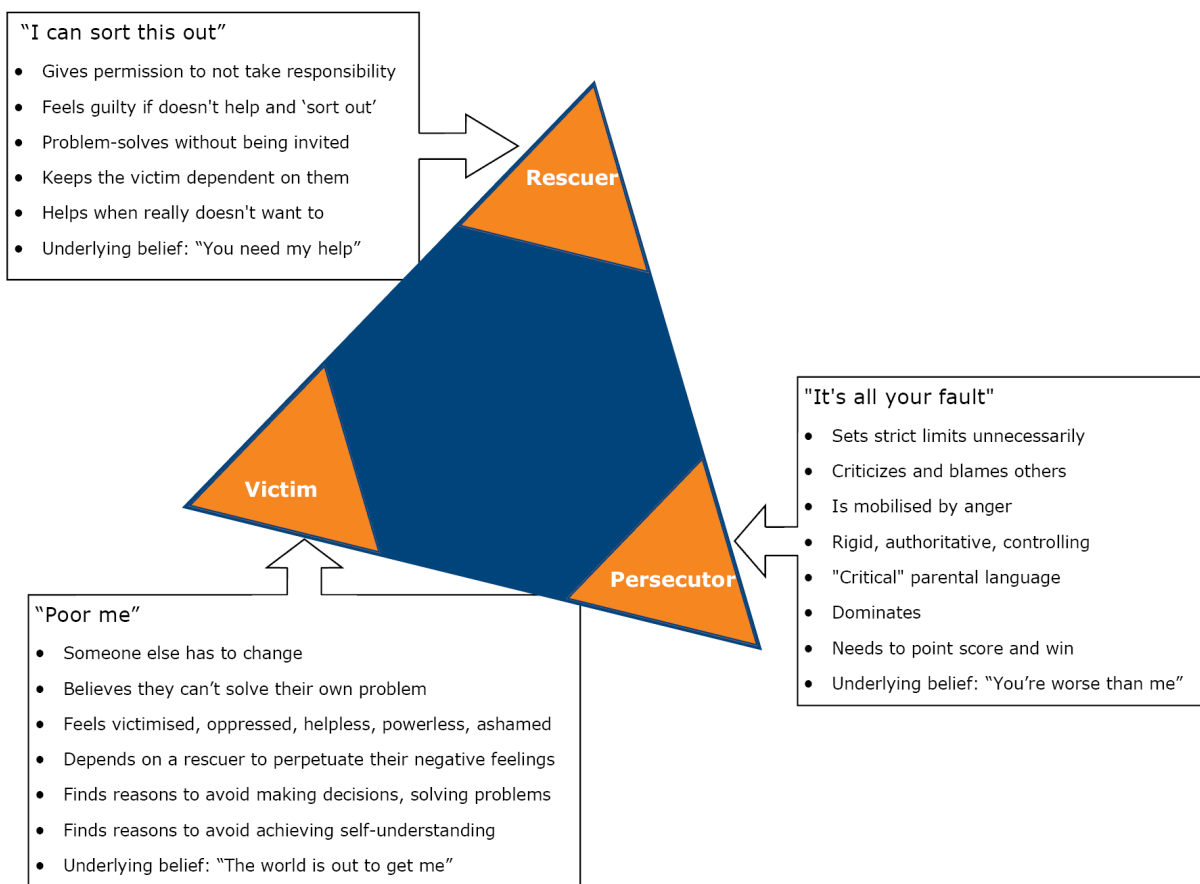


Getting out of the 'Blame Game'

This is a shortened extract from the programme materials of the ILM endorsed training course **Conflict Management for Managers**. For more information about building your skills, please contact us on 0844 504 8874.

The blame game

A common pattern that runs through many workplaces is the Drama Triangle, based on the work and observations of Stephen B. Karpman. The model below shows a triangle with, on each end, possible workplace roles. The roles are drawn on an inverted triangle as the two top positions are the "one-up" positions, where the people feel superior, while the Victim is a "one-down" position, feeling looked down on and helpless. If some changes their role, the other two roles have to change as well, and positions can shift as people change emotions to protect the ego which feels threatened. The Victim may become angry at the injustice of being persecuted and shift into the Perpetrator role. The Perpetrator may become tired with their angry barrage, feel guilty, and shift into the Rescuer role.



How each role blames the other at work

A **“Rescuer”** often does not own their own vulnerability and seeks instead to “rescue” those whom they see as vulnerable. They offer ‘help’ without asking and too soon, rather than finding out if and how the other person wants to be supported. What the Rescuer agrees to do may in actual fact not be what they or the others really want out of the situation. The Rescuer often ends up feeling hard done by or resentful and used, because they do take responsibility for themselves, but rather take responsibility for the Victim and the perceived situation.

The Rescuer will always end up feeling the Victim, but sometimes may be perceived by others who are on the outside looking in, as being the Persecutor. Managers and HR managers often put themselves in this role.

A **“Victim”** usually feels overwhelmed by their own sense of vulnerability, inadequacy or powerlessness, and does not take responsibility for themselves or their own power. They look for a Rescuer to take care of them and often turn up with complaints at their manager’s or HR office. At some point the Victim feels let down by the Rescuer, or perhaps overwhelmed or even persecuted by them, and will move to the Persecutor position themselves, and persecute their erstwhile Rescuer. ‘I came to you for help, and all you’ve done is suggest that I change!’: ‘why haven’t you sorted this out for me, you know how stressed I’m feeling about the way he’s been treating me!’. They may even enlist another Rescuer to persecute the previous Rescuer. However, the Victim will still experience themselves internally as being the Victim and will avoid making changes or taking responsibility. Chronically “dissatisfied” staff often put themselves in this position.

A **“Persecutor”** is someone who is unaware of their own power and therefore discounts it. ‘I’m not angry or blaming anyone... I’m just stating the facts. She’s not performing and she needs to or I’ll have to take steps’. They avoid discussion about themselves and their role in a conflict, but return the focus on the shortcomings of the ‘Victim’. Any player in the “game” may at any time be experienced as the Persecutor by the other player/players. However their own internal perception may be that they are being persecuted, and that they are the Victim.

Managers and HR staff often move into Rescuer mode: they seek to rescue people from their responsibilities and ‘sort it out’ for them. In doing so, they then feel victimised and move into Victim: then they feel angry and move into Persecutor. This is confusing for the others involved and although the ‘issue’ may be resolved, the others involved may feel undermined, helpless, angry, guilty, and criticised. By taking on the Rescuer role, we are taking from others

their obligation to be responsible for the quality of their lives and thereby build a platform of self esteem for themselves.

Getting out of the triangle

Without limits and boundaries, people do not know when to start or stop, when they are finished, when they have gone far enough, or when enough has been said or done. They run on emotional cues, and feelings and thoughts of entitlement. The bad feelings that follow will be obvious or subtle and often felt much later than the situation that generated them. The Drama is regenerated and repeated: nobody knows who started it, why it started, when it started, when it will end, how it will end. The Drama does not support problem-solving, understanding or self-responsibility, all of which are essential if we are to access the positives of conflict.

- The Victim needs to own their vulnerability and take responsibility for themselves; to recognise that they have power and are able to use it appropriately.
- The Rescuer needs to take responsibility for themselves, connect with their power and acknowledge their vulnerability.
- The Persecutor needs to take responsibility for themselves, and acknowledge their power and anger and desire to blame others.

All parties need to stop getting their needs met indirectly and covertly and at the cost of other people: instead they should ask directly for what they want and need. When they learn how to do this, they will shift out of the triangle. Outside the triangle is a position of equality in which the responsibility of each individual is acknowledged. It is a position of empowerment and is one of honesty, reality and respect. Boundaries, contracts, accountability and responsibility are all active here. Allow yourself to be responsible only for what is yours to be responsible about, and allow others to manage their own 'stuff'. Stop blaming others and you'll find they stop blaming you.