

Agricultural Extension in South Asia

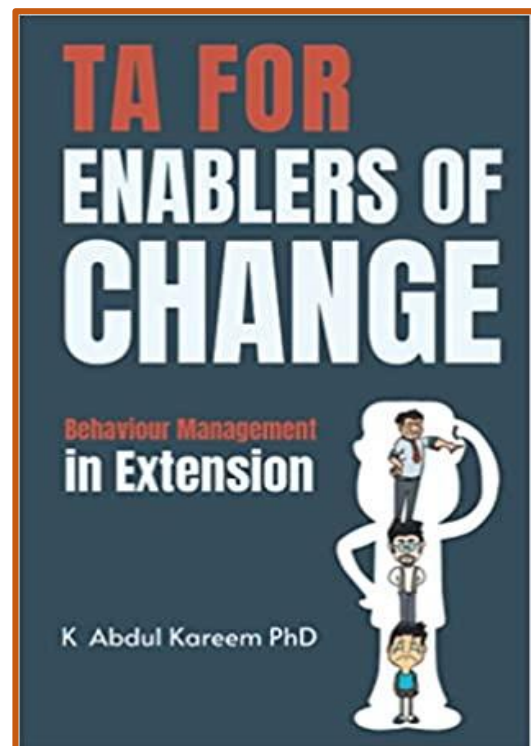
**TA FOR ENABLERS OF CHANGE:
BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT IN
EXTENSION**

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White Falcon Publishing; First edition
(30 October 2020)
Hardcopy: Rs. 450
ISBN: 978-1-63640-045-7
Pages: 181



Transactional Analysis (TA) is something that I had heard for the first time during my post-graduation days, which was quite difficult to understand for me at that time. My perception was that Transactional Analysis is a psychological concept without much practical utility. At best, it can be an engaging exercise in classes related to personality development. I never thought about TA as an important psychological tool in the toolkit of an agriculture extension professional, until I came across the book *TA for Enablers of Change*. I have always been convinced that knowledge of psychology is a must for an extension personnel; however, the idea of applying TA in extension activities was new to me, which made me read the book in one go. The book neatly elaborates on how TA can be useful for an extension agent, in a very detailed and meticulous way, with plenty of applicable examples.

To begin with, persons engaged in extension activities have to interact with and work towards changing the behaviour of individuals in the desired direction. The aim is to change farmers' behaviour by providing knowledge of new technologies and problem-solving advice to them so that they can adopt these. Unfortunately, today's extension personnel receive a fair share of blame for agriculture doing poorly! One area where they could be lacking is in understanding their own behaviour as well as how others react as a response to their behaviour and vice versa. This is what Dr Abdul Kareem, the author of the book, calls 'Extension Transactional Psychology', which I feel is very relevant in the present context. Further, we also encounter many technology adoption puzzles; a case where the technology is profitable but farmers are reluctant to adopt them. If the technology is available and beneficial, why are the farmers not adopting them? One possible explanation is from the theory of planned behaviour/technology adoption model/theory of reasoned action which highlights that adoption doesn't

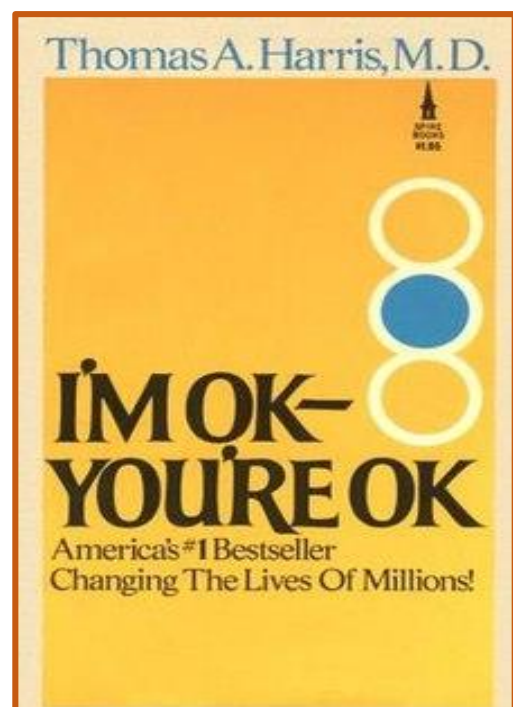


depend only on the attributes of technology but they are also determined by attitudes, beliefs and other psychological constructs. It is in this context that the enablers of change (extension professionals) have a key role to play and they should be equipped to understand the attitudes and behaviours of their clients (farmers/researchers/colleagues/other stakeholders involved) as well as their own to communicate effectively and to change behaviour for the overall social good.

The author thoughtfully articulates that the personality of an individual is based on their daily transactions, highlighting the importance of life positions (convictions about self and others), strokes (hunger for recognition), and Eric Berne's three forms of ego states viz., Parent (P), Adult (A) and Child (C). Understanding these concepts helps one to present themselves in a better way and facilitate harmonious transactions, establishing healthy relations both in personnel or professional life. (The 'P' and 'C' ego states are based on our 'past recordings' – present in the brain. The 'A' ego state is responding from the 'here and now' situation based on logical analysis and not on past experiences or beliefs.)

For instance, consider an extension professional as the Head of an institute, who possesses the knowledge of TA. He/she can use the different aspects of TA to keep a healthy working environment – actively listening, appreciating, and complimenting the good work of subordinates, and if any unfavourable behaviour is observed, he/she can focus on correcting the mistakes rather than on conducting the blame game.

For an extension professional, understanding oneself and his/her clients is the first priority at work place. He/She comes across people with different combinations of life positions, strokes, ego states in various transactions and has to deal with it, without hurting them. He/She must know certain behavioural skills, such as TA, to manage these situations through positive strokes in a "I'm Ok, You're OK" life position. One of the popular books in behavioural science/psychology – *I'm OK – You're OK* by Thomas Harris (1967) provides an insight into these life positions with an overview of intra and interpersonal behaviour of individuals and the ways to carry themselves forward with least amount of conflicts and unfavorable situations in their lives. But it also provides a general view for the readers to change their life skills. However, this book has aptly applied the concepts of 'I'm OK You're OK' to the context of extension discipline, with suitable examples from field and work place.



As extension professionals, we may never come across similar types of individuals. Every individual will have their own life plans/scripts and some may have a winning script while others might have losing scripts. It is always better for an extension professional to be able to understand the life scripts of their clients and move the person from a negative script of 'losing side/not ok side' to a 'winning side/ ok side'. In addition to improving the client's life scripts, extension personnel can also improve their own life script to maintain the life position of 'I'm OK You're OK' with positive vibes. The author has highlighted the implications of TA concepts in extension through examples and exercises, which are relatable to most extension personnel.

Here I quote an example of a workplace given by the author to understand the TA concept.

Stimulus: The extension officer introduces to farmers a new device for killing rats

Response1: 'Killing rats is a sin'. It is a belief. (The source of all belief is 'Parent' ego state.)

Response 2: The device is easy to make and can be repeatedly used. So, I would like to try it. (Here, the farmer is objectively analyzing the advantage of the new device and arriving at a decision to try it. Obviously, his ego state is 'Adult'.)

If the extension professional receives the first response where the Parent ego state is active, it will be challenging for him/her to change the behaviour. But as an extension professional he/she has to try and make the farmer realize the importance of technology by converting him/her to an Adult ego state. This is easier said than done, and calls for the extension agent to analyze their own transactions for a workable solution.

Along with a knowledge of ego states don't extension professionals also need to learn about using time efficiently in extension practice? A section of the book is dedicated to this aspect and it offers some very interesting insights. Here, Dr Kareem describes six different 'time structures' for classifying different time spent in different extension activities viz., withdrawals, rituals, activity, pastimes, games and intimacy. The author highlights that for effective extension, the extension agent must encourage the 'activity' and 'intimacy' time structures more than any of the other forms.

For example, just the physical presence of farmers in discussions without their active participation can be classified as 'withdrawal' time structure, where he/she doesn't want to interact or respond. As an extension officer, one can try and encourage them to be active participants by sharing their views and opinions. 'Intimacy' is the ideal time structure (results in positive use of time), where both the farmer as well as the extension person are interacting from a position of 'I'm ok, you're ok' and interact freely. One of the other interesting time structure is of 'Psychological Games' (probably dangerous ones too). The author explains that it is based on the three roles in a life drama (prosecutor, victim and rescuer). This happens in some activities where the purpose of the extension agent (rescuer) is to help the farmers (victim), but the situation may take on different turns and end up with the extension agent being 'prosecuted' or 'blamed'. The book highlights that the extension agent must be smart enough to anticipate such situations and navigate through it smoothly.

Establishing a healthy relationship with people whom we meet is not an easy task. Just like five fingers are not of the same length, all individuals are not psychologically identical and behaviour can never be predicted accurately. In such situations, extension professionals must be sensible and careful with respect to their own behaviour as well as in understanding others' behaviour. It also becomes the responsibility and a special skill for an extension professional to maintain stable behaviour so as to achieve his targets while maintaining good personal relationships with all stakeholders. It can never be a cakewalk for him. There can be many situations in which an extension person experiences great stress or bitterness (unpleasant), which the author terms as developing 'racket feelings/collecting brown stamps'. These stamps/feelings are harmful for the health of an individual as well as to the general atmosphere. I also agree with the author's advice that as extension agents we should take precautions to avoid collecting and accumulating brown stamps/unfavorable experiences and find a way to vent any such feelings as soon as possible, before the worst can happen.

To summarise, an understanding of the enabling psychological environment can be very helpful for the extension agent and there could be a separate subject called 'Extension Transactional Psychology'. The author has rightly pointed to the gap in the discipline and elaborated on how TA can help extension professionals to work more effectively. My understanding tells me that TA is not only useful to extension professionals, but also to every human being so as to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relations.

The key take home messages from the book are:

- We must learn ways to target uncomfortable behaviour and not people;
- Always try to establish and maintain an 'I'm OK, You're OK' position in your transactions;
- Never let your adult ego state get contaminated by your parent and child ego states;
- Don't let your transactions lead to conflicts – avoid and resolve in smarter ways;

- Adopt ways of delivering positive strokes, avoid/reduce collecting brown stamps;
- Learn to analyze the best transactions and adopt them according to specific situations.

The unique feature of the book is the exhaustive list of examples, exercises, and questions in each chapter, which makes it a very engaging read. The book can be a good read for all those who want to know these concepts in detail and are working on changing behaviour for good, directly or indirectly. It can be a good reference source for teaching post graduation courses in Agricultural Extension (particularly for courses on communication/organizational development/training/instructional technology). Moreover it can also be a good reference for personality development courses at the UG/PG levels. Apart from all this, the examples and exercises in the book can be used in the training programmes of extension professionals.

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