



Next Element Outcomes System[®]

the first context-sensitive efficacy outcomes system

Theoretical Background

In 1968 Dr. Steven Karpman discovered and named the Drama Triangle to describe unhealthy roles or positions in individual and group interaction. For this work, he was awarded the Eric Berne Memorial Scientific Award in 1972 by the International Transactional Analysis Association. Even today the Drama Triangle remains one of the most elegant and practical models to understand dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics.

An in-depth description of Dr. Karpman's work is beyond the scope of this document. Interested readers are directed to his website, <http://karpmandramatriangle.com>. The Drama Triangle is comprised of three roles: Rescuer, Persecutor and Victim. By definition, a person in the Drama Triangle is in distress, and occupies one of these roles, often switching to another as distress increases. A Rescuer over does for someone, reinforcing over dependency; a Persecutor attacks verbally, or blames; a Victim is over adaptive or feels hurt from being attacked or blamed.

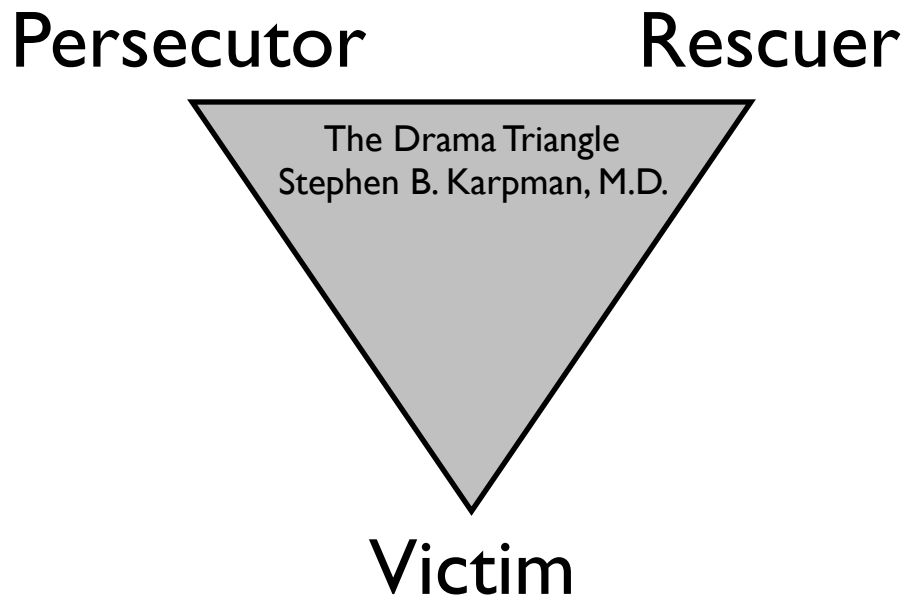


Figure 1: The Drama Triangle; Seven Karpman, MD. (1968).

The Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim are interdependent and rely on each other for the “drama” to continue. Within dysfunctional relationships, there are strong invitations to assume a position on the Drama Triangle and it is very difficult to break free, as evidenced in family systems theory or recovery from addiction.

Dr. Taibi Kahler postulates that when we are in distress, we are believing one or more of Four Myths (Kahler 2008), and he has identified the “offering” role and the “targeted” role in the other person to complete the symbiotic miscommunication (Kahler, 2008):

“I believe I can make you feel bad emotionally” [Persecutor to Victim]

“I believe I can make you feel good emotionally” [Rescuer to Victim]

“I believe you make me feel bad emotionally” [Victim to Persecutor]

“I believe you can make me feel good emotionally” [Victim to Rescuer]

Drama may be viewed as giving up our personal power by a distorted sense of responsibility: “I’m responsible for how you feel emotionally” and/or “you are responsible for how I feel emotionally”.

Although individuals may switch roles on the Drama Triangle, it has been found by Karpman and others (e.g. Kahler) that individual personality is closely correlated with the roles a person will play, and under what conditions these roles are most likely. The Drama Triangle is both descriptive of the nature of conflict, and predictive of how it will take place.

Why do we do this? Emotional (psychological) distress is most easily explained by a simple human phenomenon: negative attention is better than no attention at all. This transcends gender, ethnicity, race, and religion. If we do not get our personality-based psychological needs met positively, we will find a way, consciously or unconsciously, of getting the exact same needs met negatively (Kahler, 2008). This leads to predictable patterns of behavior in distress (Kahler, 2008).

Drama, or negative attention, often results in the misuse of personal abilities and skills, distortion of responsibility, and the compulsion to feel justified instead of be effective. The Drama Triangle is a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating cycle that can be difficult

from which to break free. This is true on an interpersonal level as well as within teams and organizations.

A Compassionate Alternative

The solution to Drama, suggests Dr. Karpman, is the Compassion Triangle. The Compassion Triangle offers an alternative to Drama, and suggests a framework for moving into open dialogue, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution. In the Compassion Triangle, the roles of Persecutor, Rescuer, and Victim are replaced by the qualities of being Persistent, Resourceful and Vulnerable, respectively.

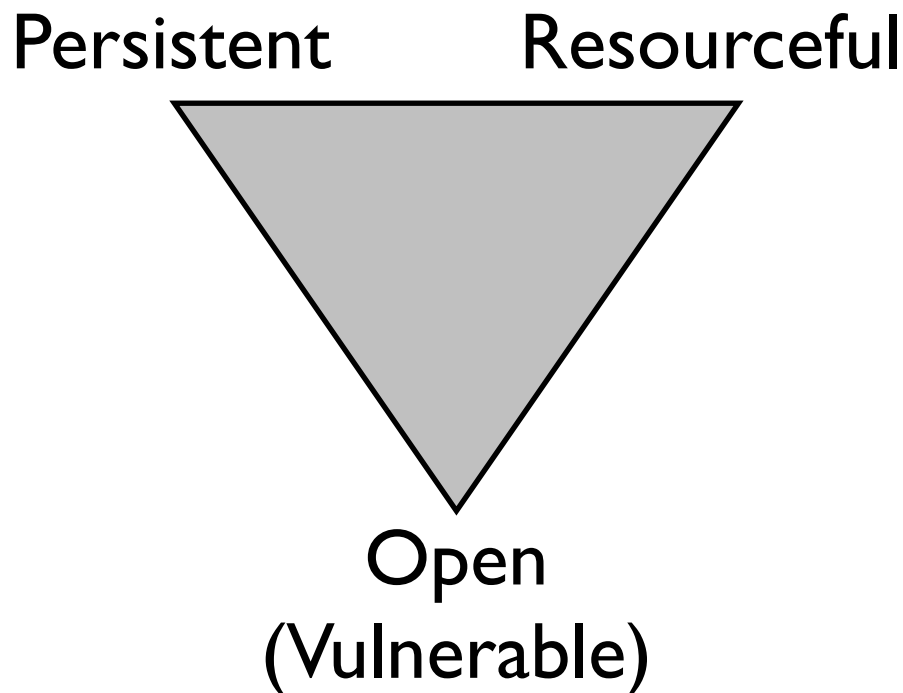


Figure 2. The Compassion Triangle; Steven Karpman, MD (1968)

Open is the alternative to being a victim, and is characterized by confident openness, transparency, honesty, and willingness to trust. Persistent describes perseverance and courage, willingness to stick with someone or something rather than attack or blame. Resourceful involves the use of creativity and adaptability to empower others rather than overdoing for them.

As with positions on the Drama Triangle, personality plays a significant role in individual propensity and comfort with Persistence, Resourcefulness, and Vulnerability. For

example, a person might have an easy time seeing projects through to completion (Persistence) but difficulty delegating (Resourcefulness). On a macro level, a leadership team may pride itself on trust and team cohesion (Vulnerability), but find themselves unable to complete projects (Persistence). The Compassion Triangle can be thought of as both an interpersonal (dynamics between people in a group), as well as intrapersonal (dynamics within a person) model.

Karpman has found the Drama and Compassion Triangles to be extremely valuable in clinical work and has contributed greatly to the body of knowledge in couples counseling particularly. We have found Dr. Karpman's models to be equally powerful for adding clarity and directing focus in our work doing personal and professional consulting, team-building, and training across multiple contexts and age groups.

In reviewing our experience with counseling, coaching, consulting, facilitating, and training, we have noticed that our clients consistently desire to increase healthy vulnerability, e.g. trust, team-cohesion, transparency, self-awareness; persistence, e.g. stick-to-it-ive-ness, perseverance, tenacity; and resourcefulness, e.g. creative problem-solving and optimism.

Current research on resilience, hope, leadership skills, social-emotional intelligence, positive psychology, and stress coping consistently point to the importance of healthy vulnerability, resourcefulness, and persistence as characteristics of adaptive and successful functioning. Whether the domain of interest is personal growth, student achievement, team-building, or leadership development, these dimensions are relevant outcomes.

Making Positive Changes

How do people move into the Compassion Triangle? Change agents each have their favorite models and methods to assist individuals and groups in making positive changes. Their efforts also vary regarding target behaviors and outcomes. However, whether you are a teacher, consultant, therapist, trainer, facilitator, coach, mentor, supervisor, or C-suite executive, we believe that the movement from Drama to Compassion is a common goal uniting the diverse field of personal and professional development.

Our experience has been that people can move out of negative Drama when their psychological needs are being met in healthy ways, when they develop confidence and

proficiency in the necessary behaviors, and when their environment supports those behaviors. This has formed the foundation of our consulting work.

Self-Efficacy

Throughout our careers we have been exposed to numerous models of change. One model that consistently offers excellent explanatory value and practical applications has been Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning theory and the construct of self-efficacy. With over 30 years of scientific research, self-efficacy explains how people change and how change agents can support positive growth.

Self-efficacy is defined as a persons' belief in their ability to perform the necessary behaviors to deal with prospective situations. Personal efficacy beliefs form the foundation of human agency and have proven to be one of the strongest predictors of actual behavior for a wide range of behavioral outcomes from academic performance to goal-setting to leadership skills.

Instrument Design and Validation

Self-efficacy elegantly describes the mechanics behind the self-fulfilling prophecy. For this reason we believe that it compliments the Drama and Compassion Triangles, and may enhance the understanding of how, and under what conditions, people make positive changes in their lives. In addition, the measurement of self-efficacy is well-researched.

Our goal in creating the Next Element Outcomes System was to offer a comprehensive measure of effective functioning that transcends age group, industry, and program-focus while remaining sensitive to specific contexts of interest to stakeholders. Our vision is that the NE-OS will help a diverse range of personal and professional growth programs document the impact of their work, benchmark their efforts against normative comparison groups, and contribute to the body of knowledge on what really works to help people be successful in today's changing world.

Design of the NE-OS involved attention to Process, Content, and Methodology factors.

Process

Process refers not to the “what” but the how. Regardless of what our goal, how we approach that goal is a critical aspect of success. Inspired by Karpman’s work, we chose to assess the competencies of Persistence, Resourcefulness, and Vulnerability. Extensive work has been done mapping the dynamics of the Drama Triangle, and Dr. Karpman has contributed greatly to the application of his work in couples therapy. However, we know of no existing instrument that can reliably measure the characteristics of the Compassion Triangle. Further, we believe that these three competencies contribute to improved performance and resilient functioning across contexts, situations, gender, and other variables.

Content

The NE-OS was constructed to assess change in the constructs of Persistence, Resourcefulness, and Openness through behaviorally anchored self-report items. Beginning with a large item-pool, we collected expert input from psychologists, researchers, practitioners, and participants in order to narrow the NE-OS to 15 face-valid and content-neutral items, five items contributing to each of the three scales. Items are written at a 5th grade reading level and can be used for ages 12 and up.

In our first round of research we tested the 15-item version on samples of youth and adults in France, Africa, New Zealand, and numerous states across the US, including persons from urban and rural locations. Preliminary analyses showed gold-standard internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$) and excellent test-retest reliability.

Analysis of nearly 3,000 cases allowed us to further reduce the NE-OS to nine items that take only a few minutes to complete. Currently, we are in phase 3 research, testing criterion validity, response-format methodology, scale reliability, and cross-cultural relevance in an even broader sample than before.

Methodology

We selected self-efficacy theory as the foundation of our assessment methodology, and are applying best-practices in instrument design and response-format (see Pajeres & Urdan, 2006).

First, the NE-OS had to have items which were behaviorally anchored, i.e. behavioral responses to various life conditions. While knowing a person's attitudes, values, and beliefs are important, they are not as predictive of actual behavior. Because the NE-OS is also designed to be used in 360-degree assessments and group feedback contexts, teacher or supervisor evaluations, and other peer-rating applications, we wanted items that would be as relevant for self-report as for a third-party observation.

Second, the response format is on a 10 point Likert scale, offering more sensitivity to change than traditional 4 or 5-point scales. This conforms to best-practice guidelines. We are currently testing variations in the context-assignment aspect of the NE-OS to determine a format that delivers the most discrimination and reliability.

Third, the NE-OS is designed to be sensitive to context so as to make it useful across a range of applications. It is well known that a person or team's efficacy depends on many factors, including context. An executive may have high levels of confidence in their ability to be persistent at work within the support structure of their team, but at home they may give up easily when confronted with challenges. Students might feel confident in their Openness when they are with peers, but less so in an academic setting or with parents. Research on self-efficacy suggests that the more context-specific the assessment, the more predictive it is of actual performance.

Fourth, the NE-OS is sensitive to changes in the domains of interest. To be useful for practitioners and programs, detecting relevant and meaningful change is critical. This is the ultimate goal of outcomes measurement - to measure change. We have already been able to show that the NE-OS can discriminate between the impact of half-day, whole-day, and multiple-day interventions; even between two different trainers teaching the same curriculum.

Our vision for the NE-OS was to create an instrument that measures change in overarching process competencies, can be anchored to a particular outcome goal by assigning a relevant context, and is grounded in the best behavioral change theory and assessment methodology available. So far, so good!

Coming Summer 2010!

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Emory University's "Self-Efficacy Super Site"
www.des.emory.edu/mfp/self-efficacy.html