Appendix 3

Basic transactional analysis (TA) theory[1]

Ego states: understanding what goes on 'in the inside'

During the late 1950s, the psychiatrist Eric Berne developed his theory of ego states. Berne's ego state model is a simple but effective way to make sense of 'what goes on in the inside' for ourselves and others. As a theory, it has been incredibly useful and has stood the test of time. Knowing about and understanding ego states is useful because it gives us a way to explain and make sense of a number of phenomena, including:

- those fluctuations in mood, ways of thinking, behaviour and ways of relating which we all experience throughout the course of each day of our lives;
- why we react in certain ways in different situations;
- why we hold on to certain ways of being which deep down we know are completely irrational;
- the nature of our internal dialogue.

As with most TA theory, in order to help make it understandable and accessible, the terminology we use is simple, everyday language. The theory of ego states is one of the methods used in TA to understand the inner world. It categorises internal experience into three classes or different states. These are called Parent, Adult and Child (Figure A1).

The Parent ego state

The Parent ego state is made up of all the messages we have picked up from outside, external sources all through our lives. This includes our parents, parent figures such as grandparents and other relatives, older siblings, teachers and other authority figures, and even from society as a whole. It is like a recording of all the thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, ways of relating and responding that we have experienced others using.

The Adult ego state

The Adult ego state is the part of our personality which is adapted to the 'here-and-now' reality. It is age-appropriate.

PARENT EGO STATE
Behaviours, thoughts and feelings
copied from parents or
parent figures

ADULT EGO STATE
Behaviours, thoughts and feelings
which are direct responses to
the here and now

CHILD EGO STATE
Behaviours, thoughts and feelings
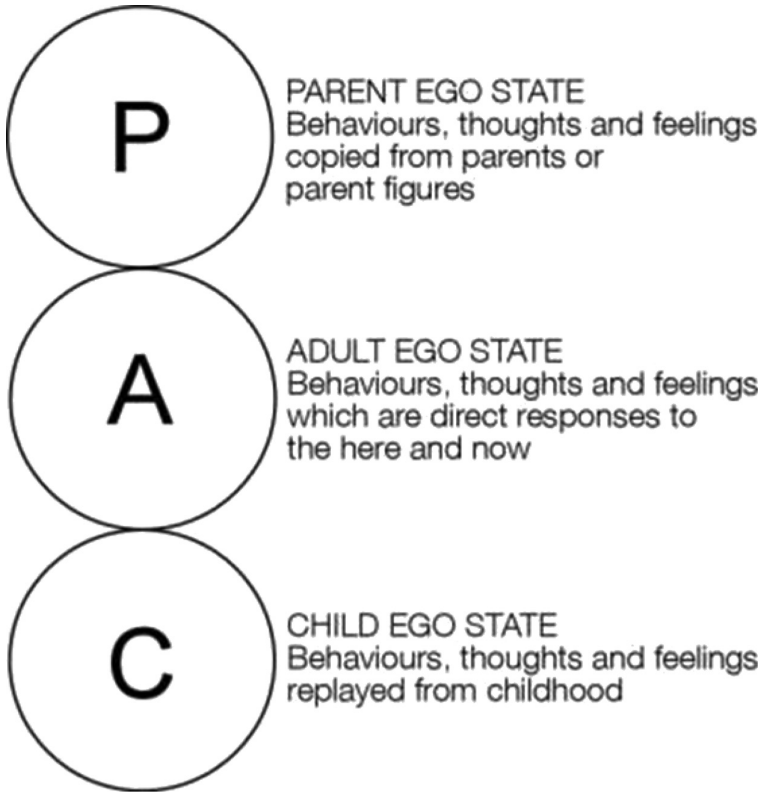replayed from childhood

Figure A1 The ego state model (Berne, 1961; Stewart & Joines, 1987).

The Child ego state

The Child ego state is made up of all our own personal history. It is the 'me who I was, back then'. This part of our personality experiences the internal and external world in exactly the same way that we did as a child, which includes the ways of thinking, feeling, behaving and relating to others that we used when we were younger.

Each ego state is continuously activated, although at any given time one will tend to predominate in our inner world. Our ego states are highly reactive to the environment and external stimuli, as well as to our own thoughts, feelings, wishes, desires, hopes, fears and fantasies, and also are responsive to our own behaviour and the behaviour of others.

Understanding internal dialogue

We all have an internal dialogue – our thoughts are often constructed almost as if they were some kind of conversation or running commentary on things.

Often, we are not aware of this internal chatter, as we are so used to it that we tend to be desensitised to its existence. Simply 'tuning in to' its presence can be a very useful way to understand our thoughts and reactions and to change the way we feel and our behaviour. When you notice your internal dialogue, you can start to reflect on which ego states were in operation at that time. Once you start to identify and understand your internal dialogue, you can begin to change it – something that will have a profound impact on how you think and feel.

Understanding communication

Not only does the theory of ego states help us to understand what is going on inside ourselves and other people, it also helps us to think about and understand communication. Whenever we communicate, we do so from one of our ego states. This in turn is heard and responded to by the other person from one of that person's own ego states.

Thinking about communication in this way can help us to communicate more effectively and also to address situations whre communication goes wrong or breaks down.

If all is going well, communication runs smoothly. In the top drawing in Figure A2, we see a person asking someone 'What time is it?' If the other person responds from his or her Adult ego state and says, 'It is 3 o'clock', then the communication has been smooth and straightforward. However, if s/he responds with a comment such as, 'Why haven't you got your own watch?', as we see in the second diagram, then we can consider that something awkward has happened in the communication process. This helps us to think about how sometimes things can go wrong when we communicate with others – either we have, or the other person has, communicated in a way that is different to what one might expect, and this has left a feeling of things not being so smooth.

Sometimes communication takes place in a more indirect way, in that people can imply certain things without actually saying what they mean. Perhaps the best-known example of this is someone asking another person if s/he would like to come back for coffee. On the surface of it, this is a very simple and straightforward invitation; however, we all know that when a person asks someone to come back for coffee at the end of a night, there is often more than coffee on the person's mind!

Strokes

The word 'stroke' was derived from the need of an infant to receive physical touch. As grown-ups, Eric Berne suggested we substitute some of the need for physical touch with other modes of recognition. These demonstrate to us that our existence has been recognised (recognition hunger), and that we have been acknowledged in some way.
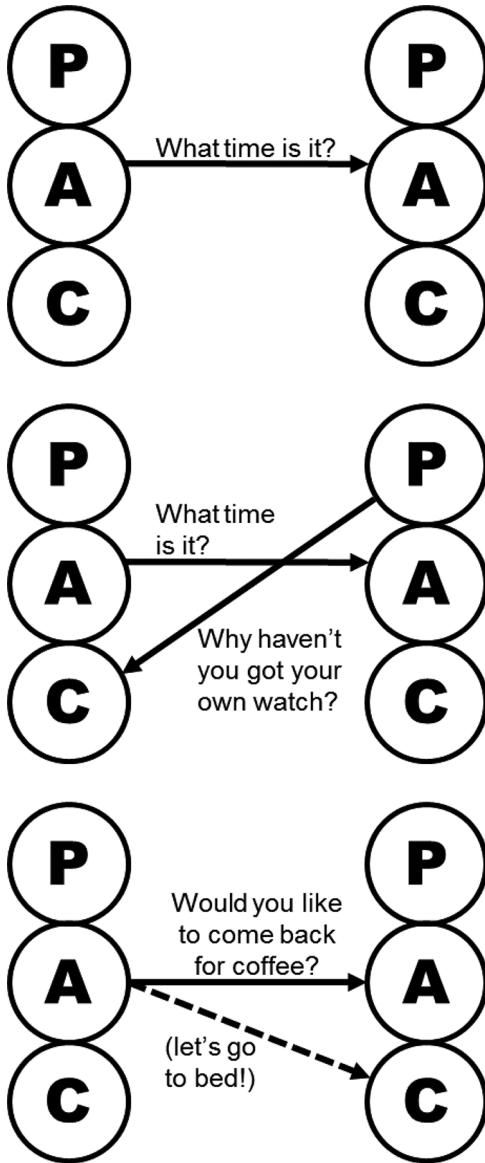
Strokes can be:

Figure A2 Understanding communication.

- verbal or non-verbal
- positive or negative
- conditional or unconditional.

Any transaction is an exchange of strokes. Any kind of stroke is better than no stroke at all. There are four types of strokes:

1   positive conditional stroke: 'That was really good work you did.'
2   positive unconditional stroke: 'I really love being with you.'
3   negative conditional stroke: 'It annoys me when you don't phone when you say you will.'
4   negative unconditional stroke: 'I hate you!'

Stroking can reinforce behaviour, and strokes give us useful feedback. Positive conditional strokes tell us what we are doing that is appreciated, or liked. Negative conditional strokes tell us what we are doing that is not liked by others. Positive unconditional strokes affirm us for being. Negative unconditional strokes tell us that we need to go somewhere else, or that this situation or person is not appropriate for us. The responsibility for how a stroke is interpreted lies with the receiver of the stroke.

Stroke filter

Strokes which do not fit the preferred variety or intensity of the receiver are often likely to be ignored, or filtered out from awareness. The stroke is discounted. Sometimes, this can be observed by an incongruity: 'Thank you' (said whilst pulling a face) or 'This old thing? I have had it for ages' (diminishing a compliment). Our stroke filter maintains our self-image as strokes which do not support the view we have of ourselves in our life script are selectively discounted. Claude Steiner came up with the idea that, as we grow up, we 'learn' certain rules about strokes from our culture and environment. Some of these rules are particularly strong in their influence on our relationship to strokes. These rules are:

* Don't give strokes when you have them to give.
* Don't ask for strokes when you need them.
* Don't accept strokes if you want them.
* Don't reject strokes when you don't want them.
* Don't give yourself strokes.

The transactional analyst, Adrienne Lee encourages us to counteract these restrictive rules and take permission to give and receive strokes freely as we wish. These permissions are:

* Do give strokes when you have them to give.
* Do ask for the strokes you want.
* Do accept the strokes you want.
* Do reject the strokes that you don't want.
* Do give yourself strokes.

Discounting

Discounting is a mechanism whereby we somehow 'distort' reality or see things in a way that reinforces our script. Jacqui Schiff and her colleagues defined discounting as 'minimising or ignoring some aspect of [one's self], others or the reality situation'. Discounting can be hard to spot, but it can have a profound effect on how we perceive ourselves, others and the world around us. Discounting also tends to be accompanied by grandiosity. This doesn't mean that someone thinks s/he is better than anyone else or has 'grand ideas', but instead means that some aspect of reality gets magnified, exaggerated or blown out of proportion. Grandiosity can be thought of as 'making a mountain out of a molehill', whereas discounting can be seen as 'making a molehill out of a mountain'.

In many problematic situations, people are both discounting and engaging in grandiosity. For example, the statement, 'I was so scared I couldn't think' involves a magnification of the feeling, as well as a minimisation of the person's abilities to think when scared. When people are anxious, they often overestimate the degree of threat connected to what they are feeling anxious about, and also discount their ability to cope. Not only do discounting and grandiosity reinforce life script, they limit options for problem solving, and they also inadvertently contribute to the maintenance of a problem.

Life script

As humans, we have an inherent need to make meaning of the world around us. In order to make sense of the world, we start to develop a narrative, or life script. In essence, this life script enables us to ask three basic questions we have in order to make our way through the world:

1   What kind of person am I? How do I see myself?
2   What are all these other people like? How do I see others?
3   What kind of world is this? What is life like? What can I expect?

The process of forming a script starts from the very earliest days of life, as infants start to experience how others relate to them, what happens when they relate to others, and as they try to make sense of the world around them and how they experience the world.

Our life script tends to operate outside our awareness, and is a form of implicit learning. We implicitly form conclusions about who we are, what we can expect from others and how the world is, based on our early experiences and how others react towards us.

Life script filters our experiences and influences how we interpret situations. Some aspects of our life script may be positive. Other aspects of our script are more problematic and can limit our options in life (or at least give us the sense that our options are limited). As such, they inhibit spontaneity and flexibility.

Script decisions are often made at times of stress and where choices are limited. These decisions can be made consciously or unconsciously. The bulk of scripting is done in early childhood; however, we may add to or amend script in adult life when under pressure or at times of extreme stress. At different times in our life we have to make choices and draw conclusions about ourselves, others and the nature of life. Script decisions are choices which impact upon our behaviour and way of interpreting the world, including how we evaluate ourselves and others.

Stan Woollams and Michael Brown suggested that children are particularly likely to draw negative conclusions from situations because of their relative lack of power and options, their inability to handle stress and their immature thinking capacity. Because of this, script decisions often seem irrational or extreme when viewed from a grown-up perspective. When we consider the situation and circumstances in which the individual developed script decisions, then they start to make sense. Ultimately, script decisions were made as a means of solving an immediate problem and in response to the information and resources the individual had at the time. For example, a child who is repeatedly in need of affection which is not forthcoming may make sense of this situation by coming to conclusions which, if we were to put them into adult language, would go something like: 'Something is wrong with me' or 'I will never get my needs met' or even 'It is dangerous to feel my feelings'. These conclusions are effectively 'learnt' and become script decisions.

Delivery of script messages

Script messages are delivered in a number of ways. These methods may be used singly or in combination. They may be delivered directly or indirectly, verbally or non-verbally. The way the message is sent and the content of the message is not necessarily the way it is received or understood by the child.

Don't messages (injunctions)

Bob and Mary Goulding observed that many of their clients came to therapy experiencing a sense that they shouldn't do certain things. They noticed that the 'don't' messages that their clients appeared to be following could be grouped into 12 themes, and that these usually related to early negative life experiences. The Gouldings referred to these 'don't' messages as injunctions. As you read this list, notice your reaction to each injunction. Many people find that they experience a strong intuitive sense of which messages resonate for them and find that they too may carry such messages at a subconscious level.

Don't be/don't exist	Don't belong	Don't be you
Don't be close/trust/love	Don't be a child	Don't be well/sane
Don't grow up	Don't feel	Don't succeed
Don't think	Don't be important	Don't . . .

Adrienne Lee developed a diagram which highlights the powerful 'sinking' effect these injunctions can have on us (Figure A3). Here, she shows them balanced with 'drivers', which people use to counterbalance the effects of the injunctions in order to feel that they are acceptable.

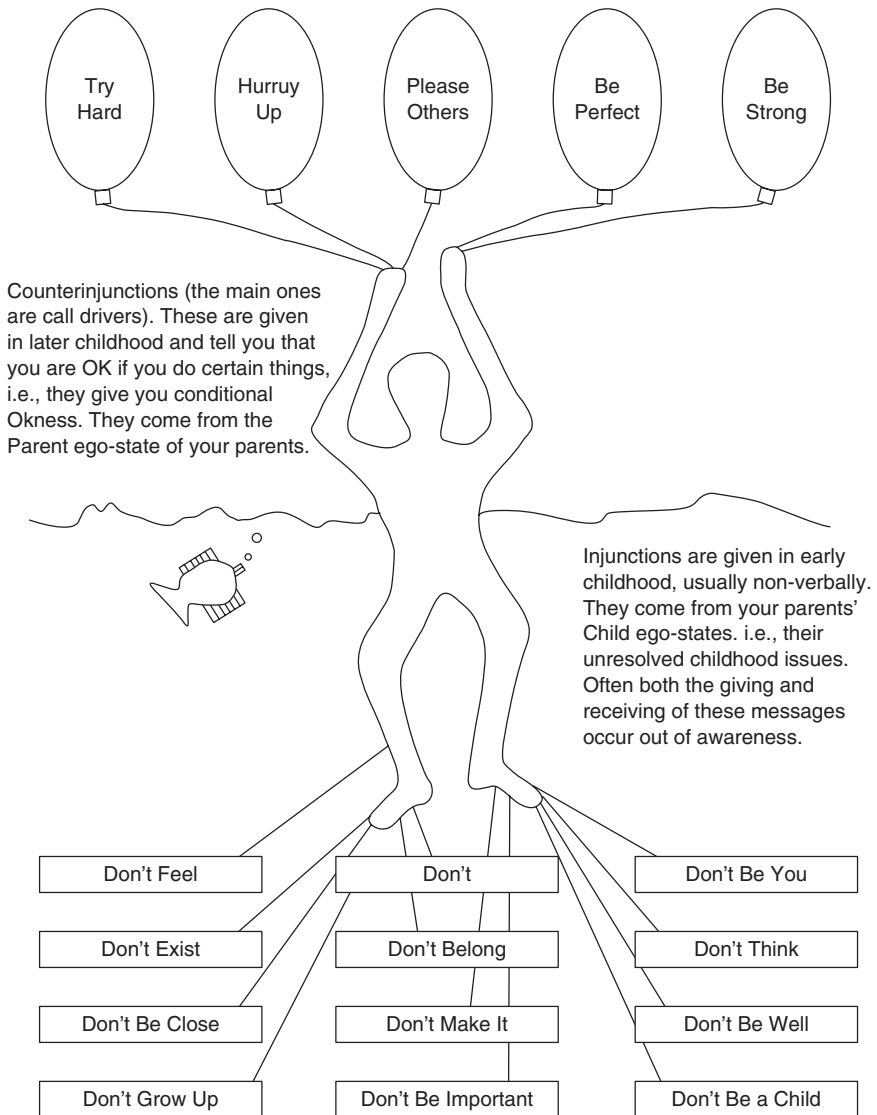As you look at Figure A3, are there any of the messages which you can personally identify with?

Try Hard

Hurruy Up

Please Others

Be Perfect

Be Strong

Counterinjunctions (the main ones are call drivers). These are given in later childhood and tell you that you are OK if you do certain things, i.e., they give you conditional Okness. They come from the Parent ego-state of your parents.

Injunctions are given in early childhood, usually non-verbally. They come from your parents' Child ego-states. i.e., their unresolved childhood issues. Often both the giving and receiving of these messages occur out of awareness.

Don't Feel

Don't

Don't Be You

Don't Exist

Don't Belong

Don't Think

Don't Be Close

Don't Make It

Don't Be Well

Don't Grow Up

Don't Be Important

Don't Be a Child

Figure A3 The drowning man, by Adrienne Lee, reprinted with permission.

Unhelpful relationship patterns

From time to time, all people get caught up in some kind of unhelpful relationship dynamic. Often, these have a repetitive feel to them and can be understood as following certain patterns. When we are caught up in these processes, we are usually not aware of what is happening, and they tend to end up with everyone feeling confused, or hurt, or wanting to blame the other person. The particular feeling that we experience at the end of such situations tends to be familiar to us in some way, and we implicitly draw conclusions from these situations which reinforce our script in some way.

One way of understanding these unhelpful relationship patterns is by using the drama triangle (Figure A4). This concept was developed by Stephen Karpman, who identified that often people seem to take up one of three psychological roles: persecutor, rescuer or victim. These are psychological roles, and not 'actual roles'; for example, someone who jumps into a river to save someone who is drowning is an 'actual rescuer' and is not necessarily taking a psychological role of rescuer. The victim position is perhaps the easiest one to make sense of, because we have all come across people who seem to feel that they are powerless and want other people to take responsibility for them. Similarly, we have all come across people who act as though they can 'save the day', or who get caught into doing things for other people, often without even being asked (rescuers). We have all also been around someone who seems to criticise everything, or someone who suddenly becomes hostile when we feel it is unjustified (persecutors). What is interesting about these roles is that people often switch positions and start from one role, but end up in another completely different role.

It can be useful to think about how you take up each of these roles from time to time. Although it can be uncomfortable to think of ourselves in each role, by understanding how we occupy these positions we can identify when we are in them more easily, and therefore move out of these roles.
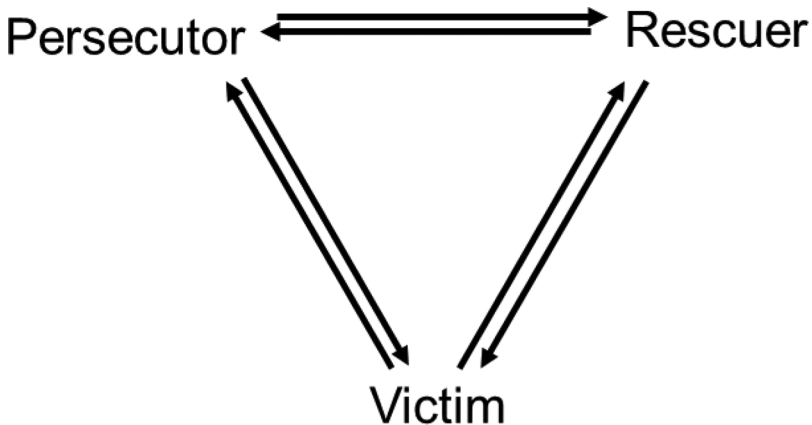

Figure A4 The drama triangle, by Stephen Karpman, reprinted with permission.

Primary and secondary emotions

Whether they be pleasant or unpleasant, we all experience emotions of different types and intensities. Feelings can come and go, and we often experience them as coming in 'waves'. At any one time our emotional state can be like soup, in that there can be lots of different 'ingredients' and it can be hard to identify what the separate emotions are.

There are different kinds of emotions, and making sense of them can be helpful when we are feeling bad in some way. Primary emotions are feelings which are a direct response to the here-and-now situation and are appropriate to the circumstances, and also the intensity of them is proportionate to what is going on. If we allow ourselves to feel our primary feelings and respond to them accordingly, they tend to resolve themselves. If we are sad, this is due to experiencing a loss of some kind. If we allow ourselves to be sad and perhaps seek comfort from others, the feeling will eventually subside (although this may take quite some time, depending on the situation). If there is some kind of danger, we experience fear, and we either want to run away or seek help and safety from others. If we feel that someone has behaved in a way that we feel is unacceptable, we feel angry. If we express this and the other person apologises, then, if we let it, our anger will subside (although there can be a brief time lag with this, whilst we allow ourself to calm down). If we are happy, we want to share this with others. If we get a positive response, our joy increases and we feel a sense of satisfaction.

Sometimes we feel things which are not appropriate to the situation (e.g. feeling fear when there is no actual danger, or convincing ourselves that there is a danger when in actual fact there is not), or we overreact with feelings that are out of proportion to the event. We might also have feelings which feel 'stuck' in some way, and which we never seem to resolve. Also, it is not unusual for people to feel one emotion as a substitute for another feeling. This is often the case for feelings which we somehow 'learnt' were unacceptable to others. For example, it is common for men to grow up believing that it is not OK for them to feel afraid. Consequently, some men will very quickly shut down their fear and instead respond with anger. Another type of secondary feeling is when we have a 'feeling about a feeling'. For example we might feel apprehensive about a forthcoming event, but then feel embarrassed about feeling some anxiety, or we might feel angry towards someone, but then feel guilty for feeling angry. It is not unusual for people effectively to 'block' certain feelings that they do not feel are acceptable, or which they feel ashamed about. All of these are examples of secondary emotions.

Secondary feelings are those feelings which have become stuck, and are difficult to resolve. By identifying the secondary feeling and the underlying primary feeling, we can start to untangle our emotions and go some way towards changing them.

There is a phenomenon known as state-dependent memory, which refers to how, when we are in a particular mood, it is fairly easy to access memories which have the same emotion attached to them. For example, if you are sat with an old

friend, reminiscing about funny stories and events, it becomes easier to remember more and more such memories. Similarly, if we are upset or angry with someone, we can find it easy to recall other times we have felt the same way around that person. Both of these are examples of state-dependent memory.

Emotions can trigger thoughts and memories. Usually, this happens at a sub-conscious level, or at least out of our awareness. Even something which might be small and possibly even imperceptible can trigger any part of our associative network and the rest becomes activated automatically. Each new activation rein-forces the network and makes it stronger.

Associative networks tend to have a negative flavour to them, and are com-prised of negative internal dialogue, unpleasant emotions, sensations, fantasies, expectations and memories. Each time the network gets triggered, a new memory is added to the memory bank. With persistence, we can change our associative networks and develop more productive ways of handling our emotions.

Drivers

The drivers are named by the fact that they lend a 'driven' quality to our behav-iour and our internal experience. It is as if we hold the driver as an unspoken motto about how we should behave at all times, and at some level believe that if we don't follow the driver we are somehow not OK. Drivers have their origins in the aspects of our development where we were being socialised by our parents and parent figures and learning what we needed to do or be in order to be accept-able, approved of and liked. In turn, we internalise these messages and live by them as implicit rules which tell us what we need to do both to be accepted and to prevent rejection.

Each driver has a positive, helpful and desirable aspect to it as well as a problematic, negative and limiting aspect to it. Unfortunately, the negative aspects of each driver tend to predominate and lead us into ways of being which are unhelpful and cause stress and problems in our lives. The five driver pat-terns are: *Be perfect! Be strong! Try hard! Please others!* and *Hurry up!* As you read this list, do you immediately identify with any of the driver patterns? Do you have any immediate sense of the presence of one or more of these drivers in you?

One of the tricky things about drivers is the fact that they are all socially desir-able in some ways, and so our drivers can be encouraged and reinforced by oth-ers around us. The key is not necessarily to eradicate the driver completely, but to keep the desirable aspects of it and loosen the grip of the driver so we have more flexibility about how we respond to situations and don't feel an automatic compulsion to follow the driver message. I'll now explain each driver in more detail. As you read these descriptions, you will notice a sense of resonance with the descriptions which are most applicable to you. These drivers are only drivers when they 'drive' someone's behaviour and when the person feels not OK when not following the driver. Of course, these must not be identified on the basis of one clue only, but are indicative of a general process.

Be perfect!

People driven by *Be perfect!* are always striving for perfection or expecting others to be perfect, believing if they (or others) are less than perfect, then they are not OK. Their language is often precise and contains many sub-clauses. They are usually very neatly presented in appearance. They tend to be industrious and logical and have high standards. These high standards can, however, cause problems when they are unrealistic and perfectionistic. Failure to reach goals is distressing for people with a strong *Be perfect*! process. When they are under stress they can become very rigid in their thinking, and sometimes controlling in their behaviour.

Be strong!

Individuals who are caught in the *Be strong!* process valiantly attempt to keep their feelings under tight control, believing that any sign of feelings is a sign of weakness and something that would make them not OK. Their language may be 'distancing', such as 'That makes me sad', rather than 'I feel sad'. They can be relatively expressionless and still in their posture. They tend to be very reliable and independent. They often do not mind tasks which are repetitive and often like working on their own. They are good to have around in a crisis as they tend not to get too emotional.

Try hard!

People driven by *Try hard!* always appear to be in a struggle, believing that such struggling and repeated attempts are imperative to remain OK. By getting caught in the struggle, they can stop themselves from achieving what they want and instead stay stuck or, if they do progress, it tends to be a torturous and slow process. The driver is named because often these people 'try' to do something instead of actually doing it. For example, 'I'll try and get it finished' or 'I'm trying my best'. They often appear to be quite tense and will agree to take on a lot of tasks (even when it is not realistic to do so) but not complete them, despite working hard. People with a *Try hard*! process can be very creative and are often full of new ideas. A common problem for many people with a *Try hard*! pattern is a strong tendency to procrastinate or find obstacles.

Please others!

People whose behaviour is determined by the *Please others!* process believe that they must pacify and put other people first at all times and must be liked at all times in order to be OK. Their desire to please will often be indicated in their language, which will often be placating. They tend to make an effort to look nice. People with a strong *Please others!* process are usually very skilled at dealing with other people and taking care of them. They are often helpful and pleasant and concerned about doing the right thing. They hate the thought that someone might not like them or be upset about what they have done. When they are stressed, they

can become very emotional and irrational. They often want to 'rescue' other people (and in doing so, do not let people do things for themselves)

Hurry up!

Hurry up! driven individuals are always rushing, and rushing others, believing that they (or others) are not OK if they do not hurry up. They may speak rapidly, and will usually be doing more than one thing at a time. They will often fidget and move a lot. People with a lot of *Hurry up*! tend to be quite lively, enthusiastic and adventurous. They are often quite efficient and good at multitasking.

A few words on balancing your drivers

- The problem with drivers is that they are essentially doomed to failure – no one can be perfect/be strong/try hard/please others/hurry up all the time.
- Drivers need to be balanced with their positive aspects, such as: speed, experimentation, agreeableness, endurance and excellence, which are all positive qualities (Clarkson, 1992).
- Be kind to yourself and accepting of the positive intention behind your driver-type behaviour, and forgive yourself when you are not (perfect, etc.) and do not determine your OK-ness as a person by it.
- Address the implicit fear of rejection and also the fear of being acceptable to others which fuel your driver. This will reduce the need to engage in the driver and give you greater flexibility in how you engage with the world.

Note

1 Modified from Lee (1997).