



101 Coaching Supervision Techniques, Approaches, Enquiries and Experiments.
Developmental Transactional Analysis Chapter: Technique 71 (pages 239-242)
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Handling Relationship Conflict Using the Drama Triangle

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Where can this be used?				Typical Level of Supervisee Experience Required	
					
Individual Supervision	Group Supervision	Peer Supervision		All levels	

When is this used?

This model is from Transactional Analysis. It can be used to examine and explore with the supervisees any 'hot buttons' or transference around their relationships with clients. It is especially useful when supervisees notice familiar patterns and are stuck repeating interventions that are not working with particular clients.

What is the technique?

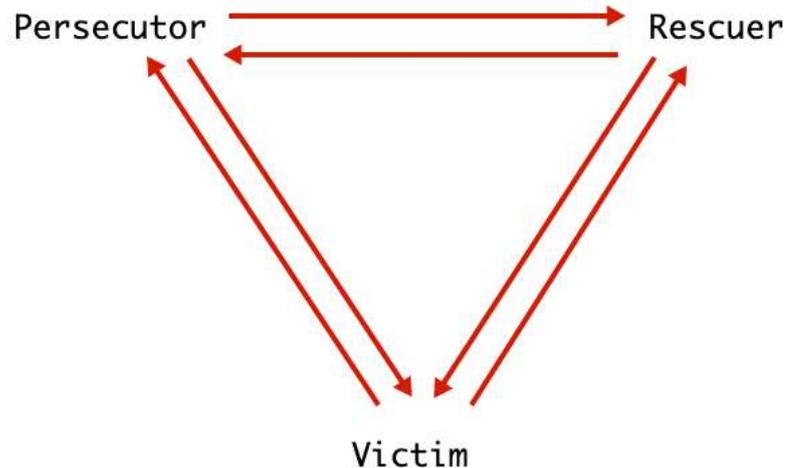
The supervisor offers a short explanation of the Drama Triangle, clarifying how it works and the different roles of Victim, Rescuer and Persecutor. Supervisees are then encouraged to engage with experiential learning around the Triangle using a technique that helps them to embody the emotion that is generated.

The supervisor needs to emphasise that we adopt these roles unconsciously and we can either start a psychological game or we can be invited into one. We can 'switch' roles or position and feel a negative emotion in the process. The steps below will help the supervisee to analyse where they or their client might start the game, and which position they go to next.

Step 1: Invite the supervisee to think about the person/situation that is causing some 'heat' for them.

Step2: 'Draw' an imaginary triangle on the floor or use post-it notes with the three positions written on them, ensuring that Victim is at the bottom (See Figure 6.6).

Figure: 6.6 The Karpman Drama Triangle (2014)



Note: Ensure the triangle is big enough for supervisees to really feel themselves making definite moves from one position to another, whilst also seeing the other positions clearly.

Step 3: Ask them to start by standing in the position that resonates for them.

Step 4: Stand alongside them (outside of the triangle) and not in their eye line.

Step 5: Encourage them to move through all three positions, at each corner ask: “What are you feeling right now as you stand there? “What is your inner voice saying when you are in that position?”.

Step 6: Ask them to return to their starting position:

- a. For the Victim corner, ask what they now need from the Persecutor/Rescuers.
- b. For the Persecutor corner, ask them what might be their positive intent in this situation?
- c. For the Rescuer corner, ask what are their boundaries?

Step 7: Invite them to step off the Drama Triangle then pose these questions:

- What has emerged from this?
- What do they know that they didn't before?
- What first action do they need to take to achieve the best possible outcome?

How to work with the technique...

To minimise the perception of supervisor as expert, ask for permission to introduce the model.



When drawing the Triangle, invite them to think of real life examples where this happened to them apart from the current problem.

When working in groups, use triads with one person to move around the triangle; one to facilitate using the above questions; the other to observe and take notes. Debrief in trios between rotations, before bringing together the large group to focus on emergent learning using questions such as:

- Where have clients played Victim and how?
- Where have clients used power plays with you? And you them?
- When have you rescued clients?

What else might need attention?

Supervisees may feel vulnerable in this activity for the personal revelations it may generate, and also the questions it raises about their relationship with the client. Emphasise that all human beings play games and this model helps us find ways of playing fewer games. This may prompt a need to explore the original contracting to surface how and why this 'conflict' is occurring.

A word of caution.

Working with the Drama Triangle can generate emotion for some supervisees and may be best left until rapport and trust has built up over a number of sessions. This depends on their self-awareness and the supervisor's intuition of the likely impact. It can be helpful to do some spot contracting and gain permission for doing something different that may provide more challenge (albeit with support).

What other uses are there for this technique?

This technique could be adapted to use virtually, using three chosen small objects. These can then be moved around the three roles instead of the supervisee physically moving. This may be a good option for those with mobility issues.

This technique can also be used with coaching clients instead of supervisees.

Reference:

Karpman, S. (2014) *A Game Free Life: The New Transactional Analysis of Intimacy, Openness, and Happiness*: San Francisco:Drama Triangle Publications.

Further reading:

Menaul, J. (2019). *The Coach's Guide to the Drama Triangle*. BookBoon.com

Karpman, S.D. (1973) *1972 Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award Lecture* [pdf] Available at: <https://karpmandramatriangle.com/pdf/AwardSpeech.pdf> [Accessed 30 September 2019]

Weinhold, B.K, and Weinhold. J.B. (2014). *How to Break Free of The Drama Triangle and Victim Consciousness*. South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.