TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS (TA)

Transactional analysis has of late become important for analysing, interpersonal communication and social behaviour. The tool of transactional analysis belongs to psychiatry. It was created by a Canadian psychiatrist Eric Berne Stein in 1950s. Berne relates interpersonal relationships and social behaviour of individuals to three ego states of the individuals involved in the act of communication. These three ego states are parent state, adult state, and child state. Berne believes that individuals act as victims of their dominant ego state present at the time of interaction. By investigating the interpersonal transactions, (communication) Berne seeks to help individuals to interact freely, and not act as victims of their ego states. They can contribute to pleasant, conflict-free social interactions when they are no more victims of unconscious, uncontrolled compulsions to exploit, that is to treat someone unfairly or be exploited.

Ego states are the states of mind. They direct and control psychic functioning and social behaviour of all human beings. According to Eric Berne, an ego state is 'a coherent system of feelings', and 'a set of coherent behaviour patterns'. And in actual practice an ego state is 'a system of feelings which motivates a related set of behaviour patterns'.[4]

Psychological Characteristics of Ego States

- *The Parent:* The parent ego state is an exact copy of the body movements, facial expressions and emotional attitudes and social behaviour of parental figures. The parent figure represents authority, control, desire to direct and the sense of concern and anxiety. Parent uses the language of command.

- *The Adult:* The adult ego state is manifested by a sense of objectivity and under-standing of the outside world of reality and awareness of the thoughts and feelings of other people. Objectivity sense and reality characterize the maturity of adults.
- *The Child:* The child ego states are reflected as revival of fixated ego states from earliest years of one's life. A child has its own organized view of the world and its own will and innocence.

The Three Aspects of Human Personality

These above discussed ego states compose the personality of all human beings. According to Berne, these ego states are real and well organized patterns of feelings, attitudes, and behavioural patterns of actual child, adult, and parent (present in every individual).

They represent real people who live and interact with us in social organizations and at work places. These ego states are 'phenomenological social realities'. They constitute the three aspects of human personality.

The Structure of Human Personality

The three aspects of human personality are diagrammatically shown in Exhibit 5.4.
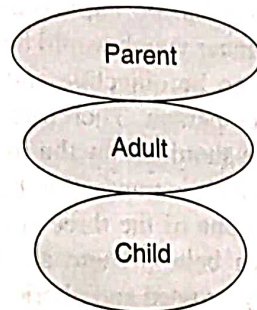
Exhibit 5.4
Human Personality

It is observed that the same individual speaks differently at different occasions while discussing about different things with different persons. As a therapist Eric Berne records one of his significant observations illustrative of the interplay of three ego states in an individual. He narrates the behaviour of Matthew, a new member in a group of well-educated psychos. 'The group soon noticed that Matthew, a new member, exhibited three characteristic of ego states at the meetings. When he was discussing his wife, he spoke in loud deep, dogmatic tones, leaning back in his chair, with a stern gaze and counting off the accusations against her on his upraised fingers. At other times, he talked with another patient about carpentry problems in a manner of fact tone, leaning forward in a companionable way, on still other occasions, he taunted the other group members with a scornful smile about their apparent loyalty to the therapist, his head slightly bowed and his back ostentatiously turned towards the leader. The other patients correctly diagnosed these three ego states as parent, adult, and child respectively'.[5]

How to Identify the Ego States of Interacting Individuals

We can identify each ego state by noticing the facial expressions, language, and behav-iour of a person. These characteristics are usually as follows:

- *Parent:* The parent ego state is a replica of parent attitudes behaviours. It is mani-fested by the language marked by expressions such as it, this, never do this, always right, must, should, raised voice and dominating tone. It could also be characterized by words of anxiety, concern, fear and wishes for good luck in situations of threat to the other person if he or she happens to be emotionally close to the person.
- *Body movements:* Raised finger or pointing fingers, gestures like stern expression and rarely smiling, showing a sense of reserve and aloofness.
- *Eyes:* Usually looking at you.

All these are clues to the structured mental state of a person in the parent ego frame of mind.

- *Adult ego state:* It is reflected from the logical and self controlled language of the individual. The choice of words such as 'possibly', 'may be', 'perhaps', 'may', can indicate that the person is objective and realistic. There is a good scope for mutual understanding between both the persons.

Gestures are related movements of hands and eyes.

- *Child ego state:* This state is essentially characterized by the sulkiness of a child, impatience to get things done, and desire to be stroked through endearing behaviour of the other.

Need to identify the ego states of each other

By recognizing these ego states, we promote effective interpersonal communication and create properly structured relations.

Conflicts and misunderstanding arise between individuals in society and work organizations when they interact with cross mental states. In such situations of communication if one person's attitude is parent (ego state) and the other is an adult (ego state), the interaction is bound to be unpleasant. The parent will speak in an authoritative and domineering manner which would be resented to by the other person of adult mental state, who loves to be objective and mature in being aware of the psychological reality of the other person. Therefore, to improve our interpersonal transactions (communications) we should know the following transactional scheme.

In the act of communication, which is transaction between two persons, one speaks first and provides a stimulus from one of the three ego states, and the other responds from her/ his ego state as shown below. There are three schemes of transactions (communication)—complementary, crossed and ulterior.

Complementary Transaction

As shown in Exhibit 5.5, in this situation, stimulus and response lines are parallel. The transaction is harmonious. Both A and B speak from the same parent attitude and state of mind. For example:

A asks his wife: Where have I kept my glasses? I am sorry, not remember it.

B replies: Here they are. At our age, we just tend to forget.

The question and response, both are direct; hence, no conflict.

Second example of direct complementary transaction is when two persons communicate with the parent and child attitudes. Let us remember that when we speak of an ego state, we talk about the attitude and the frame of mind of the speakers, and not their actual age or relationship. As shown in Exhibit 5.6, the transactional stimulus is parent to child (in terms of ego states and not of actual relationship).

X: 'Never give up. It is Cowardice'.

Y: 'Yes, Sir. I will try'.

Exhibit 5.5
Direct Transaction
Type 1
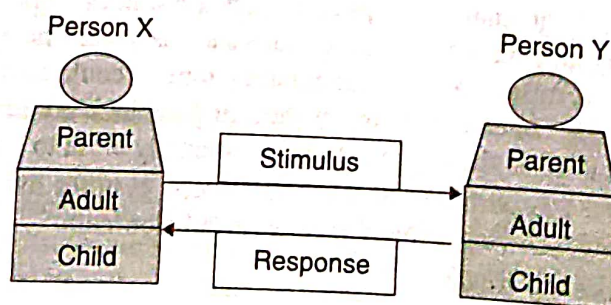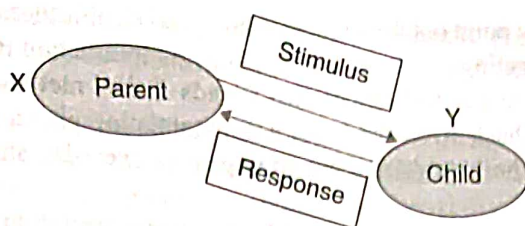
Exhibit 5.6
Direct/Complementary
Transaction

Here, both the stimulus ego state and response state are of the complementary nature of parent and child. Therefore, the transaction is smooth and psychologically properly structured.
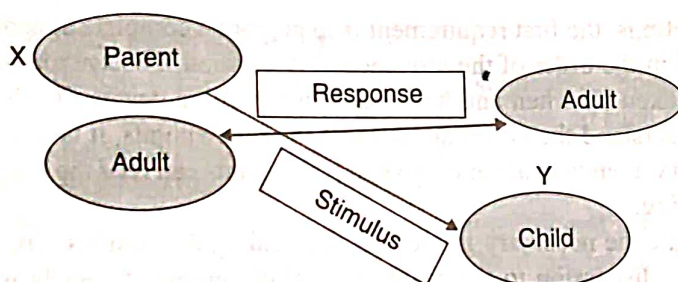
Crossed Ego State Transaction

But suppose in the same situation X patronisingly speaks to Y as parent and Y reacts as an adult, for example:

  X says: 'Never give up; it is Cowardice'

  Y replies: 'It is easy said than done'.

Here X speaks as parent but Y treats him as adult and responds accordingly.

In this situation, the transaction is crossed. The two ego states, of the stimulus and response are not parallel. They cross each other; the transaction is not smooth. The communication may grow into a conflict between the two persons. This crossed ego states' scheme of transaction is diagrammatically shown in Exhibit 5.7.

Exhibit 5.7
Crossed Ego State
Transaction

The response represents adult state.

From A → A

In this example X speaks with parents' feelings and attitude to encourage Y, treating him as a child but Y responds with the factual attitude of an adult who knows the difficulties of life and its challenges. Y responds with a sense of reality and objectivity. Therefore the stimulus and response cross each other. The transaction is therefore not well structured and would fail.

In life, this form of crossed transaction is the most common cause of bickering and misunderstanding in personal relationship between friends, couples, and other social and work situations. The stimulus from parent to child is not properly perceived by the receiver and is responded as one adult to another adult with a sense of resentment.

Ulterior Transactions

Ulterior transactions are 'those which take place at two levels simultaneously. At the superficial social level they usually appear to be adult to adult while at the deeper psychological level they involve parent to child'.[6]

Himstreet and Baty call it 'Stroking' aspect of human communication. 'Just as a baby requires coddling, patting, and loving (stroking); an adult requires communication. A simple "Good Morning is a stroke", the reply "Same to you" is another stroke'.[7]

Himstreet and Baty point out the great psychological significance of this commonplace adult exchange of greetings between two persons. As transaction it may not seem very important, but imagine the feelings of two friends if they met and no exchange took place. 'A pat on the back from the boss, a congratulating phone call, and taking the time to listen to another's problems are examples of everyday stroking that occur in business'.[8]

'We all require stroking for our mental health, and attention to strokes can greatly improve communication and people's feelings about their work'.[9]