

Rescripting Trauma Re-enactment

The Trauma Re-enactment Triangle is also known as Karpman's Drama Triangle; it identifies a common pattern to how unconscious conflicts and emotionally-based re-enactments unravel between people, or groups of people. It helps us to understand polarisation and unhealthy power dynamics - where some people take on too much responsibility (over-responsibility) and others not enough (under-responsibility).

The triangle depicts how human beings unconsciously adopt three broad patterns or roles: Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim.

The Victim: feels powerless, helpless and hopeless. They struggle to take responsibility for their own emotions or behaviours. They feel unsupported and unable to create change (learned helplessness). So they seek out others to 'fix things' and 'rescue' them. The archetypal character that depicts this role type is the *damsel in distress*.

The Persecutor: feels superior to others and denies their vulnerability. They too struggle to take responsibility for their own emotions and behaviours – and will often feel victimised – however this isn't congruent with their behaviour. Persecutors use blame, shame, coercion, verbal attacks and even aggression to dominate others and take control or attain power. The archetypal character that depicts this role is the *villain*.

The Rescuer: feels more capable and 'better' than others, and derive esteem from taking on too much responsibility for the welfare of others. They feel important and powerful when they are 'saving' or 'fixing' other people or their problems. However, they unwittingly disempower others by enabling dependency. They usually neglect their own needs and often become resentful (martyrs). The archetypal character that depicts this role is the *hero*.

Our identification with each of these roles is unconscious and is predominantly driven by our reactive, instinctual and emotional (lower) parts of our brains. Importantly when we are in the midst of these unconscious interactions, we can often move between roles – for example persecutors frequently feel they are the victim. These roles disempower all involved, and because the 'drama' is centred in our lower brain areas and we can't access our higher brain centres where empathy, problem solving and innovation are located. So instead we tend to 'dig in' and defend our role.



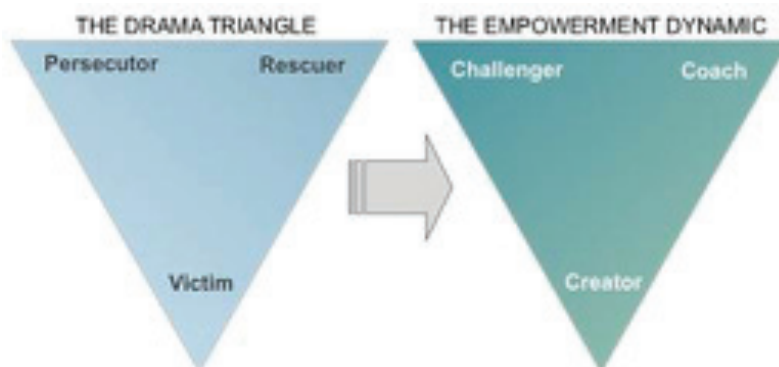
The Drama or Re-enactment Triangle is evident at both a macro-level (between organisations, departments or even nation-states) and at a micro-level - in our workplaces – between colleagues, clients or within teams.

When the re-enactment triangle continues undisrupted in workplaces it can lead to unhealthy, unsafe and even toxic work cultures, and poor outcomes for our clients. This is why it is important to recognise and identify re-enactments in our workplaces; and to step out of the triangle by embracing a more empowering role. For example:

➔ **Persecutor – can move into an advocate/challenger**

➔ **Rescuer – can move to a coach**

➔ **Victim – can move into survivor/thriver**



To step out of the triangle and 'rescript' toward empowerment, we need to become self-aware and cultivate our emotional intelligence and curiosity. We need to get back into the rational thinking part of our brain - the cortex – to prevent the drama from taking hold. This is why the Sanctuary Model promotes emotional literacy and the Seven Commitments such as Non-Violence, Social Responsibility and Emotional Intelligence. And the Sanctuary Toolkit has specific tools to help prevent trauma triangles and re-enactments:

- The Sanctuary Safety Plan helps us to remain calm and in our cortex
- Reflective Supervision helps us to identify re-enactment patterns
- Raised-Flag Meetings (formerly Red-Flag Meetings) help us defuse entrenched conflicts and problem solve a way forward from re-enactments
- Training – helps to raise awareness so we can identify and prevent future re-enactments.