is brought up as natural child with nurturing parenting. It becomes the philosophy of a person who has good and positive experiences with others. They feel confident about themselves and others. Managers with this life position believe in give and take. They are competent to take decisions and also allow others to participate in the decision-making processes. They delegate authority and express confidence and consistency in others. They are not threatened by others and express freely what they want to express.

I am OK, You are not OK

This life position represents parent ego of a person who is brought up as a rebellious child. They have critical attitude towards others. They believe

whatever they do is right and blame others for their wrong acts. This usually happens when a person is ignored as a child. Managers with this life position have critical attitude towards others. They find faults with others and lack trust, faith and confidence in them. They believe whatever they do is right and, therefore, do not delegate tasks to others. It would be difficult for this person to form and maintain intimate friendships or relationships.

I am not OK, You are OK

This life position represents child ego state having a state of distrust in the person himself. He lacks confidence in whatever he does. He believes he cannot do things that people around him can do and, therefore, keeps grumbling most of the times about something or the other. Managers with this life position are usually not good managers. They do not perform well, have an erratic behavior, feel guilty for their acts and often use excuses to act against others.

I am not OK, You are not OK

This life position represents a desperate state of persons who have lost interest in life. They have been brought up as neglected children and, therefore, have negative attitude towards life. In extreme situations, they may even commit suicide. Managers with this life position do not believe in themselves and others. They make mistakes in work, do not make proper decisions and also do not believe in decisions made by others.

Application to Workplace Life

According to Berne 99.9% of people fall into the three quadrants other than the one at the bottom left. Most of us do not consistently act from a single life position and our positions can change from situation to situation. However, we may adopt a single life position with a particular person every time that we meet them until such time as the parties deliberately decide to change the relationship.

The optimum position is 'I am OK, You are OK where a person believes in himself and others. It represents an adult- adult transaction and a psychologically matured state of mind. This position can be achieved through education and managers should try to reach this stage through training and development programs in their interest and interest of the organisation. It is believed that even people in the last position can change if they try to understand the life experiences that led them to have this view and can learn ways to change those early decisions that support these negatives beliefs. Since we are almost all born in the position of "I'm OK You're OK," we can get back to that belief even if our life experiences have led us to feel differently.

Although other theories in Berne's work have been used, his "Ego States" and "OK Corral" theory have been used more in organizations of all sizes and types than any other. Ego states theory has been used extensively to help better understand communication between individuals with different Ego states (where we want to avoid Parental and Child state conversations in particular, where it is inappropriate). And the OK corral theory has been applied in the areas of customer service and more extensively in the realm of leadership development. In

the latter, the aim is to get individuals to operate as much as possible from an "I'm OK, you're OK" stand-point when leading individuals and teams. This allows them to avoid over-doing the parental role (which many leaders natural slip into) and the child ego state, where the leader over-does the peer friend role and fails to stand back from the team enough in order to give firm direction and lead strong when necessary to do so.

In summary, Eric Berne's psychological theory provides some interesting ideas on how adults relate to one another which have plenty of applicability to workplace situations. "Ego States" and "OK corral" theory have been used extensively but should be researched more thoroughly before being applied widely. This applies to other related theories developed by Berne, which are not often easily accessible but have several interesting insights to offer.

Transactions

When two persons interact or communicate with each other, there is a transaction between them. While transacting, both of them are at different ego states which results in either smooth/straightforward communication or unclear/ unsatisfying communication. An understanding of transactions can help you keep your communication with others as clear as you would like it to be. Based on the ego states, two types of transactions can take place; Complementary and Crossed.

Complementary Transactions

In complementary transactions, ego states of two persons are parallel to each other. Stimulus and response patterns are as predicted. This involves one person initiating a conversation in one of the three ego states, such as parent-to-child, and the respondent sending a reply back to the sending ego state, such as child-to-adult. In complementary transactions, sender of information gets an expected response from the receiver. People get expected response from each other because both are in the expected ego states. Both are, therefore, satisfied and communication is complete. Successful communication in the workplace requires complementary transactions.

Crossed Transactions

Crossed transactions can take place between a supervisor and employees or between employees themselves. In crossed transactions, sender gets unexpected response from the receiver which obstructs the process of communication. Stimulus – response lines are not parallel in these transactions. Rather, they cross each other. When crossed transactions occur, a break in communication likely results unless one person shifts his response to a complementary ego state. This may happen when the receiver forms the wrong impression about the sender's message or responds in an ego state differently than what you might expect.

When we learn to recognize and differentiate between straight and crossed transactions we increase our ability to communicate clearly with others. Conversations made up of straight transactions are more emotionally satisfying and

productive than conversations that have frequent crossed transactions. Becoming an expert at recognizing ego states and straight and crossed transactions takes time. In the beginning you will need to pay close attention to what is going on both inside yourself and with others. With practice, identifying various ego states and different kinds of transactions becomes second nature. Learning these new skills can be interesting and helpful. It can also be fun!
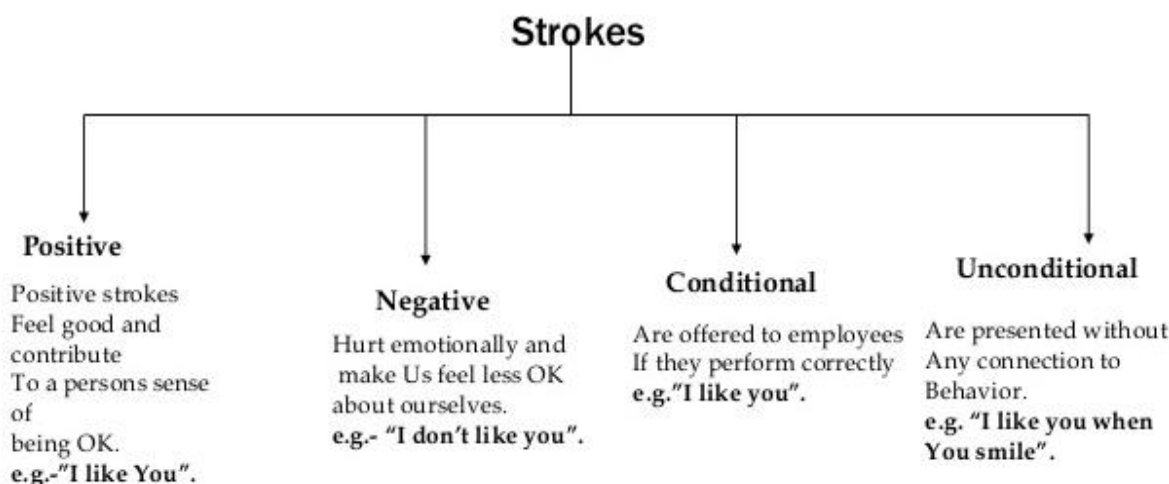
Strokes

An important part of transactional analysis is the concept of stroking. Eric Berne defined a stroke as a "unit of human recognition". Stroking is defined as any act of recognition for another. People seek stoking in their interaction with others. A stroke can be a look, a nod, a smile, a spoken word, a touch. Any time one human being does something to recognize another human being, that is a stroke. Babies need strokes to survive. Humans have a continual need for strokes, which can be understood as simple units of interpersonal recognition.

Strokes Can Be Positive or Negative

Most of us like positive strokes better than negative ones. But when children are not able to get positive strokes, they will make their best effort to get the negative ones, since negative strokes are better than no strokes at all. This is the reason that some people grow up being more comfortable with negative stroking patterns.

Types of Strokes

Strokes

Positive

Positive strokes
Feel good and
contribute
To a persons sense
of
being OK.
e.g.-"I like You".

Negative

Hurt emotionally and
make Us feel less OK
about ourselves.
e.g.- "I don't like you".

Conditional

Are offered to employees
If they perform correctly
e.g."I like you".

Unconditional

Are presented without
Any connection to
Behavior.
e.g. "I like you when
You smile".

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Strokes Can be Wanted or Unwanted

Strokes which are positive in nature are not necessarily wanted by any one specific person.

Strokes can be Physical, Verbal or Non-verbal (Action Strokes)

1. Physical strokes can be simple touch, hugs, kisses, caresses, back rubs, being held, holding hands, etc.
2. Verbal strokes can be about a person's looks, clothing, intelligence, generosity, creativity, elegance, wisdom, dignity, leadership ability, tact, warmth, energy, taste, honesty or any attribute a person possesses.
3. Action strokes are non-verbal forms of recognition like listening empathizing, or actively liking or loving someone

Strokes can also Be Unconditional or Conditional

Unconditional strokes are those that come to us just for being. They are a very rich kind of strokes. Babies who get lots of positive, unconditional strokes really thrive. And adults who have a good base of positive unconditional stroking thrive as well. Conditional strokes are given for what we do, for what we accomplish, or for a particular trait that we happen to possess. Thus, they are based on some condition. Conditional strokes can fill important needs. If I sing well, or get a good grade, or do a good deed, and someone recognizes me for that, they are giving me a positive conditional stroke. If people tell me that I am pretty or that they like my dress, they are giving me a positive conditional stroke. These strokes can feel

very good and they fill us up in different ways than do positive unconditional strokes.

The most harmful kind of stroke is the unconditional negative stroke. These strokes convey to us that we are not OK. And there is no condition that this is based on. The unconditional negative stroke says that the core of who we are is just not OK. This kind of message and stroking pattern early in life can seriously impact a person's view of himself or herself; it can be damaging to the person's self-esteem and even impact his or her will or desire to live. When negative strokes are conditional, they are a bit less harmful than the unconditional negative ones. At least the person can believe that there is something good about himself or herself, since the negative strokes are limited to certain specific characteristics or behaviors. "I hate when you yell like that" is more limited in its negative impact than "I hate you!"

Strokes Have Power

They have the power to soothe or agitate, to create good or bad feelings, to make people feel OK or Not OK about themselves, to heal physical and mental illness. Some strokes are more powerful than others depending on how much they are wanted , who is giving them and how strongly they are worded or delivered. Stroke starvation can lead to physical and mental and emotional illness. Depression is most often the result of stroke deficit. Stroke satisfaction "opens the heart."

Strokes Involve Risk

The risk of giving or asking for strokes depends on how much they are wanted and the likelihood of rejection or how much the critical Parent opposes them. When risky, stroking takes courage.It is interesting to look at how different stroking patterns affect how people feel in relationships.

According to Steiner, Claude (1971) following can be considered, in general:

1. Most people live in a state of chronic stroke hunger,
2. Caused by the strictures of a stroke economy that severely restricts the exchange of strokes.
3. The stroke economy and other body-inhibiting processes are enforced by the Critical Parent ego state, both internally within each person, and externally between people.
4. People who are stroke starved will accept and even seek negative strokes with their toxic side effects, when what they really want is positive strokes.
5. Games are social behaviors that generate mostly negative strokes that can become the principle source of strokes for some people.
6. The most effective intervention for people who play games is to help them regain their capacity to love, by teaching them how to give, ask for and accept strokes

Pay attention to the kind of strokes you most like to get and learn ways to ask for them. Yes, it is OK to ask for strokes, and asking does not diminish the value of the stroke you get! Usually the more you give, the more you get!

Aim of Study

Understanding Interpersonal relation and communication in organization through Transactional Analysis.

Conclusion

TA is the study of social interactions between people. TA rests on these facts: the human brain acts like a tape recorder, and while we may 'forget' experiences, the brain still has them recorded. Along with events the brain also records the associated feelings, and both feelings and events stay locked together.

By proper understanding of one's own ego state and that of the other, communication barriers on account of behavioral mal-adjustments can be reduced. It improves interpersonal relationships amongst people by understanding their ego states.

Positive thinking and complementary transactions help to understand human needs/motivation and improves communication .People will be more comfortable interacting with each other. This will improve effectiveness of the organisation.

It also changes the managerial style from autocratic to participative by changing the life position from 'I am OK, You are not OK' to 'I am OK, You are OK. This is beneficial for the employees and organisation as a whole.

Managers and supervisors can create a positive work environment and positive relationships with employees by giving constant strokes. Examples include verbal praise of an employee, compliments or positive feedback about a project. Strokes can also be physical, such as a handshake or pat on the back.

Understanding transactional analysis can help you understand yourself better. It can also help you see more clearly how you interact with others. One of the things that sets transacttional analysis therapy apart from some other therapies is the belief that we are each responsible for our own future, regardless of what happened to us in the past.

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