

Dealing with individual behaviour in a team

In the training, we will look at a range of possible responses to specific behaviours we may encounter. The spectrum of different behaviours is very wide, and the unpredictability of these behaviours makes it particularly difficult for those at the receiving end. Although we will look at a sliding scale of responses to difficult situations, there is no formula. Rather, each situation must be judged on its own merits and dealt with accordingly. For this reason it is useful to try to achieve some insight into negative behaviours in the workplace and what lies behind them. Only then can we help to move things on beyond simply reacting to presenting behaviour.

There are many different models to help understand the complexities of people's behaviours. I have found some understanding of both Transactional Analysis and Kahler's drama triangle particularly useful to help shift the fundamental dynamic of a potentially negative situation. They are particularly relevant where you spot recurring or predictable behaviour.

There are many behaviour patterns and interactions in the workplace that involve psychological 'games'. We will play the ones which somehow fit our personality and serve our underlying positive intention for ourselves. A good facilitator needs to have some essential understanding of these possible dynamics which might well be going on at an unconscious level.

Given below are a few common 'set ups' or 'games':

Harried We rush about earning the right to either collapse as a martyr, or to mutiny. We accept any work that needs to be done.

Packed lunch We bring our lunch to work, so we needn't take a break. We offer to answer the phones while the others go out. We refuse their invitation because we've already brought our food with us.

Why don't you...Yes but,...Someone mentions a problem they have. Solutions are offered. The person with the problem points out what is wrong with each solution.

Gotcha In a meeting, we explain our ideas. A listener asks questions. We feel they are really interested in what we are saying and we feel acknowledged and flattered. Suddenly they pounce, and point out a flaw in our argument. Everyone hears this.

Rebuff We are very busy, even overloaded. Someone offers something to help us in our need. We are not sure. The other person offers more insistently, and we back off more. They then talk as if it was going to happen. We lose patience and rebuff them.

You will probably recognise some or all of the above. These are just a few of the many kinds of set-ups. The drama triangle was first described by Dr. Stephen Karpman in 1968, and has been a tried and tested way of understanding what lies at the back of many behaviours. It has three positions - Persecutor, Victim and Rescuer. Think of these at each end of a triangle which represent the roles we play in life. The set-ups or scenarios will go on as long as someone is willing to be victimized. If anyone in this triangle changes roles, the other two roles change as well.

Persecutor "It's all your fault"

- Sets strict limits unnecessarily
- Blames
- Criticises
- Keeps victim oppressed
- Is mobilised by anger
- Rigid, authoritative stance
- 'Critical' parent

Victim - "Poor me"

Feels victimised, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, powerless
Looks for a Rescuer that will perpetuate their negative feelings
If stays in Victim position, will block self from making decisions, solving problems and self-understanding
'Dejected and passive' stance

Rescuer - "Let me help you"

Rescues when really doesn't want to
Feels guilty if doesn't rescue
Keeps victim dependent
Gives permission to fail
Expects to fail in rescue attempts
'Very soft/soggy' parent

If anyone in this triangle changes roles, the other two roles change as well. Any attempt to interrupt 'the game' can result in a change of roles. Hence, the Rescuer can become Persecutor, Victim can become Rescuer, Persecutor can become Victim. The dance around the triangle continues. To be effective or 'potent' in this situation, the facilitator helps everyone involved to acknowledge their shared responsibilities and to take ownership of their behaviours. So many negative encounters in the workplace relate to a distorted assumption of responsibility - either too much or too little. So in responding to difficult behaviours, a critical question we may ask ourselves is "What is and what isn't my responsibility here?" An honest appraisal of this can be very liberating.

As we will discover in the training session, a continued theme in dealing with difficult behaviour is for the facilitator to try to get the individual to

take responsibility for whatever they say and do. Often the behaviour is child-like, expecting the manager to 'sort things out', while accepting little or no responsibility themselves. This might be described as typical 'adult/child' interaction. It is a very common pattern in a workplace setting. In a mature adult like environment, there is a keen sense of shared responsibility, even where that responsibility does not fall evenly upon different people's shoulders. For some of us, or maybe most of us, our immediate intuitive response is that we, as managers, have to sort everything out. This is usually an unhelpful, even damaging response, which does not enable others around us to flourish. We will practise responding 'counter-intuitively' when we need to and expanding our repertoire of possible responses as we encounter behaviours that seem hard to deal with.

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