



THE DRAMA TRIANGLE



Source: Steve Karpman (Transactional Analysis)

In our professional or private lives, when we wish to satisfy a personal need, we can choose to "manipulate" the situation or to "assertively request" what we require.

One means of "manipulation" is to play "mind games", otherwise known as **stratagems**.

Stratagems have several characteristics:

- Each one has a specific and foreseeable aim that is termed a "payoff". All the exchanges lead to a negative outcome that is expressed through unpleasant emotions.
- All of this takes place in an unconscious state: we are totally unaware of what is going on.
- There is always an element of surprise, a dramatic turn of events, or "*coup de théâtre*".

One of the most common mind games is the "**Drama Triangle**".

In this stratagem, there are three roles: the **PERSECUTOR**, the **RESCUER** and the **VICTIM**. However, the game can be played out by two, three or even more protagonists. People often have a preferred point of entry into the stratagem (their favourite role) but it is important to be aware that, whatever the case, once you are in, you are in until the end. This means that you will successively play each role at least once and that you will come out of the process with a negative payoff.

Responsibility for the stratagem is always shared between the protagonists.

Reasons for getting into a drama triangle can range from a simple need to be doing something, a desire for recognition, sustaining negative beliefs, accumulating frustrations, maintaining "loser" status, making a situation more predictable (i.e. by knowing how others will react) and finally, keeping other people at a distance or, on the contrary, trying to keep them as close as possible.

PERSECUTOR

Reality: acts in own interest (team, company)
Belief: the other person is not important
Behaviour:

- Judges and punishes
- Enforces decisions without negotiating
- Increases the other person's difficulties and suffering

RESCUER

Reality: is concerned about the person who is in difficulty
Belief: the other person is not able to deal with the situation
Behaviour:

- Takes control
- Does more than is expected
- Doesn't listen – guesses what the other person needs

VICTIM

Reality: is in difficulty, suffering
Belief: does not have the resources or ability to deal with the situation
Behaviour: feels sorry for self, grumbles and moans (yes, but...)

These sterile strategies, the *motivations behind which are both complex and subconscious*, can nevertheless be understood and then avoided or diverted in a more positive way by using the Winner's Triangle described below:

VULNERABLE

Reality: is in difficulty, suffering
Belief: has the resources and ability to deal with the situation
Behaviour: uses feelings to formulate a clear request and seeks help from the right person

ASSERTIVE

Reality: must act in own interest
Belief: the other person plays an important role in dealing with the situation
Behaviour:

- Describes the facts
- Expresses feelings with regard to the situation
- Sets out a clear change process
- Negotiates and knows how to say "no"

CARING

Reality: is concerned about the person who is in difficulty
Belief: the other person has the resources to deal with the situation but also needs help
Behaviour:

- Waits for the other person to ask for help or incites such a request
- Listens, reformulates
- Checks to see if the request is clear, if he/she is the right person to provide help, if the other person accepts their share of responsibility and is ready and willing to act