

Hilary Williams - Coaching

The Drama and Empowerment Triangles

Understanding our thoughts, actions and reactions



Introduction

The Drama Triangle, created by Stephen Karpman, shows three roles we can fall into when communication breaks down: **Victim, Rescuer, and Persecutor**. These roles aren't who we are, they're patterns of behaviour we learnt along the way. By noticing them, we can step out of the drama and into conscious choice.

The empowerment triangle, created by David Emerald (Womeldorff) was designed as a positive alternative to Stephen Karpman's Drama Triangle. Instead of being stuck in Victim,

Rescuer, or Persecutor roles, the Empowerment Triangle reframes them as **Creator, Challenger and Coach**:

Victim → **Creator** (focus on choice and desired outcomes)

Persecutor → **Challenger** (offers learning and growth)

Rescuer → **Coach** (supports without rescuing, asks empowering questions)

Why the Drama and Empowerment Triangles Matters

We often move between these roles without realising, snapping at someone when stressed (Persecutor), stepping in to save when we don't need to (Rescuer), or shrinking back when we feel overwhelmed (Victim). These dynamics limit growth and connection.

The key is **awareness**. When you notice you're in the Triangle, you get to pause and ask:
"What would it look like to respond from my Adult state instead?"

Generally, the Drama Triangle represents the states we wish to avoid occupying. The Empowerment triangle, which we will look at a little later, offers three alternate states which are often associated with positive states that we are happier to occupy.

The Three Roles

Victim → Creator

- Drama Role: Feels powerless, stuck, overwhelmed.
 - Empowerment Shift: As a Creator, you take ownership.
 - You ask: “What do I want? What small step can I take?” You focus on possibilities, not limitations.
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Rescuer → Coach

- Drama Role: Jumps in to fix, often without being asked.
 - Empowerment Shift: As a Coach, you walk alongside.
 - You ask questions that empower others to find their own answers: “What feels right for you?”
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Persecutor → Challenger

- Drama Role: Blames, criticises, controls.
- Empowerment Shift: As a Challenger, you bring honesty and accountability with respect.
 - You invite growth by asking: “What can you learn here?”

Exercises to try

The Empowerment Triangle gives you choice: to create instead of collapse, to support instead of rescue, to challenge with respect instead of criticise. It's a path to greater resilience, freedom, and connection.

Spot the Spot the Shift

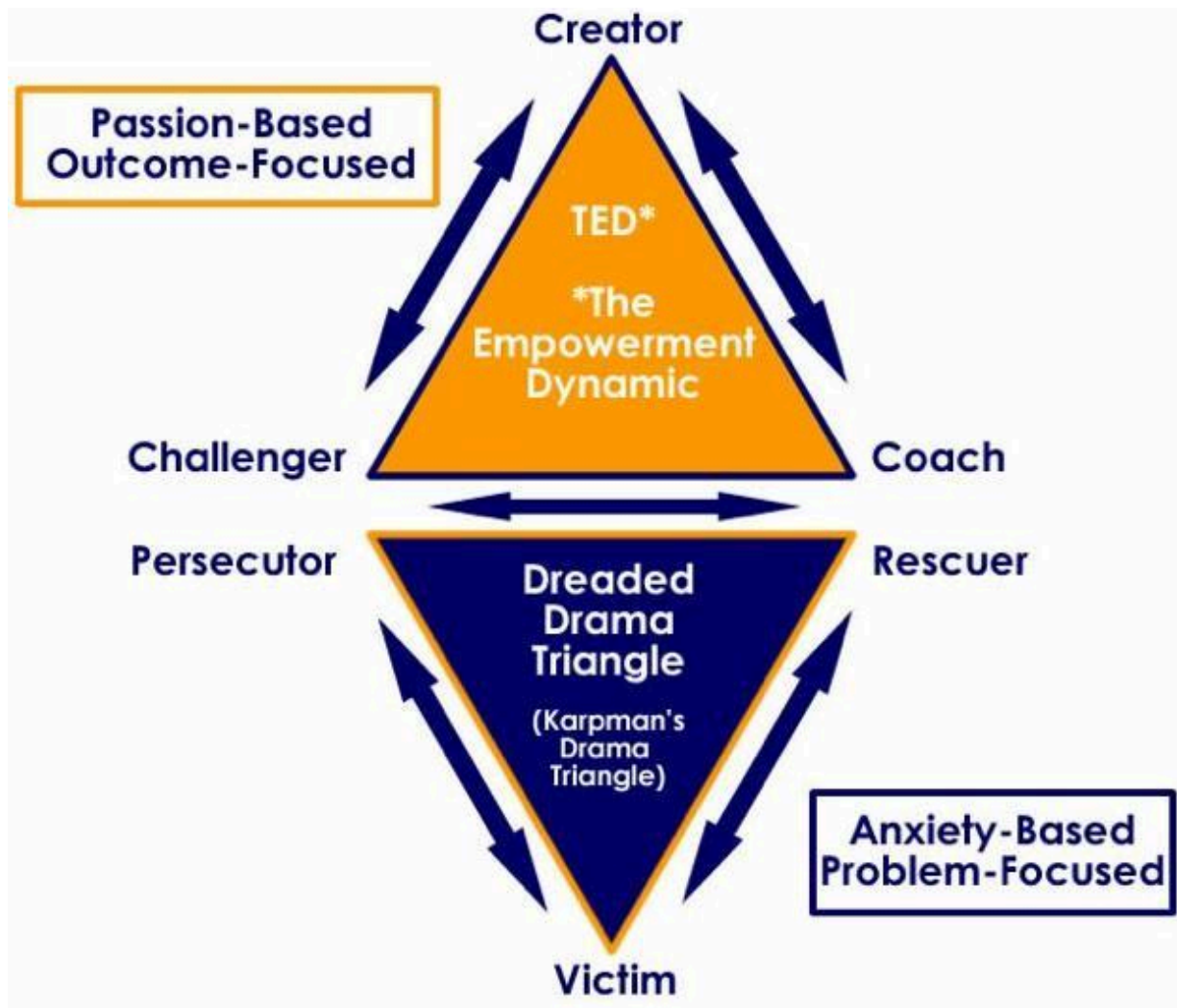
- This week, when you notice you're in Victim, Rescuer, or Persecutor, ask:
 - How could I shift to Creator, Coach, or Challenger here?
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Reframe with Questions

- Instead of "Why is this happening to me?" (Victim), try "What outcome do I want?" (Creator).
 - Instead of "Let me fix this for you" (Rescuer), try "What support do you need from me?" (Coach).
 - Instead of "You're wrong" (Persecutor), try "What might you see differently here?" (Challenger).
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Daily Reflection

- At the end of each day, reflect: "Where did I show up as Creator, Coach, or Challenger today?"
 - What difference did it make?"



The Drama and Empowerment Triangles in Popular Culture

We see examples of these triangles frequently in stories, whatever form they are told in, and whom ever they are told by. Here are some examples to bring these concepts to life for you.

The Drama triangle in Fairy Tales & Disney Films

These stories reinforce the “helpless victim / powerful rescuer” dynamic.

- *Cinderella:*
 - Cinderella as the **Victim**
 - Stepmother & Stepsisters as the **Persecutors**
 - Fairy Godmother / Prince as the **Rescuer**
 - *Avengers: Age of Ultron*
 - Ultron as **Persecutor**
 - Wanda and Pietro as initial **Victims**
 - Avengers swinging between **Rescuers** and **Victims** depending on the battle.
 - *Wicked*
 - Elphaba as **Victim**
 - Wizard/Madame Morrible as **Persecutors**
 - Glinda as would-be **Rescuer**.
 - *The Apprentice*
 - Contestants set up as **Victims** of the tasks
 - Lord Sugar as **Persecutor** with his blunt critiques
 - Teammates scrambling as **Rescuers** to cover each other
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The Empowerment triangle in popular culture

- *The Karate Kid:*
 - Mr. Miyagi acts as a **Coach**, empowering Daniel rather than rescuing him.
 - Daniel becomes a **Creator**, taking responsibility for his training and growth.
 - His opponents serve as **Challengers**, helping him grow stronger.
- *Hamilton*
 - Hamilton as **Creator**
 - Burr as **Challenger**
 - Washington as **Coach**.
- *Black Panther*
 - T'Challa as **Creator** defining Wakanda's future
 - Killmonger as **Challenger** forcing him to question tradition
 - Nakia as **Coach** helping him see alternatives.
- *The Great British Bake Off*
 - Contestants stepping into **Creator** roles as they learn from mistakes
 - Judges as **Coaches** giving feedback
 - Tough challenges (like technical bakes) acting as **Challengers**

What other examples can you think of? Practicing recognising these patterns in this way will help you see it within your day to day interactions.