



LIFE SCRIPT: DETERMINANTS AND OUTCOMES

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to understand and analyze the concept and components of Transactional Analysis. The rationale behind the qualitative research is to analyze the behavioural patterns of individuals in their personal and professional life. The problems which occur in our personal and professional lives are not due to external factors but internal factors such as life script, operating from wrong ego state, continuously remaining in wrong life positions, manipulations (games people play), giving and receiving wrong strokes etc. At the same time, problems in the organization are not because of lack of infrastructure, resources or policies but due to different behavioural pattern of the employees. Ironically, organizations try to mend them through improving infrastructure, providing resources and changing their policies but this does not work. The employees in the organization, who are at their best in their technical skills, should also be best in their life skills for smooth running of the organization. The behavioural pattern of the individual is governed by the important components discussed in the theory of TA. The paper focuses on how drivers and injunctions received by an individual in his childhood determine his life script as the life script brings about the inference of personality in terms of drivers and injunctions. These drivers and injunctions predict the outcomes as ego states, life position and the psychological games people play in their life. The present review is an attempt to understand the different components of TA as determinants and outcomes of human behavior governed by the life script and the role they play in personal and professional life. The extensive review is supported by the views of academicians, behavioural scientists, parents and siblings obtained through informal interview/discussion to make it more objective and authentic.

Keywords: Drivers, injunctions, life script, personality, behavior, ego states, life positions, psychological games.

Introduction

It has created a lot of curiosity amongst behavioural scientists that why human behavior is different in spite of its encounter with a standard stimulus. Human beings are not robots who will respond in a similar manner whenever they encounter similar stimuli. They have been blessed with a healthy physique with sound mind which never stops thinking and reasoning. Apart from these processes, there are other important factors also which determine our behavioural patterns. To understand human behavior, a model which will be followed in the present research is Transactional Analysis theory proposed by Eric Berne (1961). He created the theory of transactional analysis as a way of explaining human behaviour. Transactional Analysis (TA) offers a model of personality and communication. It analyses the dynamics of self and its relationship to others. TA refers to a process of analyzing and understanding interpersonal behavior. When people interact with each other, there is social transaction in which one individual responds to another. The study of these transactions amongst people is called Transactional Analysis. TA involves self- awareness, structural analysis (ego states), transactions, life script, life positions, injunctions, drivers and games that affect individual life (Eric Berne 1961).

Transactions

Eric Berne (1961) developed this theory, and he defined a transaction as the fundamental unit of social interaction. This created a basic unit that could be studied, measured, and classified. According to Berne, we can observe what people do and say to themselves and to other people and the resulting effects of each individual act. Transactional Analysis is the method for studying interactions between individuals. There are different types of transactions which have been discussed in TA theory.

Complimentary Transactions

A complimentary transaction occurs when a message, sent from a particular ego state, gets the expected response from a specific ego state prevailing in the other person. Berne (1961) describes a complimentary transaction as one which is "appropriate and expected and follows the natural order of healthy human relationships. A complimentary transaction can occur between any two ego states. For example, two people may transact from Parent-Parent, Adult-Adult, Child-Child or Parent-Child. A person can transact from his or her Parent with any of the ego states of another person and can also do this with the Adult and Child ego states. If the response is the expected one, the transaction is complementary. Simplest transactions are between Adult ego states. The lines of communication are open, and the people can continue to transacting with one another. This does not always happen.

Crossed Transactions

A crossed transaction occurs when an unexpected response is made to the stimulus/people. An inappropriate ego state is activated, and the lines of transacting between the people are crossed. At this point, people tend to withdrawal, turn away from each other, or switch the conversation in another direction. Crossed transactions are a frequent source of pain between people -- parents and children, husband and wife, boss and employee, teacher and student, and so forth. The person, who

initiates a transaction, expecting a certain response, does not get it. When a stimulus receives an unexpected or inappropriate response, the lines of communication become crossed.

Ulterior Transactions

Ulterior transactions are the most complex. They differ from complimentary and crossed transactions in that they always involve more than two ego states. When an ulterior message is sent, it is disguised under a socially acceptable transaction.

Games

Games are the reflection of manipulative behavior for getting advantage from people or surrounding. Berne (1964) defines games as an “ongoing series of complementary ulterior transactions progressing to a well-defined, predictable outcome. Descriptively, it is a recurring set of transactions... with a concealed motivation... or gimmick.” Games are ongoing series of ulterior transactions that lead to a predictable outcome. Ulterior transactions are complex interactions that involve more than two ego states and send a disguised message. In other words, you are playing a game if you are trying to accomplish something other than what you are outwardly expressing.

Life script

Berne (1972) defines life script as an unconscious life plan made in childhood, reinforced by parents, justified by subsequent events, and culminating in a chosen alternative. A life script is a personal life plan which an individual decides early on in life and is based upon his or her interpretation of the external and internal events which affect the individual. Our script is developed from our early decisions based upon our life experiences. This happens at an unconscious, or at best pre-conscious, level and we may not even realize that we have set ourselves a plan. Script is decisional and responsive; i.e decided upon in childhood in response to perceptions of the world and as a means of living with and making sense of the world. It is not just thrust upon a person by external forces. Script is reinforced by parents (or other influential figures and experiences). Script is for the most part, outside awareness. Script is how we navigate and what we look for; the rest of reality is redefined (distorted) to match our filters. It is the whole journey of an individual uncovering the early decisions, made unconsciously, as to how life shall be lived. It is one of the five clusters in Transactional Analysis, involving a progression from structural analysis, through transactional and game analysis, to script analysis. The purpose of script analysis is to help a person to achieve autonomy by recognizing the script's influence on his thoughts and actions and thereby allowing them to decide against the script. Berne (1961) describes someone who is autonomous as being 'script free' and as a "real person".

Stewart and Jones (1987) analysed that a key part of script theory is the ‘decisional’ nature of the life plan; this means that an individual’s script arises from decisions made in childhood, rather than solely from environmental or parental factors. Different children brought up in the same environment may well make different decisions resulting in quite different life plans. The script decisions made in childhood need to be differentiated from adult decision making, as young children

do not have the same mental faculties as adults, and their decision making is mainly based on feelings, emotions and bodily sensations rather than grown-up logic and reality testing. Parental influence, while not directly writing a child's script, is nonetheless central to its development, through the messages (both verbal and non-verbal) delivered to the child. These messages form part of the child's frame of reference and consist of many definitions – of self, of others and of the world – which are integral in the conclusions that the child forms about itself. It is important to recognise that the early script decisions we make are outside our grown-up awareness, although we may live them every day in our behaviour.

Steiner (1974) also stated that the script decisions we make in childhood have a significant impact on the course of our lives. He considered that these key early personality decisions are made prematurely, before we have sufficient information and decision-making faculties to properly take them. He hypothesised that if a child was left to develop naturally, important decisions about life would be deferred until adolescence. Unfortunately this natural development is routinely interrupted, and a child is subjected to various constraints and pressures – parental and environmental – that require adaptation to survive and have essential needs met. The quality of the decisions made at such an early age depends entirely on the abilities of the child's own Adult ego state (the Little Professor) at the time of the decision. A young child thinks and feels in ways that are quite different to grown-ups, and the logic of an infant can be puzzling. The world of an infant is a world of extremes – ecstasy, terror, rage – and very early decisions will reflect these extremes. The position of a child at birth is one of 'basic trust' – an expectation that the mother will respond unconditionally to the child's needs. When this unconditional protection is withdrawn (at least in terms of the infant's own perception of the world), the child is forced to consider an important question, namely 'what must I do to get what I need around here?' The answers to that question will, inevitably, be largely contained within the 'script messages' that come from the child's parents (and other parent-figures). We can always make intervention in life script through unlearning and relearning as Goulding (1979) stated that re-decision therapy is based on the premise that, through goal-setting and the re-enactment of important childhood scenes, we may change our future and gain control of our lives.

Drivers

Drivers are the motivating or encouraging strokes given by parents / parent like figure to the children/child like figure to help them grow. Some-times drivers are taken as parental pressure to perform well. The driver decision is made out of awareness. These drivers may be responses to an Injunction so they are also called counter injunctions. The major drivers are please others, be perfect, be strong, try hard, hurry up.

Kahler (1975) stated that drivers are the words that motivate us, and which can be at the root of dysfunctional behaviors. These are commonly framed as the Transactional Analysis drivers, although they can be used stand-alone like Be Perfect, Be Strong, Hurry Up, Please Others, and Try Hard. Any of these can be rooted in early admonishment from teachers and parents who are seeking to help the child become socially functional, but perhaps do not offer sufficient guidance and praise for adequate behavior, thus leaving the child over-doing things. In reasonable quantities, these drivers are

effective in creating functioning and successful adults. When people do not know when to stop, then dysfunctional behavior can set in, causing stress and consequent further coping.

Injunctions

Injunctions are “prohibition or negative commands from a parent” Berne (1972). Injunctions are non-verbal messages received from our parents or parent like figures. They are implanted in the unconscious mind of children and govern their life script. 'Don't be close' for example, may be learned by the child from not being cuddled and held by his mother. The major injunctions are Don't exist, Don't be you, Don't be important, Don't belong, Don't be close, Don't be well/ sane, Don't be a child, Don't grow up, Don't feel, Don't think, Don't succeed, Don't enjoy.

Role of Drivers and Injunctions in Life Script

Drivers and injunctions play a major role in determining our life script. Holtby (1974) gave an example of how he had charted the sequence of parental injunctions, precipitating events, through to outcome and hence reaffirming parental attributions and predictions. Cole (1993) linked injunctions to chronic back pain, describing how Don't Be, Don't Make It, Don't Grow Up and Don't Be Well can produce behaviours that may be perceived as malingering, and how Don't Feel (what you feel) and Don't Be a Child may greatly increase the stress. McClendon & Kadis (1994) propose that the power of injunctions is created through shame affect (Tomkins 1962, 1963, 1991) where 'shame' refers to disruption of a positive state and not as commonly associated to being shamed. They describe the four defensive patterns (Nathanson 1992) of withdrawal, attack self, attack other, and avoidance (as in suppress awareness). Hence, they recommend addressing the defensive pattern so the client can re-decide. Ramond (1994) suggests an additional injunction – Don't Change – as the basis for a script that prevents the children of immigrant families from integrating into the culture when they are the first generation born in a host country. This might be considered as a form of gossamer injunction, with an apparently positive maintenance of culture of the parents' origin leading to an 'inability' to integrate. The impact of these injunctions can be seen in the behavior of individuals in their day to day life. McNeel (2010) suggested injunctions be renamed as injunctive messages, which he defined as “messages emanating from parental figures, often outside their awareness, that are negative in content, often delivered in a context of prohibition, and defeating to the natural life urges of existence, attachment, identity, competence and security.” Whatever injunctions a person have received, and whatever the decisions were taken as a result of those injunctions, transactional analysis holds that people can make substantive life changes by changing their decisions at that moment. A basic assumption of TA is that anything that has been learned can be relearned. Drivers and Injunctions determine the life script of an individual to a greater extent. Though it depends on the individual too how to recreate a new life script if he actually wants to make some interventions in his life to be a better individual.

Ego States

An ego state is a consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behavior. Berne (1961) defined three ego states that can be confirmed by

observable behavior: the parent, child and adult. The parent is the ego state that contains the external events that were imposed on a person in the first five years of their life. These are constructs that are imposed on the child. Examples would be 'Don't talk to strangers,' 'Always hold a grown-up's hand when you cross the street,' or 'Don't touch a hot stove.' The child is the ego state that contains the feelings and emotions related to the external events that were imposed on a person in the first five years of life. These feelings or emotions are replayed in the person's mind when the corresponding external event is recalled. Examples would be 'Being approached by a strange person makes me feel nervous,' 'I feel safe when I hold someone's hand,' or 'I am scared of being burned.' The last ego state is the adult. The adult is the ego state that evaluates what is really going on and makes independent decisions about the world. This ego state begins forming as soon as we gain the ability to control aspects of our environment. It allows a person to compare what they are told about the world with what they feel and experience. Let's use the hot stove as an example. The adult is told by the parent not to touch a hot stove and recognizes the child's fear of being burned is reasonable. Therefore the adult determines to use caution when it is necessary to use a hot stove. Thomas Harris (1967) uses an extremely simplified way to explain these ego states. The parent is a taught concept, the child is a felt concept, and the adult is a learned concept.

Life Positions

Early on, two articles (Berne, 1962/1976; Haiberg, Sefness, & Berne, 1963/1976) described life position as a total life direction or a person's overall life destiny. This is similar to what Eric Berne called someone's life script theme. Berne (1962/1976) stated, "Every game, script, and destiny then, is based on one of these four basic positions"

Life Position refers to the general feeling about life particularly in context to oneself and others. The individual's behavior towards others is largely based on specific assumptions that are made early in life. This tends to remain with the person for life time unless major experiences occur to change it. Such positions are called psychological positions. Decisions about oneself, one's own world, and one's own relationships to others are formed during the first 5 years of life. Such decisions act as a basis for the formulation of a life position, which develops into the roles of the life script. Usually, once a person has decided on a life position, there is a tendency for it to remain fixed unless there is some intervention, such as therapy, to change the underlying decisions? Games are frequently used to support and maintain life positions and to play out life scripts. Transactional analysis identifies four basic life positions, most of which are based on decisions made as a result of childhood experiences, and most of which determine how people feel about themselves and how they relate to others:

1. I'm OK—You're OK.
2. I'm OK—You're not OK.
3. I'm not OK—You're OK.
4. I'm not OK—You're not OK.

The I'm OK—You're OK position is generally a win - win situation for both and is game-free. It is the belief that people have basic goodness, honesty, value, worth, and self-respect as human beings. Persons are OK is a statement of their essence, not essentially their behavior. This position is categorized by an attitude of trust and openness, willingness to give and take, and an acceptance of

others in the way they are. There are no losers, only winners. It reflects healthy, optimistic and confident attitude towards self and others.

I'm OK—You're not OK reflects win and lose situation. It is the position of people who project their problems onto others and blame them, let them down, and criticize them. The games that reinforce this position involve a self-styled superior (the "I'm OK") who projects anger, disgust, and scorn onto a designated inferior, or scapegoat (the "You're not OK"). This position is that of a person who does not want to take responsibilities for his/her mistakes and also wants to make others responsible for the failure. It reflects attitude of superiority and distrust.

I'm not OK—You're OK is known as the depressive position and is characterized by feeling of "poor me" or powerless in comparison to others. It reflects the notion of "mercy on me". Typically such people serve others' needs instead of their own and generally feel victimized. Games supporting this position include "Kick me" and "Martyr"—games that support the power of others and deny one's own. It reflects the feeling of powerlessness, depression and inferiority.

The I'm not OK—You're not OK quadrant is known as the position of hopelessness, frustration and ineffectiveness. This is the worst possible position. Operating from this position, people have lost interest in life and may see life as totally without possibilities. It reflects extreme apathy and non-productivity. This self-destructive attitude is characteristic of people who are unable to cope up with the real world. It may lead to extreme withdrawal, a return to childhood behavior, or violent behavior resulting in injury or death of themselves or others. Most of the criminals and people with anti social behavior may fall in this category. In reality each of us has a preferred position we operate from while we are under stress. The challenge is to become aware of how we are struggling to make life real through our basic life existential position and create alternative solutions. Woollams and Brown's (1978) concept of life position was that life positions are fairly permanent and do not change easily. Our behavior is the reflection of life script during the childhood time and one can predict life position from it. White (1994) examines the transactional analysis concept of life positions (Berne, 1962/1976) and what various authors have written about these positions since Berne. A two-level model is proposed to clarify some of the confusion that currently exists in the transactional analysis literature.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to gain an insight into the concepts of Transactional Analysis theory and role of drivers and injunctions in determining the life script of an individual. It is stated that our life script is written (unconsciously/subconsciously) when we are very young based on the drivers and injunctions given by our parents or parent like figure. Our life script governs what type of life we are going to lead when we grow up. The outcome of the life script reflects in our ego states and games that we play with others. The elder child remains mostly in parent ego state, caring about his parents and younger siblings. Sometime, when these children grow up, they start interfering in their parents' life and dominate them. In the organization they prove to be leaders who are mostly operating from parent ego state but controlling their subordinates. This reflection is based on the informal interview/discussion conducted with academicians, behavioural scientists, parents (specifically mothers) and siblings.

Life script is determined at a very early age based on the drivers and injunctions received from the parents. The eldest child is mostly given drivers like go head, you can do it, and the younger one is given injunctions as be small, do not to take up the responsibility as they are always guarded by their parents. The parents do not allow them to take initiative and not to be very confident as there is somebody elder to them in family to whom they should look forward to take decisions. In Indian culture most of the children are given drivers and injunctions based on their birth order which determines their life script. The interpretation has been supported by White (2017) as he states that birth order can have a lasting influence on personality and behavior According to him the eldest child is socially dominant and intellectual, but tends to seek approval from others because he is no longer the center of attention following the birth of a sibling; that the middle child, being sandwiched between older and younger siblings, is competitive and diplomatic; and that the youngest child tends to be selfish and demanding, since he is used to being provided for.

Life script decides our life position. The child who was raised up with great love and affection but with discipline takes up the challenges of life and is mostly in the thought process of “Live and let live” which translates into “I am ok you are ok” life position . Second life position of “I am ok, you are not ok” reflects in the behavior of a person where he thinks he is the best and others around him are not good at all. Third life position of “I am not ok, you are ok” reflects in developing “poor me” kind of attitude towards himself and always seeking sympathy and help from others. The child who was raised up with lots of comparisons with siblings, restrictions for not being himself and limitations of resources develops the thought process of “because I am not happy, I will not allow others also to be happy” is mostly in life position of “I am not ok you are not ok” reflecting in destructive or a social behavior. Thus life positions play a great role in our wellbeing and happiness.

In this study drivers and injunctions have been taken as determinants of life script and other concepts of Transactional Analysis Theory i.e. Ego- states, life positions, transactions and games have been taken as outcomes of Life scripts. Berne (1972) stated that an injunction is a “prohibition or negative command from a parent”. Holtby (1974) gave an example of how he had charted the sequence of parental injunctions, precipitating events, through the outcome and hence reaffirming parental attributions and predictions. The life script of an individual can be predicted by the instructions in the form of injunctions given by parents in the childhood. The role of injunctions and drivers also helps us to know the life position of the individual in which he/ she is. The four life positions give indication about the life script. “I am ok and you are ok” refers to the drivers given by the parents, where as the life position “I am not ok and you are not ok” emphasizes on the experience and injunctions given by the parents which reflect insecurities, frustration, unhappiness, un-fulfillment of desires, sacrifice for others, compromising on decisions that make the individual bitter and unhappy. The life script as determinant also indicates on ego states. The individual operates from effective state because the positive instructions may have been given by the parents and from ineffective state because of negative injunctions.

The psychological games played by people in their life also indicate the life script. The individual play psychological games because of the insecurities, frustration, unhappiness, un-fulfillment of desires,

sacrifice for others, compromising on decisions. These concerns may arise from the injunctions given by the parents. The role of injunctions and drivers reflect to the operating from ego states, life position, games people play and finally make us understand life script. The conclusion has been drawn from the observations/informal interviews/discussion of people involved in informal interview process for validating review of literature.

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