
Ego States in E. Berne's Transactional Analysis and the Dominant Ways Managers Use to Solve Conflicts

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Magdalena Kraczkla¹

Abstract:

Purpose: The article aims to capture and present relationships between a manager's personality structure and their conflict resolution styles. The fast pace of work and the constant changeability of organizational life make broadly understood conflicts an everyday phenomenon. Therefore, it is interesting how managers behave in conflict situations, what kind of conflict resolutions they adopt, and what determines the adoption of a specific response style. This knowledge is particularly valuable from the cognitive and practical points of view as it helps optimize managers' behaviour in their business practices.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Two research tools were used in the studies presented in this paper: the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), and the Ego State Scale (the Egogram) by K. Kälin and P. Müri. The latter refers to the functional model of personality proposed by E. Berne's Transactional Analysis, which makes it possible to determine dominant personality predispositions presented as so-called ego states.

Findings: This article presents the findings of research whose main objective was to determine dependencies between the ego states that make up one's personality and one's conflict resolution style, described by means of a theoretical construct proposed by K. Thomas and R. Kilmann. When subjected to multifaceted analysis and interpretation, the obtained correlations provide good insight into the mechanisms and causes of these relationships.

Practical Implications: The findings of research into the interdependencies between ego states and behaviour styles in conflict situations point to a number of different actions that can be taken to give managers more control over their behaviour, with the ultimate aim of improved and more effective conflict resolution.

Originality/Value: The findings are of significant cognitive and practical importance as they confirm a close relationship between intrapsychic phenomena and human behaviour in real-life situations. They make it possible to understand managers' tendencies to adopt specific styles of behaviour, regardless of situational variables. The captured dependencies can play a huge role in preparing people in managerial functions to consciously improve their professional behaviour.

Keywords: Transactional Analysis, ego states, conflict, conflict management strategy, managers.

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Paper type: Research study.

¹dr hab. Associate Professor at WSB University in Poznań, Faculty in Chorzów, Business and Health Psychologist at SMG/KRC Poland HR, certified Trainer and Coach, licensed Mental Resilience Consultant and lecturer of MBA studies. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9382-4249> www.magdalenakraczkla.pl;

1. Introduction

The 21st century is extremely dynamic, changeable and diverse. Changes take place at an exponential rate in virtually all areas of human life and entire social groups. Adapting to such rapid changes is not easy and generates conflict situations that often have negative consequences, especially for those who do not have the knowledge, skills, behaviour patterns or experience to respond appropriately. What is interesting and also important from the practical point of view is how the specific psychological predispositions of individuals involved in conflict determine their ways of reacting to these situations, as is manifested by their behaviour, emotions, or the adopted coping strategies, also known as conflict resolution strategies.

The article is an attempt to take a closer look at the different styles of responding to conflict in connection with ego states, which are defined in accordance with Transactional Analysis. The reason behind choosing Transactional Analysis as the theoretical background for the considerations stems primarily from the fact that it is a theory that allows for a relatively smooth transition from the level of theoretical analysis to practical actions. Its theoretical constructs, such as ego states, can be rather easily operationalized, which makes it possible not only to use them in theoretical research, but also to apply the results of studies in corrective or development actions aimed at improving managers' professional efficiency.

The aim of this article is to present the relationships between personality structure (as understood by Transactional Analysis) and the styles of conflict resolution described by K. Thomas and R. Kilmann. The subject of the analysis was the correlations between the functionally defined ego states of the Criticising Parent, the Nurturing Parent, the Adult, the Natural (Free) Child, and the Adapted Child on the one hand, and the conflict management styles of Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating on the other hand.

The article defines the basic concepts covered by modern Transactional Analysis. It describes ego states, including their genesis, formation, and how they shape people's positions in life. It also attempts to explain to what extent they determine human behaviour. Additionally, the author presents conflict-related concepts, with a particular emphasis on the determinants of conflict situations and the possible ways of responding to them.

Behaviour styles adopted in conflict situations are defined in accordance with the theory formulated by K. Thomas and R. Kilmann, which describes responses to conflict along two scales: one measures one's focus on achieving one's own goals; the other measures one's focus on one's interpersonal relations. This concept and the research tool developed by its creators are well proven and have demonstrated their usefulness in many studies.

The empirical part of the article analyses and interprets the identified phenomena, presents the research findings, and draws practical conclusions, including development indications.

2. Presentation of Ego States Based on E. Berne's Transactional Analysis

Transactional Analysis was developed as a theoretical background for therapeutic activities. However, its practical nature and relative simplicity quickly led to it being applied not only in psychotherapy but also in the analysis of educational organizations and processes. Currently, the practical application of Transactional Analysis has gone far beyond E. Berne's original assumptions. Some of the original concepts, such as psychological games, life scripts, life positions, communication models, or recognition signs, are also widely used in other psychological concepts (Berne, 2010; 2015; 2016; 2018; Pankowska, 2010; Steward and Joines, 2016; Steward and Vann, 2012).

The key area of Transactional Analysis is the theory of ego states, which constitutes the main axis of the whole concept and is an original contribution of E. Berne to the development of psychological thought. The ego state theory assumes that there are three states functioning in every human being: Parent, Adult and Child (capitalized to differentiate from the common use of these terms). These states determine ways of thinking, feeling, and, consequently, one's behaviour in various life situations (Berne, 2010; 2015; Harris, 2012; Steward and Joines, 2016; Steward and Vann, 2012).

Description of ego states distinguishes two models: structural and functional. This distinction is crucial to understand the functioning of an individual, especially their pathological (or at least dysfunctional) behaviours. The structural model determines the contents of the Parent and Child ego states as well as the role of the Adult state; it also explains the genesis of certain behaviours and people's motivation to exhibit them. It seems that the Parent and Child ego states are impossible to observe in the structural model; moreover, their impact on the individual is implicit and unconscious (Harris, 2012; Steward and Joines, 2016).

What can be observed, however, is a person's behaviours, as described by a functional model that is derived from intrapsychic processes occurring in the individual; these behaviours are then described by a structural model. In the functional model, there are two distinguishable manifestations of the Parent ego state: Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent. There are also two manifestations of the Child ego state: Natural (Free) Child and Adapted Child. There is only one manifestation of the Adult ego state (Harris, 2012; Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000; Steward and Joines, 2016; Steward and Vann, 2021).

In order to comprehend the functioning of an individual, it is necessary to understand the contents of the Parent and Child ego states and how these affect a

given person's choice of behaviour. It is possible that the ego state triggered at the structural level will be different from the ego state expected at the functional level. If that is the case, interpretations made at the functional level may be incorrect and may point to incorrect motives and reasons for an individual's behaviour (Kahler, 1978; Tample, 2004).

However, practice shows that structural analysis is particularly helpful mainly in psychotherapy. It is not necessary for the analysis of behaviours in organisations or in everyday life unless they include pathological behaviour. It is important to understand that for the sake of structural analysis and analysis of the structural processes in an individual, a lengthy procedure is required to uncover the contents of particular ego states, which, as already mentioned, a given individual is often unaware of (Harris, 2012; Steward, 2001; Steward and Vann, 2012).

This article focuses mainly on functional analysis. The tool used to determine an individual's ego states is based on behavioural indicators, conscious emotions, and thoughts. Considering the quantitative scope of the study, the author was not able to conduct an in-depth structural analysis of all the participants. The author concluded that, for the purposes of this study, functional analysis defining the dominant ego states is sufficient.

However, to maintain methodological correctness in the theoretical part of the study, the author believes it is worth indicating the importance of structural analysis and its impact on the functional model so that the interpretation of the research results, as well as the conclusions resulting therefrom, are not devoid of reflection at this level.

At the structural level, the Child ego state contains all the inner experiences that a person has had and has been through since they were born. It is "a set of feelings, attitudes, and behaviour patterns which are relics of the individual's own childhood" (Berne, 1961, pp. 77-78).

Therefore, it includes all possible kinds of experiences and emotions related to satisfying one's hunger, contact with the mother, experiencing fear, or the joy of having fun or experiencing something for the first time. All of these past experiences are embedded in the structure of the Child ego state and influence one's interpretation of events for the rest of one's life (English, 2002).

The negative emotions related to a child's contact with other people may accompany this person for the rest of their life and therefore determine how they interpret relationships with others at work or in their personal life, even many years later. The experiences and emotions that are recorded in the Child ego state may become how an individual always interprets signals sent by other people. If these past experiences facilitate open communication and building functional relationships, the individual lives their life in a successful and satisfying way.

However, if the past experiences of the Child ego state encourage negative interpretations of others' motivations, this creates distance and leads to distrust in relations with others, thus this person may have difficulties in creating satisfactory interpersonal relationships (Woolams and Brown, 1978). What is important and what Transactional Analysis pays special attention to is the unconscious nature of both these past experiences and their impact. In other words, in a given situation, e.g., a conflict situation, an individual may not know why they react in a certain way, why they experience certain emotions, and why certain thoughts come to their mind (Williams *et al.*, 1983).

At the functional level, the Child ego state can function as a Natural (Free) Child or an Adapted Child (Berne, 1966; 2015). A Natural Child, also known in the literature as a Free Child or Spontaneous Child, exhibits behaviours typical of a small child: egocentric, extremely responsive emotionally, without inhibitions, and focused on seeking pleasure. In unfavourable situations, a Free Child reacts with rebellion and anger. It is the inner part of each individual and is most primal and spontaneous, but it is also the most natural (James and Jongeward, 2017).

The Adapted Child is an aspect of the Child ego state that results from adaptation to external demands. The adaptive changes taking place in the Free Child include learning and experiencing rewards and punishments; they ultimately lead to the creation of the Adapted Child ego state. The Adapted Child feels the need for conformist behaviour and recognizes it as an obvious way of functioning in certain situations.

The Adapted Child responds accurately to the requirements of social norms and properly interprets and responds to the expectations of others. Thanks to the well-formed ego state of the Adapted Child, an individual functions appropriately in social groups, observing and correctly interpreting orders and prohibitions (Erskine, 2010; Pankowska, 2010; Steward and Vann, 2021).

In the functional model, the Parent ego state takes the form of a Critical (Controlling) Parent or a Nurturing Parent. The role of a Nurturing Parent is to take care of others, support and advise them, and give consent to various types of activities. The positive aspect of this state is manifested in the recognition of, respect for, and confidence in other people's capacities and coping abilities. This means that a person functioning as a positive Nurturing Parent helps when others need and ask for help. A Nurturing Parent approves of the right of others to take responsibility for themselves and their actions (Harris, 2012; Pankowska, 2010; Steward and Joines, 2016; Steward and Vann, 2012).

The negative aspect of a Nurturing Parent, also known as a Saviour, is that it does not take the other person's abilities and potential into account and, instead, relieves them by imposing their own help and advice. As these activities do not take into account the actual needs of the other person, they are often inadequate and deprive

others of the opportunity to develop, take responsibility, and solve problems on their own (Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000).

As Steward and Joines claim (2016, p. 34), “Being a positive Nurturing Parent means care shown together with genuine respect for the person being helped”. A Nurturing Parent is negative when “help” is offered from a position of superiority that undermines the value of the other person.

The Critical Parent, also known as the Controlling Parent, is the ego state which contains the internalized influences of meaningful people who were encountered during an individual’s socialization and upbringing, especially in the first years of their life. When considered at the structural level, this state encompasses all the messages of parents and other people who influence one’s moral principles, values, beliefs, and views. It also contains their knowledge about how to behave in various situations.

When describing the content of the Critical Parent ego state in structural analysis, it is often noted that it includes “whole” persons that are significant for a child’s development from the moment of their birth because a child cannot independently decide which messages they will save in their Parent ego state and which they will reject (Berne, 1961; 2015; Rogoll, 1989). At the functional level, the Critical Parent directs other people to comply with social norms, checks how they respect these norms, and takes corrective actions. If the positive aspects of the Critical Parent prevail, their goal is to impose rules and principles of conduct that serve the good of the other person or the individual themselves if the Critical Parent acts on the basis of the principle of internal influence (Nishikawa, 2001).

The negative aspects of a Critical Parent, known as the Persecutor, are related to domination, diminishing other people’s value (or one’s own value in a situation of internal influence), and expressing excessive criticism that is often based on prejudices and stereotypes. The Persecutor has a tendency to treat others with no respect and a sense of superiority (Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000).

The Adult ego state is expressed through a developed sense of reality of the person operating in this state as their main tasks are to receive and process information, to be aware of their behaviours, and to take responsibility for them (Jankowski, 1980). This ego state also involves a belief in one’s abilities and that one can cope with pressures both from the outside and from within the individual. A person with a developed Adult ego state personality structure copes with their own anxieties, loneliness, or the pressure of unmet needs (Harris, 1987).

A characteristic feature of the Adult ego state is that it operates without any a priori assumptions, which means focusing on the process of collecting and verifying information (Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000). In this ego state, a certain duality is revealed which can conventionally be defined by the vectors “from” and “to”.

On the one hand, this dualism means that one can afford to and is able to realistically or critically assess their own limitations and possibilities; on the other hand, it means realism in assessing others and reality itself. This type of action is called reality testing as it consists in separating internal and external stimuli. Thanks to this, there is no confusion between the objective perception of the world and one's subjective perceptions (Fhanér, 1996, pp. 21-22). In functional terms, additional structure elements are sometimes distinguished in the Adult ego state; these are referred to as the 'Computer', which is responsible for processing and updating data from reality, and the 'Database', which collects information from the Computer and the other ego states (Harris, 1987; Krumper, 1977).

The Adult ego state is a structure characterised by a compromise and mediation structure. It mediates between, on one hand, the requirements, duties, orders and prohibitions of the Parent ego state and, on the other hand, the emotions and impulses from the structure of the Child ego state. Therefore, a person functioning in this ego state can be recognised by features like, on one hand, emotional stability, patience, calmness, self-control, and, on the other hand, a lack of utopian views or a certain distance to the actions they take. Persons with a dominant Adult ego state are real-life realists who are persistent in pursuing their goals, think in a logical way, and have a practical attitude towards the tasks or duties they perform.

They have confidence in themselves but they also gain the trust of others, e.g., their superiors or subordinates at work. They tend to use constructive defence mechanisms of the psyche (e.g., sublimation, sense of humour, deferred gratification, etc.) more often than destructive mechanisms, which greatly deform perception of reality (e.g., denial, fake reactions, or projections, especially delusional projections). Negative manifestations of the Adult ego state are a certain stiffness and distance in relation to others, a lack of empathy, or emotional coldness (Cornell *et al.*, 2016; Harris, 2009; Lapworth and Sills, 2011; Steward and Vann, 2021; Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000).

Every human contact and every transaction originates from an ego state. Some reactions, for example those shown under stress, are not consciously controlled, and this is when the past experiences accumulated in the Parent or the Child come to the fore. However, when a person subjects a situation to conscious reflection and interpretation using the Adult ego state, they can react from any ego state. The external manifestations of such a decision will be identical to the spontaneous reaction from the state of Parent or Child, but the essence of the decision will be completely different (Steward and Joines, 2016).

Communication in Transactional Analysis is described through the analysis of stimuli that occur between the ego states of communicating people. This analysis is particularly interesting from the point of view of the subject of this work, i.e., conflict situations and ways of reacting to such situations (Erskine, 2010; James and Jongeward, 2017).

According to J. Hey, “some combinations of ego states can lead to poor communication, for example when we use the Functional Adult ego state when addressing someone with the Parent or Child ego state” (Hey, 2010).

Thus, it can be said that the use, even if subconscious, of improper ego states in interpersonal communication can significantly affect the effect of communication. The formal course of a transaction is determined by the transaction vectors and may result in the emergence of conflicts or other barriers to communication, regardless of the substantive content of the communicated messages.

Knowledge of ego states enables the recognition of behaviour and both the conscious and unconscious activation of the ego state that is adequate to the situation and goals of communication. The most characteristic features of ego states are as follows:

- Natural Child – spontaneity, kindness, creativity;
- Adapted child – courtesy, dexterity, non-conflict;
- Nurturing Parent – care, concern, help;
- Critical Parent – firmness, control, strength;
- Adult – logic, thinking, problem-solving, distance (Hey, 2010, p. 100).

From the aforementioned characteristics of ego states, it can be expected that a person with a dominant Critical Parent ego state will have a tendency to communicate in a firm manner and impose certain views and solutions. He/she will tend to seek forceful solutions that give him/her control and domination. A person with a predominant Nurturing Parent ego state will create relationships in which they will be able to express their concern and provide help and other services that help others, regardless of their abilities and potential.

A person with a dominant Adult ego state will base their relations with other people on rational premises and, when communicating, will refer to verified information and logical conclusions. This person avoids exaltation, strong emotions or feelings. In relations with other people, a person with a dominant Free Child ego state focuses on creative activity, satisfying their curiosity, and expressing and satisfying their own needs and pleasures through free expression of their personality.

A person with a dominant Adapted Child ego state spontaneously uses learned ways of behaviour which are consistent with generally accepted norms and take into account the expectations of others. Thanks to this, this person will avoid conflicts, social disapproval, and strong emotions. This person tends to be calm and polite.

According to J. Hey (2010, p. 108), “although in theory any ego states can be combined, in practice there are four communication channels that result in good relations:

- Functional Adult – Functional Adult
- Nurturing Parent – Natural Child
- Natural Child – Natural Child
- Critical Parent – Adapted Child“

These channels enhance the emergence of parallel transactions that are beneficial for both parties of communication and provide each party with the desired, albeit different, psychological benefits.

Crossed transactions, on the other hand, are conflicting in nature as they prevent a free flow of information and emotions. The crossed transactions which are particularly interesting are those between the ego states of Child and Parent both in terms of their transactional stimulus and transactional reaction. This kind of transaction may be referred to as a conflict of needs and is characteristic of many conflicts of a very emotional nature, the cause of which is various unmet needs that are felt and manifested from the Child ego state (Cornell *et al.*, 2016; Lapworth and Sills, 2011; Steward and Joines, 2016; Harris, 2009).

The second typical crossed transaction which enhances conflict is the one with a Parent-Child transactional stimulus and Parent-Child transactional reaction. This relationship is called a conflict of values. It occurs especially when communicating persons are predisposed to function from a negative aspect of their Critical Parent ego state, in which they try to impose their values or beliefs on others without taking into account others' needs, expectations, or opinions (Erskine, 2009; Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000).

The third situation type is when people come into conflict without a conscious intention. Such situations are accompanied by a hidden message, which is unconscious but read (felt) by the recipient of the transactional stimulus. The most common relationships of this type include the following transactions: Child – Child on the explicit level and on the hidden (psychological) level; the Parent – Child intersection (conflict of values); or the Child – Parent (conflict of needs) (Berne, 2010; 2016; 2018).

To sum up, the preferred ego state and the methods of communication resulting from it may significantly affect one's functioning in conflict situations. Although every person has the possibility to freely choose the ego state from which they will react, this flow of psychological energy often encounters barriers or even blockages (exclusions, contamination). The rigidity of reactions from the Critical Parent or the Nurturing Parent ego states seems particularly high.

3. Conflict Resolution Strategies in Difficult Situations

Defining conflict from a psychological perspective encounters many difficulties resulting mainly from the nature of this phenomenon, its complexity, and the

numerous ways in which it can be defined. Depending on the research perspective and the preferences of researchers, conflict may be described from the perspective of the conditions preceding the participants' conflict behaviour, the emotional states of the conflict participants, and their cognitive states or conflict behaviours (Pondy, 1972).

Other researchers, e.g., Z. Pawlak, propose a strict and mathematical approach to conflict and require that it be treated as a derivative of the configuration and function of the strength of an object, which can be presented as $S=(X, f_i, m_i)$, where S is a conflict situation, X is a set of objects in relation to each other, f_i is a relation between elements such that $f_i(xy) = -1$, and m_i is the strength of the object (Pawlak, 1987, p. 14).

The mathematical approach to conflict makes it possible to analyse conflict situations by means of game theory, which makes it possible to closely analyse the conflict process and predict its outcome (Pawlak, 1987). This approach, however, does not take into account the specificity of the $f_i(xy)$ function and its personality determinants between x and y , i.e., the people in conflict. The mathematical approach to conflict seems to be very interesting for general considerations and when the individual specificity and individual determinants of conflicts are disregarded. However, in research into conflict at the interpersonal level, this approach seems to be of little use.

There is general agreement among researchers that conflict is a universal phenomenon that is integrally related to human functioning in communities (Hocer and Wilmot, 2017; Janowska, 2020).

However, there is also no complete agreement among researchers as to the causes of conflict. C.W. Moree distinguishes five main causes of conflict: data conflict, value conflict, relationship conflict, structural conflict, and conflict of interest (Jakubiak-Mirończuk, 2008, p. 85). It seems that this classification is accepted by most researchers of this issue (Balawajder, 1992, p. 94). A similar classification of the causes of conflict is proposed by M. Deutsch, who, however, pays more attention to the nature of relationships and the emotions between conflicting parties. He identifies the following causes of conflict: resource control, preferences and dislikes, values, faith and beliefs, and the nature of the parties' relationship (Deutsch, 1973).

When analysing conflict at the interpersonal level, many researchers also pay attention to the emotions that determine the occurrence of conflict and the emotions that arise during it. D.R. Peterson emphasizes the importance of hostility and a number of related emotions and resentments (Balawajder, 1992, p. 53).

The research conducted so far on the psychosocial determinants of conflict and ways of reacting to conflict situations has produced a number of interesting results that are worth mentioning in the context of this article. B. Kłusek-Wojciszke conducted

research on the “Big Five” and the ways of responding to conflict. As she says, “agreeableness correlates negatively with competition, and positively with cooperation and adjustment. Extraversion correlates positively with competition and negatively with adjustment. Neuroticism clearly favours adjustment and avoidance.

Conscientiousness only influences avoidance, clearly inhibiting it. On the other hand, openness turns out to be the only feature that does not correlate with the styles of conduct in a conflict situation” (Kłusek-Wojciszke, 2009, p. 20). M.H. Davies, L.A. Kraus, and S. Capobianco investigated the ways in which employees of different ages respond to conflict in the workplace.

These studies provided convincing evidence that, with increasing age, female workers have a greater tendency to be non-aggressive, non-confrontational, and more focused on conflict reduction and cooperation (Davies *et al.*, 2009). Stafyla, Kaltsidou, and Spyridis (2013) conducted studies analysing the influence of gender on conflict behaviour in the workplace; they showed that, under the influence of stress resulting from organizational conditions, men in the workplace exhibit conflict behaviours more often than women (Stafyla *et al.*, 2013).

Without going into a detailed analysis of the conflict phenomenon, for the purpose of this study it is worth taking a closer look at the concept of conflict in a way that well reflects the subject of this work, i.e., the mutual determinants between ego states (as distinguished in Transactional Analysis) and responses to conflict. L.R. Pondy (1972) sees conflict as a process that consists of a series of episodes that occur sequentially and have their own unique dynamics resulting from the conditions of the individuals involved.

According to this author, the first episode, which is the source of the conflict, is a hidden conflict resulting from the simultaneous strivings of the conflict's parties for limited resources and autonomy, and the differences in the goals of these parties or a conflict of roles. A hidden conflict is a state of objective contradiction but the parties to the conflict are not yet aware of this, therefore they do not yet undertake actions that characterize a conflict situation. The second episode in L.R. Pondy's model is a perceived conflict, i.e., when the participants realize the contradictions defined in the first episode.

Interestingly, as this author emphasizes, some hidden conflicts never turn into perceived conflict as the potential parties use a defensive suppression mechanism which prevents less-threatening conflicts from occurring. The third episode is a perceived conflict, which is a state of emotional tension, anxiety or hostility that is directly related to the sources of the hidden conflict or to the interactions of those involved in the conflict. The fourth episode is an open conflict, manifested in the specific behaviour of the participants. The most characteristic conflict behaviour is that which is intended to frustrate others. Such frustration occurs in particular when a person blocks or hinders others from achieving their goals.

The most obvious behaviour of this type is overt aggression, which, however, may not always be manifested due to the circumstances of each particular situation. The last, fifth episode in the discussed model is the consequences of the conflict, i.e., the state that is arrived at as a result of interaction during the conflict. It is possible to eliminate the contradictions underlying the conflict and temporarily solve the emerging difficulties and negative emotions, or at least reduce their intensity. As emphasized by L.R. Pondy (1972), each conflict episode is determined by combinations of previous conflicts and the environmental conditions that occurred during previous conflicts. The existing episode creates the basis for future episodes.

A similar concept of the course of conflict is proposed by S. Robbins (2000), who distinguishes four stages (episodes) of conflict. This author combines the perceived and felt conflict into one phase of conflict, which he describes as the phase of recognition and personalization. However, as regards the essence of the course of conflict, S.P. Robbins does not introduce any significant changes to the model presented by L.R. Pondy.

Another interesting approach to conflict which emphasizes its processual nature is D.R. Peterson's concept (1983). This researcher sees the causes of conflict primarily in the contradictory nature of interests, conflicting values and beliefs, and actions aimed at making it difficult for one party to achieve their intended goals. At the behavioural level, conflict manifests itself in two forms: as specific behaviours and inclinations that the other party does not accept, or as behaviours inconsistent with the applicable social norms.

According to D.R. Peterson, the conflict process takes place in three basic phases: the beginning, i.e., the emergence of the conflict; the middle, which comes down to a series of interactions between the participants of the conflict; and the end, i.e., the solution to the existing problems. The initial phase, i.e., the occurrence of a conflict, is triggered by behaviours and situations such as expressing criticism, making unauthorized demands, refusing to meet the partner's expectations, or an accumulation of unpleasantness. D.R. Peterson believes that the first three events that initiate conflict are associated with a violation of the norms that regulate interpersonal relations, while an accumulation of unpleasantness initiates conflict when the tolerance threshold of a growing state of irritation has been exceeded.

In the central, essential part of the conflict, negative influences are exchanged between the disputing parties. These interactions are aimed at limiting or even blocking the negative influence of the other party and exerting such an influence that would result in this party reaching a state that is favourable for the person exhibiting the given behaviour.

In the middle phase of conflict, cognitive processes focus on the essence of the dispute, oneself, and the interaction partner, while the dominant emotional states are disappointment, anger, anxiety or pain. Escalation in the middle of the conflict ends

when the disputed problem is perceived as less important than the importance attached to the relationship with the partner, or when one of the participants takes responsibility for the conflict and does not try to offend or hold anyone else responsible for it.

Thus, the conflict passes into the third, final phase, which may take two forms: either the lack of a solution, which interrupts the relationship between the parties, or a state is reached that satisfies the participants in the dispute to varying degrees. D.R. Peterson (1983) points to five potential endings of conflicts: separation of the parties, domination of one side and submission of the other side, reaching a compromise, achieving complete consent, and obtaining additional benefits from conflict resolution in the form of improving the bond between the participants.

Thomas (1992) is the author of a cognitive-motivational model of conflict. According to his conception, conflicts begin when one party becomes aware that the actions of the other party may be or are a significant obstacle to the realisation of their own goals or values, which triggers negative emotions that become apparent in the behaviour of the conflict participants. K. Thomas distinguishes five main conflict states: frustration, conceptualisation, behaviour, reaction of the other party, and outcome. In this researcher's view, frustration can be referred to as a trigger effect of the entire conflict process. Frustration can relate to both actual and anticipated situations and can reflect the whole spectrum of decisions, ranging from seizing resources, active obstruction, or passive resistance, to ignoring feelings.

Conceptualisation, on the other hand, is the moment when an individual, by activating cognitive resources, becomes aware of his or her own frustrations and the conflict moves from the latent phase to the overt phase. As a result of this conceptualisation, the parties take specific actions to achieve the benefits they envisage. The behaviour of each party is at the same time a stimulus for the other party to react.

Therefore, the conceptualisation of a conflict situation is dynamic and can change as a result of the interaction between the conflicting parties. When analysing conflict behaviour, K. Thomas distinguishes between two components: orientation and strategy (tactics). Orientation is defined by the intensity of two tendencies: satisfying one's own needs vs. satisfying the partner's needs.

Strategy, on the other hand, is defined by the integration component and the distribution component. The integration component determines the overall sum of satisfaction possible for both parties in a given situation. The distribution component is the degree of satisfaction of each party; therefore, it determines how the overall satisfaction is shared between the conflicting parties.

The fourth phase of conflict in K. Thomas' terms is the reaction of the other party, i.e., interactions, which can lead to an escalation of the conflict, i.e., an increase in

the hostility of the parties, an increase in the number and size of the problems involved, a decrease in trust, and the use of coercion. On the other hand, interactions can lead to de-escalation or the end of the conflict. When interactions end, the conflict fades away and an outcome emerges. Its end result depends on the degree of satisfaction of both parties; however, if satisfaction is too low for just one of the parties, it will be the cause of further conflicts in the future (Thomas, 1992).

Conflict models and their assumptions determine the behaviour of the parties to a conflict. These behaviours, in turn, determine the outcome of the conflict and whether the parties are satisfied with the achieved result (Howell, 2020).

Deutsch (1994) suggests distinguishing two basic types of behaviour in conflict situations: cooperative and competitive. Cooperation is the result of positive interdependence, i.e., a situation in which the achievement of the goals of one of the parties is possible only when the goals of the other party are also achieved. Rivalry, on the other hand, stems from the negative interdependence of the goals of the parties to the conflict. The differences between cooperation and competition are visible in forms of communication, mutual attitudes and task orientation.

Cooperation requires open communication based on trust, while competition usually manifests itself in a lack of communication, hiding one's goals, and often misleading the other party. Deutsch (1991) concludes that specific types of social relations, e.g., competition or cooperation, and their results cause the emergence of the same type of social relations. This means, for example, that open communication as a result of a cooperation strategy will result in the emergence of a cooperative strategy; on the other hand, the lack of trust caused by a competitive strategy will in effect favour the dominance of a competitive strategy. The author called these dependencies "Deutsch's cruel law".

Blake and Mouton (1964a, 1964b) also propose a two-dimensional classification of behaviour in conflict. In their view, the dimensions describing human behaviour may be defined as interest in pursuing one's own interests and interest in contact with people. By means of these two dimensions, these researchers distinguish five ways of behaving in a conflict: domination (high interest in one's own goals and little interest in people); mitigation (low interest in one's own goals and high interest in people); problem-solving (high interest in one's own goals and people); avoidance (low interest in one's own goals and high interest in people); and compromise (moderate interest in one's own goals and moderate interest in people).

The typology of Blake and Mouton was creatively developed by K. Thomas (1992) and R. Kilmann (1977). Based on the concept of orientation in a conflict situation, which is an integral part of by K. Thomas' conflict model, they created a typology that takes into account the different intensities of the two components that influence orientation: the pursuit of satisfying one's own needs and desires, as well as striving to satisfy the needs and desires of the other party of the conflict (Rubel and Thomas,

1976). The pursuit of satisfying one's own needs is expressed in the active and persistent pursuit of one's own goals, defending one's own arguments, and imposing one's own definition of the situation.

On the other hand, the desire to satisfy the needs of the other party manifests itself in collaboration and cooperation aimed at enabling the other party to achieve their own goals and benefits. The decision regarding how to behave in a conflict is therefore always the result of these two desires. As a result, similarly to R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton's model of behaviour, K. Thomas and R. Kilmann distinguished 5 types of behaviour: avoiding, competing, accommodating, collaborating, and compromising.

Behaviour defined as avoidance results from one's low regard for one's own interests and the interests of the other party (Schaubhut, 2007). People who follow this motivation pattern prefer to avoid dealing with conflict and use all their energy to move away from the problem, ignore it, or postpone it. Very often, people with this preference even deny the existence of a conflict. Their perception of a conflict situation can be characterized as lose-lose. Competitive behaviour is characteristic of people who seek to satisfy their own needs without any desire to satisfy the needs of the other party.

Competitors actively and resolutely defend their own interests, often display assertive or aggressive behaviour, and seek their own gain even at the expense of the other party. Such rivals tend to use unethical tactics, such as manipulating, exerting pressure, lying, and concealing information. They perceive the conflict as a win-lose situation, and they see their goal as a victory over the opponent. Accommodating, on the other hand, refers to behaviour motivated by a desire to fully satisfy the needs of the other party, while not striving to satisfy one's own needs.

Accommodating people are passive in defending their own interests and have a strong desire to cooperate with others. People with this motivation see a conflict situation as a lose-win situation and often perceive themselves as a victim (usually unaware) of circumstances and other people's decisions and behaviour. The behaviour defined by K. Thomas and R. Kilmann as collaboration results from the pursuit of fully satisfying both one's own needs and the needs of the other party to the conflict (Schaubhut, 2007). This means cooperating with others while relentlessly defending one's own interests.

A person guided by this motivation strives to obtain a result that gives maximum satisfaction to both parties to the dispute. This person's perception of a conflict situation is win-win. Compromise behaviour allows one to partially satisfy both one's own needs and the needs of the other party. This type of behaviour involves moderate motivation to defend one's own interests and, at the same time, moderate motivation to cooperate. Depending on the extent of the compromise and the results to be obtained, the perception of a conflict situation may range from win-win,

through win-lose, lose-win, to lose-lose if the result of the conflict does not satisfy either party (Fuller, 1991; Howell, 2020).

K. Thomas and R. Kilmann's classification of conflict behaviour is widely used by researchers dealing with conflict issues. It is a convenient and extremely useful tool that provides a common conceptual framework for research into various aspects and determinants of conflict. This is also why the author of this article decided to apply it in her empirical research.

4. Ego States in the Context of Transactional Analysis and Conflict Resolution Methods – Analysis of Research Results

The results of the research presented in this article come from a research project that was carried out on a group of 152 managers in 2019-2022 in large cities of the Upper Silesian agglomeration. The respondents completed two tests using the paper-pencil method: Thomas-Kilmann's Inventory and K. Kälin and P. Müri's Ego State Scale. The research was conducted in the form of group and individual meetings.

The research was voluntary and anonymous and, to ensure the reliability of the collected data, each person participating in the study completed the same set of tests. 152 people took part in the research. This group was diverse in terms of gender, age, and education. All the respondents were professionally active although they held slightly different positions. Due to incomplete feedback material, 102 completed test sheets qualified for the final analysis.

4.1 Characteristics of the Analysed Group

The analysed group was diverse in terms of age, gender, and education. Taking into account the gender variable, the group of respondents consisted of both women and men, with a majority of women: 60 women and 42 men, a total of 102 respondents. In the percentage distribution, women constituted 59% of the group and men 41%. The structure of the research sample in terms of gender is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the group according to the gender variable

Gender	N	%
Women	60	59 %
Men	42	41%
Total	102	100 %

Source: Author's own compilation.

Distribution of the group of respondents according to the age variable is presented in four age groups. The structure of the research sample in terms of age is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of the group according to the variable of age*

Age	N	%
up to 30	33	32%
31–40	36	35%
41–50	28	28%
51 or over	5	5%
Total	102	100%

Source: Author's own compilation

The distribution of the group of respondents according to the education variable was analysed taking into account all levels of education, from primary to university education. In terms of education, the structure of the study group is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Distribution of the group according to the education variable*

Education	N	%
Primary School	1	1%
Vocational School	4	4%
High School	77	75%
University	20	20%
Total	102	100%

Source: Author's own compilation.

4.2 Characteristics of the Research Tools

Two measurement tools were used in the presented research: the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Schaubhut, 2007), hereinafter referred to as the Thomas-Kilmann Inventory, and the Ego State Scale by K. Kälin and P. Müri (Kälin, 1998), also referred to as the Egogram.

The Thomas-Kilmann Inventory measures response to conflict (behaviour in a conflict situation). This inventory has been successfully used all over the world for over 30 years and allows behaviours in conflict situations to be reliably estimated on 5 scales.

The inventory consists of 30 pairs of statements that allow the intensity of the specified behaviour preferences in conflict situations to be measured (Schaubhut, 2007). In order to better emphasize the characteristics of each type of behaviour measured in the inventory, they are all presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Behaviour in conflict situations according to K. Thomas and R. Kilmann*

Type of conflict response	Characteristics of the response
Collaborating	This type of conflict behaviour balances one's self-interest with that of the other party. Achieving one's own goals is correlated here with caring for the quality of the relationship with the other party. This

	type of behaviour is characteristic when one seeks solutions to conflict situations in the win-win paradigm. It is characterized by an attitude of cooperation and mutual concessions.
Competing	The parties involved in the conflict try to maximize their own benefits, without taking into account the benefits of the other party. The aim of the actions taken is to win and force concessions from the other party. There is no care for the quality of relations, which results in the polarization of positions and a loss of trust between the parties to the conflict.
Compromising	This type of behaviour means willingness to make concessions to one's partner even at the expense of one's own benefits. There is also a certain care for relationships. The aim of the activities is not to win at any cost, but rather to find, even by limiting one's own benefits, a solution that would satisfy both parties at least to a minimal extent. This strategy is therefore related to both parties adjusting their preferences; however, the solution, although not guaranteeing full benefits, allows relationships to be maintained at a satisfactory level, enabling collaboration in the future.
Accommodating	Accommodation is a type of behaviour that favours maintaining positive relationships with the other party to the conflict over one's self-interest. It is a strategy involving concessions "here and now" in order to maintain good relationships and a positive emotional atmosphere that may allow for greater benefits in the future.
Avoiding	The parties involved in the conflict ignore both their own interests and their relations with the other party. This type of behaviour in conflict is manifested by postponing its resolution, not noticing the conflict, leaving things to run their own course, denying the conflict, or withdrawing from a conflict situation in the hope that the problem will end or lose energy and the other party will withdraw their claims. It is worth noting, however, that the choice of this strategy does not have to mean that neither of the parties will lose, neither in terms of their own benefits, nor in terms of their relationship.

Source: Author's own compilation based on Lewicki, R., *Hiat; A. and Oleander, K. (1998): Pomyśl zanim powiesz. Wszystko o strategiach negocjacyjnych*, Warszawa: Amber, p. 46; Klusek-Wojciszke, B. (2009): *Osobowość jako determinanta wyboru stylu rozwiązywania konfliktów*, „Organizacja i kierowanie” 1/2009 (135), pp. 12-13.

The other tool used to conduct empirical research for this article is the Ego State Scale (also referred to as the Egogram) proposed by K. Kälin and P. Müri (Kälin and Müri, 1996). This inventory focuses on the functional model of ego states, and the authors distinguish the following ones: Controlling Parent (Normative), Nurturing Parent (Caring), Adult, Free Child (Natural), and Adapted Child (Adjusted).

These ego states will be used later in the article to analyse the relationships between conflict behaviour tendencies and the tendencies to respond from specific ego states (Dusay, 1972).

4.3 Analysis of Research Results

The results obtained in the Thomas-Kilmann's Inventory and the Egogram are presented in the following tables and analysed in line with the research problem addressed in this study. The results obtained in the Ego State Scale study are presented in Tables 5-9.

In order to analyse the relationships between the variables, a series of internal analyses was carried out between the scales of the Egogram by means of Spearman's rank correlation. The findings are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Correlation findings – the Ego State Scale*

		Controlling Parent Ego State	Nurturing Parent Ego State	Adult Ego State	Natural Child Ego State	Adapted Child Ego State
Controlling Parent Ego State	r	1.000	.529**	.295**	.196	.160
	p		.000	.003	.050	.110
Nurturing Parent Ego State	r		1.000	.165	.122	.257**
	p			.102	.228	.010
Adult Ego State	r			1.000	.242*	-.271**
	p				.015	.006
Natural Child Ego State	r				1.000	-.011
	p					.911
Adapted Child Ego State	r					1.000
	p					

Note: *r* = Spearman's correlation coefficient (*rho*); *p* = statistical significance; * *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01.

Source: *Author's own compilation.*

As shown in Table 5, the analysis of the ego state correlation indicates that an increase in the intensity of the Controlling Parent ego state is accompanied by an increase in the intensity of the Nurturing Parent, Adult and Natural Child ego states. Further analysis shows that the Nurturing Parent ego state positively correlates with the Adapted Child ego state. Also, an increase in the intensity of the Adult ego state is accompanied by a significant increase in the intensity of the Natural Child ego state and a decrease in the intensity of the Adapted Child ego state.

In order to analyse the relationship between the metric variables and the results of the Ego States Scale, a series of analyses were conducted by means of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test, the findings of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Relationship between the metric variables and AT inventory measurements.

		Controlling Parent ego state	Nurturing Parent ego state	Adult ego state	Natural Child ego state	Adapted Child ego state
Gender	r	.070	.024	.209*	-.038	-.157
	p	.486	.809	.036	.706	.118
Age	r	.019	.020	.118	-.080	-.255*
	p	.851	.846	.239	.428	.010
Education	r	-.125	-.157	-.074	-.020	-.140
	p	.213	.118	.461	.844	.164
Income level	r	-.059	-.044	.154	.072	-.367**
	p	.606	.698	.175	.533	.001
Work duration	r	-.001	.060	.188	-.073	-.272**
	p	.992	.562	.064	.476	.007
Company size	r	-.114	-.083	.056	.207	-.014
	p	.339	.492	.639	.081	.907
People management	r	-.002	-.010	-.070	.070	.230*
	p	.981	.919	.493	.496	.022

Note: r = Spearman's correlation coefficient (ρ); p = statistical significance; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Author's own compilation.

When correlated with the basic metric variables of gender, age, education, income level, work duration, company size and people management, the results obtained in the measurement of ego states (presented in Table 6) indicate a positive relationship between men and the Adult ego state ($r = 0.209$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, correlation analysis using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test showed that the Adapted Child ego state negatively correlates with the age of the respondents ($r = -0.255$, $p < 0.05$), the level of income ($r = -0.367$, $p < 0.01$) and people management ($r = -0.230$, $p < 0.05$).

A positive correlation between men and the Adult ego state may result from the apparent cultural gender-related stereotypes of men having personality predispositions and being assessed positively when they demonstrate logical thinking abilities, knowledge and lack of emotions (as opposed to women, who according to these stereotypes are focused more on artistic talents and emotional attitudes).

The other significant dependencies between the metric data and the ego states concern the Adapted Child ego state. The negative correlation between the Adapted Child ego state and the age of the respondents may result from the personal and

professional development of the people participating in the survey and the fact that, as time passes, they tend to adopt the attitudes of “I am OK – you are OK” or “I am OK – you are not OK”. It should be noted, however, that the research group is made up of mainly young and well-educated people, which may be associated with high aspirations regarding life positions or personal and professional development.

There is also a negative correlation between income level and the frequency of using the Adapted Child ego state. It seems that an increase in income levels is accompanied by an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, and the need to create interpersonal relationships increases in a way other than simply adapting to the expectations and requirements of others.

Similarly, managerial roles related to people management enhance attitudes rooted in the attitude of “I am OK – others are not OK”. In the hierarchical structures that currently dominate in the companies in which the research was conducted, people’s vertical development is accompanied by a decline in Adapted Child attitudes in favour of attitudes associated more with the Parent or Adult ego states.

The analysis of internal correlations performed using Thomas-Kilmann’s Inventory showed that an increase in levels of Competition was associated with a decrease in levels of Compromise, Avoidance and Accommodation. Further analysis showed that with an increase of Collaboration, levels of Avoidance and Accommodation decreased. The analysis did not reveal any other significant relationships between the examined variables. The obtained results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Correlation results in Thomas-Kilmann’s Inventory.*

		Competing in conflict	Collaborating in conflict	Compromising in conflict	Avoiding in conflict	Accommodating in conflict
Competing in conflict	r	1.000	-.034	-.211*	-.534**	-.475**
	p		.737	.034	.000	.000
Collaborating in conflict	r		1.000	-.174	-.294**	-.458**
	p			.083	.003	.000
Compromising in conflict	r			1.000	-.140	-.137
	p				.162	.172
Avoiding in conflict	r				1.000	.181
	p					.071
Accommodating in conflict	r					1.000
	p					

Note: *r* = Spearman’s correlation coefficient (*rho*); *p* = statistical significance; **p*<0.05, ***p* < 0.01.

Source: *Author’s own compilation.*

The research also included an analysis of the relationships between the metric variables, and measurement of conflict resolution styles using Thomas-Kilmann's Inventory. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Relationship between the metric variables and Thomas-Kilmann's Inventory findings.

		Competing in conflict	Collaborating in conflict	Compromising in conflict	Avoiding in conflict	Accommodating in conflict
Gender	r	.240*	.042	-.183	-.063	-.121
	p	.016	.674	.067	.531	.229
Age	r	.165	-.039	-.096	-.126	-.044
	p	.100	.698	.338	.209	.660
Education	r	-.132	-.063	.148	.048	-.093
	p	.189	.530	.139	.636	.353
Income level	r	.178	-.018	.078	-.252*	-.105
	p	.117	.874	.495	.025	.355
Work duration	r	.094	.008	-.042	-.155	.022
	p	.356	.935	.682	.128	.826
Company size	r	.049	.135	.213	-.402**	-.141
	p	.682	.259	.072	.000	.237
People management	r	-.229*	-.028	.074	.057	.218*
	p	.024	.785	.471	.577	.031

Note: r = Spearman's correlation coefficient (ρ); p = statistical significance; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Source: Author's own compilation.

The conducted analysis showed that, compared to women, men score significantly higher in the conflict management style referred to as Competing. People who managed other people had significantly lower results in Competing than people who did not manage other people.

Further analysis also showed that the tendency to apply the Avoidance strategy decreased as income level and company size increased. The analysis also showed that people who managed other people had significantly higher Accommodation strategy scores. The analysis did not reveal any other significant relationships between the examined variables.

The results of analysing the correlation between ego states and the tendency to adopt certain styles of behaviour in conflict situations, measured by Thomas-Kilmann's Inventory and obtained by means of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient test, revealed a number of significant statistical relationships (Table 9).

Table 9. Relationships between measurements from Thomas-Kilmann's Inventory and Ego State Scale.

		Controlling Parent ego state	Nurturing Parent ego state	Adult ego state	Natural Child ego state	Adapted Child ego state
Competing in conflict	r	.254*	.049	.263**	.089	-.345**
	p	.010	.629	.008	.381	.000
Collaborating in conflict	r	-.227*	-.195	.199*	.109	-.323**
	p	.023	.052	.046	.280	.001
Compromising in conflict	r	-.004	-.037	.030	-.023	-.048
	p	.970	.715	.767	.823	.633
Avoiding in conflict	r	-.082	.079	-.282**	-.230*	.405**
	p	.415	.435	.004	.021	.000
Accommodating in conflict	r	-.086	.103	-.208*	-.071	.347**
	p	.390	.309	.037	.482	.000

Note: *r* = Spearman's correlation coefficient (*rho*); *p* = statistical significance; * *p* < 0.05, ** *p* < 0.01.

Source: Author's own compilation.

The Controlling Parent ego state positively and strongly correlated with the style of conflict resolution that is defined as Competing ($r=0.254$, $p=0.010$). This dependence is understandable and results directly from how an individual acts in the Controlling Parent ego state. As previously mentioned, a Controlling Parent is, to put it briefly, a resource of values, norms and beliefs (Berne, 1961) which are treated by the given individual as obvious and appropriate and are assessed as positive from pragmatic and moral stances.

On the other hand, any other values, norms and beliefs other than those recognized by a particular individual are rejected and assessed as negative. The results obtained in the research clearly confirm this way of seeing the world and the resulting behaviours. In a conflict situation, a person with a strong Controlling Parent ego state is also focused on his/her own way of seeing the world and his/her own values. What is more, the life position characteristic of the Controlling Parent, i.e., "I am OK – others are not OK", favours treating others, their goals, and benefits as less important in conflict situations (Erskine, 2010; Harris, 2012; Szymanowska and Sękowska, 2000).

This phenomenon applies to both the essence of a conflict as well as its structural course. The situation is similar with the emotional aspect as a Controlling Parent shows little emotional sensitivity and their empathic abilities are limited (Steiner, 2017). When entering competition and striving to stand their ground, a Controlling Parent (or, to be more precise, a person in the Controlling Parent ego state) does not take into account any mutual relations with the other side of the conflict as an

important dimension of the situation. He/she focuses on their own gain and “defeating” the other party of the conflict. In this case, this “defeat” takes the form of a psychological imperative as it allows one to prove to themselves and to others that they are right and that their values, norms and convictions are better than the values, norms and convictions of the other party. Obtaining their own benefits without this psychological success would not fully satisfy a person with a strong Controlling Parent ego state.

This way of interpreting the revealed correlation is coherently related to another statistically significant relationship, i.e., the negative relationship between the Controlling Parent ego state and Collaboration as a strategy of functioning in a conflict situation ($r=-.227$, $p=0.023$). Collaborating in a conflict situation means “... focusing on one’s own benefit for the benefit of the other party. Achieving one’s own goals is correlated with caring for the quality of the relationship with the other party.

This type of behaviour is characteristic of seeking solutions to conflict situations in a win-win paradigm. This attitude is characterized by an inclination towards cooperation and mutual concessions” (Kłusek-Wojciszke, 2009, p. 12). As this characteristic shows, it is necessary when cooperating to recognise and take a partnership approach to the needs and interests (benefits) of the other party, and to take good care of the condition and development of mutual relations. For a person with a dominant Controlling Parent ego state, such an approach is difficult and in some extreme cases, when there is a negative and overinvested Controlling Parent, it might even be impossible.

Striving to obtain one’s own benefits and “defeating” the other party – as is so characteristic of the Competing conflict resolution strategy and the Controlling Parent ego state (a negative side of this state) – does not enhance Collaboration in terms of benefits and relationships. The Collaboration conflict resolution strategy means searching for solutions that are beneficial to both parties, i.e., win-win solutions.

However, such solutions are in direct contradiction to the life position adopted by people with a dominant Controlling Parent ego state, which, as already mentioned, has the form of the “I’m OK – you are not OK” attitude. This position is irreconcilable with the cooperation paradigm and a search for win-win solutions because it includes one’s conviction of being better and more important than the other side of the conflict (Harris, 2012; Howell, 2020; Pankowska, 2010).

In the conducted research, the Nurturing Parent ego state demonstrates a significantly high correlation level of $p = 0.05$ or higher only with those behaviours which are defined as Collaboration in conflict situations. This is a negative correlation, which indicates that an increase in the intensity of the Nurturing Parent ego state means a decrease in the level of Collaboration when resolving conflicts.

This finding corresponds well with the dependency identified between the Collaboration strategy and the Controlling Parent ego state, where the correlation is also negative but slightly stronger. It should be remembered that the Controlling Parent and Nurturing Parent ego states in essence reflect the life position of "I am OK – you are not OK", which means a perceived sense of superiority and advantage in relation to other people. The only things that change are the forms of communication and the areas of interaction. A Nurturing Parent expresses their life position by helping and relieving others, which in fact might take the form of imposing their own solutions and preferences.

In the Collaboration model defined by Thomas and Kilmann, the key condition for effective cooperation is equality and partnership relations between the parties to a conflict, understood as assuming the life position of "I am OK – you are OK" (Robbins, 2000, p. 182). By its nature, the Nurturing Parent ego state precludes such an approach. It should be assumed that, in a conflict situation, people with a strong Nurturing Parent ego state will be ready to help and support the other party to the conflict, but on their own terms.

The supportive form and manner of communication do not change the essence of the relationship, which at the hidden (psychological) level is marked by a sense of superiority. And, as mentioned previously, according to laws of communication, if the explicit level and the latent level of a message diverge, then the hidden level determines the essence of the relationship (Erskine, 2010; Harris, 2012; Rogoll, 2010; Berne, 2010).

Thus, in a conflict situation, at the open level a person functioning in the Nurturing Parent ego state will provide help and support, but at the hidden level they will communicate their superiority and advantage to the other party. In this situation, it is impossible to look for win-win solutions and build positive emotional relations with the other side of the conflict, as these require honesty, openness, and trust between partners. This, however, is impossible due to the negative correlation between the Nurturing Parent ego state and the style of conflict resolution defined as Collaboration.

The Adult ego state correlates positively with the styles of conflict resolution of Competition ($r=0.263$, $p=0.008$) and Collaboration ($r=0.199$, $p=0.046$), but negatively with Avoidance ($r=-0.282$, $p=0.004$) and Accommodation ($r=-0.208$, $p=0.037$). The positive correlation between the Adult ego state and the conflict resolution style defined as Collaboration was the expected result, and the study fully confirmed it. The Adult ego state is characterized by the life position of "I am OK – you are OK", i.e., a position of equality and partnership that is thus conducive to searching for mutually beneficial solutions.

The partnership-based way of creating relations also fosters a positive emotional atmosphere between parties to a conflict. It is true that the Adult ego state (a person

functioning in this state) focuses mainly on rational thinking, a search for information, and associating facts; the emotional sphere does not play a significant role.

However, a satisfying understanding and emotional acceptance arise between the parties to the conflict because this is an equal relationship, which is, after all, a *sine qua non* condition for this style of conflict resolution (Cornell *et al.*, 2016; Steiner, 2017; Steward and Joines, 2016).

The positive character of the correlation between the Adult ego state and the Competition style of conflict management seems to be related only to the “substantive” view of the subject of a conflict. The Adult ego state firmly defends its interests and benefits, trying to logically and rationally strive to obtain them through cooperation. As mentioned above, this is largely due to the Adult’s position in life, which is referred to as “I am OK – you are OK”.

However, if this approach does not work and the other party to the conflict does not have the competence or motivation to seek win-win solutions and create a positive emotional climate, then the Adult has sufficient resources (mainly intellectual) to protect their interests at the expense of the other party to the dispute.

Then, most likely, the Adult will take actions to protect their own benefits, and, at the expense of the other party, the Adult will move from Collaboration to the style known as Competition. To some extent, this shift may be fostered by the relative lack of empathy and the limited emotionality of this ego state. It seems, however, that the Competition style is forced by the behaviour of the other party to a conflict and does not naturally result from the inherent features of the Adult ego state.

The theory regarding the shift of a person in the Adult ego state from the Collaboration style to the Competition style in order to defend their own benefits finds its confirmation in the negative correlation of this ego state with the Accommodation style of conflict resolution ($r=-0.208$, $p=0.037$). It is worth recalling here that Accommodation is “...a type of behaviour that prefers maintaining positive relations with the other party to a conflict over the pursuit of self-gain. It is a strategy involving concessions here and now in order to maintain good relationships and a positive emotional atmosphere, which may allow for greater benefits in the future” (Kłusek-Wojciszke, 2009, p. 13).

In a situation where there is no possibility of cooperation with the other party to the conflict, a person functioning in the Adult ego state does not give up his/her own benefits and interests for the sake of good relations and a good emotional atmosphere. On the contrary, he/she adopts the Competition strategy at the expense of emotions and emotional atmosphere, as is confirmed by the negative correlation cited above. This approach is even more justified by the fact that the Adult does have the intellectual resources needed to achieve their own goals.

However, due to their emotional deficits, it would be much more difficult for a person in the Adult ego state to shift towards the Accommodation strategy because this strategy requires a significant level of empathy and care for the emotional atmosphere, which is not natural and easy for the Adult ego state. The Adult's natural predispositions move them towards Competition, where emotional deficits do not play a significant role.

The Avoidance conflict resolution style strongly and negatively correlates with the Adult ego state ($r=-0.282$, $p=0.004$). As mentioned above, Avoidance is characterized by the tendency not to perceive conflicts, not to get involved in solving them, and to leave matters to their own course. All this means there is no need to take responsibility for a conflict, its course and its resolution. The Adult ego state, on the other hand, is characterized by a high degree of responsibility for taken actions and the immediate environment. Adults are rational, honest, straightforward, and also responsible.

Hence, the obtained result fits perfectly into the logic of functioning in the Adult ego state: the need to see conflict and then resolve it based on the win-win model (if possible). The Avoidance style of conflict resolution is not consistent with the needs and competences of the Adult ego state (Hay, 2010).

The Natural Child ego state correlates statistically significantly only with the style of conflict resolution defined as Avoidance ($r=-0.230$, $p=0.021$). This result fully corresponds with the theoretical predictions resulting from the characteristics of both the Natural Child ego state and the Avoidance conflict management style. As already indicated, the Natural Child ego state is characterized by a pursuit to satisfy one's own needs and pleasures, a creative approach to problem solving, and cognitive curiosity. A person in the Natural Child ego state shows ease in expressing their feelings and communicating their own needs and expectations to other people.

As regards the negative aspects of functioning in this state, they include impatience in satisfying one's own needs, outbursts of anger, uncontrolled aggression, and nonconformist behaviour directed at objects that cause frustration (Erskine, 2009; Lapworth and Sills, 2011; Pankowska, 2010). On the other hand, the Avoidance style of conflict management is characterized by a whole spectrum of behaviours that are aimed at not perceiving a conflict, postponing the reaction time, and suppressing one's own needs and expectations in the hope that a conflict situation will lose energy and therefore no reaction will be needed at all.

As can be seen from the above-mentioned characteristics of the Natural Child ego state and the Avoidance style of conflict resolution, they both lead to contradictory aspirations and behaviours of a given individual. The negative correlation observed in the research indicates that these tendencies are mutually exclusive and are largely incompatible with the real behaviour of a given person. The negative correlation indicates that the more dominant the Natural Child state is in the personality

structure of the individual, the less likely this person will be to avoid conflict in a conflict situation or postpone its resolution. Conversely, low intensity of the Natural Child ego state will result in more frequent conflict responses that are perceived as Avoidance.

The Adapted Child ego state shows a number of interesting correlations with conflict response styles. There is a strong negative relationship between this ego state and the Competition-oriented conflict resolution style ($r=-0.345$, $p=0.000$). This result confirms the theoretical assumptions regarding the relationship between the Adapted Child ego state and Competition-based behaviour in conflict.

As pointed out by K. Kälin (Kälin, and Müri, 1998), people functioning in the Adapted Child ego state take into account the needs and expectations of others and look for compromises when acting, but they also easily withdraw and quickly give up their interests, willingly adapting to the expectations of others and giving up when they experience pressure from them. Such predispositions do not create a basis for competitive behaviour, the aim of which is "...maximizing one's own interests, without taking into account the interests of the other party" (Kłusek-Wojciszke, 2009, p. 13).

The observed correlation indicates that the tendency to resolve conflict in the Competition style decreases with an increased adaptation of the Adapted Child ego state, which is in line with theoretical assumptions. The strength of this correlation indicates a high probability of its occurrence in real-life situations.

The Adapted Child ego state demonstrates a negative correlation with the style of conflict resolution defined as Cooperation ($r=-0.323$, $p=0.001$). Apparently, this result indicates that, in conflict situations, people with a dominating Adapted Child state do not have the potential to maintain a balance between taking care of their own interests and the interests of the other party to a conflict.

This issue is a characteristic feature of this style of conflict management (Kłusek-Wojciszke, 2009, p. 12). It seems that such people do not possess the level of assertiveness necessary to protect their own interests. They also demonstrate compulsive striving to yield and accept the interests of the other party to a conflict; as a result, they are not able to balance their own and the other party's goals in conflict situations (Schaubhut, 2007).

It looks like here lies the cause of the inverse relationship between the intensity of the Adapted Child ego state and the style of conflict resolution focused on Collaboration. The more dominant the Adapted Child ego state is, the greater the tendency to accept the goals of others, even at the expense of one's own interests.

The Adapted Child ego state, on the other hand, correlates positively with the Avoidance and Accommodation conflict resolution styles ($r=0.405$, $p=0.000$ and

$r=347$, $p=0.000$, respectively). These results are also in line with the theoretical predictions. As a conflict resolution style, Avoidance is largely based on the fact that "...the parties involved in the conflict ignore both their self-interest and their relationship with the other party. The interpersonal relations and the result are not important enough for the parties to get involved in the conflict" (Kłusek-Wojciszke, 2009, p. 13).

As indicated by the obtained result, in conflict situations the Adapted Child ego state shows a strong tendency towards behaviours such as postponing the resolution, withdrawing, or leaving matters "to their own course". This is consistent with the characteristics of this ego state, whose dominating attitude is focus on other people, care for good relationships, looking for ways to maintain one's life position of "I am not OK – others are OK" or "I am not OK – others are not OK".

The strong and positive correlation between the Adapted Child ego state and the Accommodation conflict resolution style seems to be the result of the efforts made by people operating in this ego state to meet the expectations and needs (interests) of the other party to a conflict, with the aim of maintaining or building good relations with them. For people with a strong Adapted Child ego state, good relationships with others and the resulting sense of acceptance are especially important. A conflict situation and the choice of another style of solving it, e.g., Competition, could disturb the relations between the parties to the conflict and cause their deterioration or even complete breakdown.

As the results of the study show, the more dominant the Adapted Child ego state, the greater one's readiness to adopt behaviour aimed at maintaining good relations despite a conflict situation, even at the cost of giving up one's own important interests. In the long run, however, giving up one's own needs might lead to frustration. On the other hand, caring for relationships with others can increase the feeling of being accepted and liked.

To sum up, the behaviours resulting from the Adapted Child ego state facilitate the resolution of conflicts in ways that are intended to either maintain positive relations with the other party to a conflict, or encourage the adoption of defensive mechanisms that avoid a need to respond to a conflict, as is typical of the Accommodation and Avoidance conflict coping styles. The characteristics of the Adapted Child, however, are not conducive to assertive behaviours aimed at protecting one's own interests, i.e., the Competition and Collaboration conflict resolution styles.

5. Conclusions

The conducted research allowed a number of interesting relationships between ego states and styles of behaviour in conflict situations to be captured.

The basic conclusion from the research is that certain ego states largely determine the way in which an individual reacts to a conflict situation. The research has shown a number of very strong correlations between ego states and conflict, which seems to firmly confirm the thesis that in situations where emotions are very strong – and this is usually the case in conflict situations – people turn to unconscious, internalized patterns of behaviour and thought structures developed in the past, including their ego states, life positions, or psychological games, all of which are intended to obtain specific results.

The obtained results allow people's behaviour in conflict situations to be looked at from an angle that is different from the most commonly applied approaches. As shown by the results of the conducted research, an individual's behaviour is largely dependent on their unconscious predispositions and internal conditions; it is not only the result of conscious and rational decisions taken in response to external conditions.

According to the research results, in conflict the probability that a person with a dominant Controlling Parent ego state will adopt a conflict management style referred to as Competition is much greater than the likelihood of them adopting other behaviour styles. Importantly, the tendency to adopt such behaviour is conditioned by intrapsychic determinants and is largely independent of external conditions. The results obtained in the course of the research are largely consistent with the theoretical predictions regarding the essence of an individual's ego states and the behaviour styles described by K. Thomas and R. Kilmann (Schaubhut, 2007).

In particular, apart from the above-mentioned relationship between the Controlling Parent ego state and Competition, it has been shown that the Controlling Parent and the Nurturing Parent ego states are not conducive to Collaboration in conflict. On the other hand, the Adult ego state favours the Competition and Collaboration styles and negatively correlates with Avoidance and Accommodation. A dominant Natural Child ego state makes it unlikely that an individual will adopt the Avoidance style, while a dominant Adapted Child ego state reduces the likelihood of Competition and Collaboration and greatly increases the chances that the Avoidance and Accommodation conflict management styles will be demonstrated.

The obtained research results have high cognitive and practical significance. They confirm a very close relationship between intrapsychic phenomena (not realized by an individual) and people's behaviour in real-life situations. These results make it possible to better understand the tendency of individuals to adopt certain behaviour styles regardless of situational variables.

These findings also encourage taking a different look at various types of activities aimed at preparing an individual for conflict situations. It is already known that focusing on the rational analysis of situational conditions is not enough to identify one's style of reaction to conflict. Equally or perhaps even more important is the

question of the unconscious conditioning that results from a particular dominating ego state. This observation may be of great importance in the preparation of people for specific professional roles, such as managers. The results of the presented research seem to indicate that identifying the dominant ego state and taking action that makes it possible to consciously control the influence of this state should be an integral part of preparing an individual for a given professional role.

Further research is recommended in order to better understand the impact of intrapsychic phenomena on behaviours that so far may have seemed to be determined strictly by rational and conscious thinking. In the light of the obtained results, it seems worth conducting further studies regarding the influence of emotions on the disclosure of unconscious patterns of reacting to “here and now” situations.

As is commonly known, effective methods of communication have a significant influence on the development of enterprises as they either strengthen or paralyze their ability to deal with internal conflicts (Hocer and Wilmot, 2017; Howell, 2020). Transactional Analysis, as a personality concept, along with the possibilities it brings in regulating the mechanisms of human functioning, provides practical guidelines for improving human behaviour, including behaviour in professional organisations (Erskine, 2009; Mountain and Davidson, 2015; van Poelje and de Graaf, 2022; Howell, 2020). Therefore, it is worth describing enterprises and determining the directions of their development based on the Transactional Analysis model.

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