

# A Model for Enhancing Individual and Organisational Learning of 'Emotional Intelligence': The Drama and Winner's Triangles

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*The author describes a model that can enhance professional learning and awareness, assisting appropriate responsibility-taking in interactions. It has been effectively applied over 10 years with managers and practitioners in public sector settings across social work, health, education and housing, and more recently also in the private sector. The model is first explained in the context of family relationships to facilitate generalisability. Applications in social work management and practice roles are described. They are seen to demonstrate greater effectiveness, personally and professionally, within the context of day to day challenges. The result is to assist collaborative and organisational learning in behaviours similar to those associated with the language of emotional intelligence.*

*Keywords: Drama Triangle; Emotional Intelligence; Winner's Triangle; Transactional Analysis; Learning; Awareness; Effectiveness; Development*

## Introduction

The concept of the learning organisation (Pedler *et al.*, 1991; Senge, 1990) is familiar. Models of good practice are less easily accessible. The attainment of this ideal requires individual and organisational intelligence that includes, but goes beyond cognitive expertise. Of the three levels of intelligence (IQ, expertise and 'emotional intelligence') IQ is the poorest predictor of success (between 4 and 25%). Expertise is a 'baseline competence' (Goleman, 1998, p. 21) rather than a differentiator between outstanding and average performers. Emotional intelligence is what marks out top performers and their organisations.

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It is interpersonal skills or emotional competencies which Goleman identifies as contributing no less than two thirds of the requirements for effectiveness. These enable those who are most effective to do justice to their cognitive skills in organisational settings. Emotional competence is complex. It comprises: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation (three levels of managing ourselves), and empathy and social skills (for handling relationships) (Goleman, 1998). I do not intend to expand here on what Goleman has done so well. By exploring a parallel path I hope that readers will draw their own links.

To foster these emotional competencies requires that development in an organisation provides coaching in a learning, not a blame, culture. I have found the action learning approach (McGill & Beaty, 1995; Burgess, 1999) conducive to individual and cultural change in accordance with these values. Within action learning sets, as well as in training and educational programmes, I have been utilising a simple model that has contributed effectively to assisting individual, then organisational, awareness and practice of emotional intelligence. I describe it here, to invite others to test it out.

While working with social work managers using action learning sets for problem solving and personal and organisational development (Burgess, 1999), I was introduced, by a set member, to a model derived from Transactional Analysis (TA). I have subsequently developed and applied this framework to a variety of situations with members of action learning sets, masters programmes and training courses for over 10 years. We found that it offered manoeuvrability when stuck, with issues of complexity, disempowerment and boundaries in relationships. Its strength is in facilitating the taking of appropriate responsibility and therefore becoming more 'response-able'.

The model was originally offered to me as simply a diagram on a worn photocopied sheet, and a reference was not available. The name 'Acey Choy', in a corner, was the only clue to its author. The sheet consisted of two diagrams: the 'Drama Triangle' and the 'Winner's (sic) Triangle' (I will use Winner's with punctuation as in Choy, 1990). The former part, the Drama Triangle, can be found in TA texts, e.g. Stewart & Joines (1987). Midgley (1999) identifies Stephen Karpman, a colleague of Eric Berne, as the originator of the Drama Triangle, and expands on the concept of winner/loser. However, the source paper for the Winner's Triangle was not discovered until after this paper was initially presented for publication. It completes Karpman's Drama Triangle by offering a solution (Choy, 1990).

### **A Value Base of Self-awareness and Choice Rather Than of Blame**

In introducing this model to colleagues, I have found it helpful to clarify that it is not a 'politically correct' model (Burgess, 1995). By this I mean that when pointing a finger at other people's behaviour (and possibly feeling justified by comparing with my own), I am required to be aware of the three fingers in my hand pointing back at myself. In other words, its strength is as a tool for self-awareness and choice, rather

than for criticising others. The implication is that a blame model justifies non-change in the blamer. (This, it need hardly be said, is not a basis to avoid challenging discrimination or oppression—simply not to do so in a self-justified way.) Taking personal ownership is also the reason for my writing about this model largely from the first person. A more remote perspective might imply that I could dissociate myself from the behaviour and feelings in both triangles.

So the Drama Triangle is not about ‘should nots’, any more than the Winner’s Triangle is about ‘shoulds’. Both are about the reality of day-to-day human experience and making choices for oneself. You, no less than I, are likely to frequently find yourself in the Drama Triangle positions. You also find your own successful ways to become unstuck. This model simply offers a way of conceptualising this to make clarity about choices more accessible. No model can stop you or I behaving at times in ways that are ineffective or that leave us dissatisfied. What it may offer is a language, and a clarity that enables quicker choices to change what we want to change, to enhance our effectiveness as people and as professionals.

The model is based on that level of self-awareness and understanding of the human condition that acknowledges, ‘There, but for the grace of God, go I’. In common with Transactional Analysis, it empowers change by helping to clarify what I can first change in my own behaviour, perceptions or feelings. In management development work over 10 years, initially with social work managers, and then with social work practitioners and with managers in health, housing and education and more recently with managers in the private sector, we have noticed how making such choices can ripple into relationships and dynamics with others, engaging them in choices for change for themselves.

### **Part One, the Drama Triangle**

The first, or Drama Triangle, developed by Karpman (1968), describes experiences of my neurotic self, which I can experience numerous times each day, whether it be for minutes, hours or just milliseconds. It is a tool for accelerated awareness of my interactions with others. As can be seen in Figure 1, the three positions are Victim, Persecutor, Rescuer. Whichever position I take in this triangle, I am not taking appropriate responsibility for myself. It is only the expression of this abdication that is different in each position.

To initially illustrate the positions in the model, I will offer a simple caricatured scenario, not totally imaginary, from my own parenting experience. Imagine one Saturday, after I have cleaned and tidied the lounge for visitors, that my son cuts, glues and colours cardboard to create an alien-repelling raygun, leaving the room looking like the aftermath of an intergalactic war. I walk in, view the chaos and feel hopeless. I take Victim position: ‘Oh, no! Tim, what have you done again, after all my effort and time?’ He responds, cued in by me, as Persecutor (eight, going on 18): ‘Dad, you’re such a fusspot!’ (then flipping into Victim), ‘You always pick on me’. I am already fuelled by anger, and shift to Persecutor: ‘You are the most inconsiderate

**Reality:** Act in own interests.

**Characteristics:**

Others suffer from their behaviour.

Part of goal is to punish.

**Discounts:** Victim doesn't matter.

I can't be OK unless you get punished.

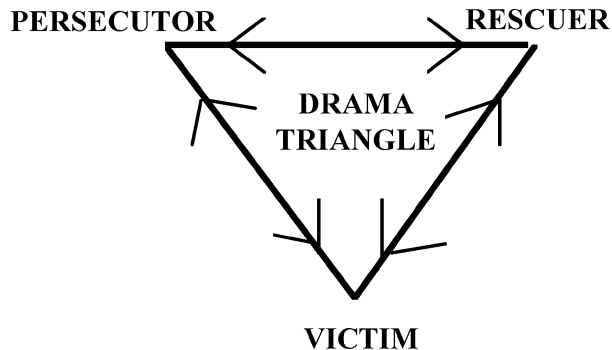
**Reality:** Concern for victim.

**Characteristics:** Take over the thinking and problem solving.

Do more than their share.

Do things they do not want to do.

**Discount:** The victim cannot solve his/her problem.



**Reality:** Suffering or potentially suffering.

**Characteristics:** Act as if: 1) do not have the resources to solve their problem (or someone else has to change for them to be happy).

2) their need is so acute it prevents them solving problems (don't use Adult ego state to think + feel at same time).

**Discount:** I can't solve this.

**Figure 1** The Drama Triangle (Choy, 1990, from Karpman, 1968).

child I know! I've told you about our visitors coming. You'll lose your pocket money for this'.

My partner enters the room, overhearing the fracas, and takes Rescuer position, opting for me on the basis of my near apoplectic face: 'Why don't you just go and change, and I'll sort out Tim and the room. You really shouldn't get into such a state'. She then rescues Tim too: 'You just go and take your raygun outside, and leave me to tidy the room'. I, however, will not go along with letting him off the hook and continuing as Persecutor, turn on her: 'What sort of parenting is that? How do you expect him to learn? You are as thoughtless as he is'. She is fired to respond in equally Persecutory mode: 'So you're such a model parent are you? I'll just leave you to resolve this as successfully as you started'. Tim is bewildered and unnerved by the hostility between us, and tries to rescue us both: 'Mum, Dad didn't really mean it. He just ...'. But I am back into Victim with a vengeance: 'This is so typical of the support I get in this house!'. Turning to Tim, I revert to Persecutor: 'If you don't tidy this up in five minutes I'll fine you five week's pocket money!' (Ouch!)

I will leave the squabble, which is clearly not achieving any real progress, to focus on the Drama Triangle. The terminology of Victim is probably the most familiar. This position can feel 'sweet and sour', in which I hold anyone and anything but

myself as responsible for solving my problems, and probably for causing them as well. While relishing my abdication of responsibility, I languish in renouncing my own ability to negotiate or problem solve at the same time as experiencing my hurt feelings.

As Victim, I am likely to attract the attention of someone willing to take the Rescuer position. The Rescuer takes over responsibility for the other person, and this to an extent that is beyond eventual willingness, or even ability, to respond. In this way the Rescuer does not take responsibility for their own boundaries, and takes over responsibility from the Victim. They do not acknowledge that the Victim has any problem solving capacity, nor that they are preventing the Victim from developing his/her own potential. Nevertheless, they are soon likely to feel that the Victim is ungrateful for the extent to which they, as Rescuer, are 'so generously' putting themselves out.

In the Rescuer position, anger at the lack of appreciation or response of the Victim, is likely to shift them into the position of Persecutor. So too can the Victim easily shift into Persecutor position, angry at the way others will not take away their problems, or even angry at the way they do.

What is evident is that there is a fluid dynamic between all three positions in the Drama Triangle, so that we can flip from one position into another, pushing, and/or being pushed by, others in the game. The consistency is that we stay in the destructive dynamics of the Drama Triangle, in which none of us take responsibility for ourselves, and in which, despite rapid shifts between the different positions, no positive outcome is achievable.

In the third position, Persecutor, I act as if satisfaction will be gained by punishing another, in lieu of taking proper responsibility for self. As Persecutor, I hit out at another, to satisfy my frustration or anger. I am unwilling to negotiate or problem solve, and I abuse. I place all responsibility for issues that I am involved with on anyone else that I can blame.

The Victim is a perfect foil for the Persecutor. However, the Rescuer can also quickly become Victim of the Persecutor. The dynamic in the Drama Triangle is such that the Persecutor can rapidly flip into Victim, Victim into Persecutor, Rescuer into Victim etc. Each position is equally accessible to us, while we are refusing to take responsibility for ourselves in relating to another person (internally or interactively). The only boundary is the triangle. The shifts between positions can be instantaneous and multiple in the same interaction.

The three positions of Victim, Rescuer and Persecutor provide a language, or a mental model that is easy to picture, for noting my behaviour, feelings and abdication of responsibility for myself. While I am sure that every behaviour cannot be identified within these three or their corresponding positions in the other triangle, yet the more I explore them, the more I am able to connect these triangle positions with a variety of behaviours.

The complement to the Drama Triangle offered by Choy (1990) is the Winner's Triangle (see Figure 2). The Winner's Triangle illustrates ways of redeeming our

**Reality:** Act in own interests.

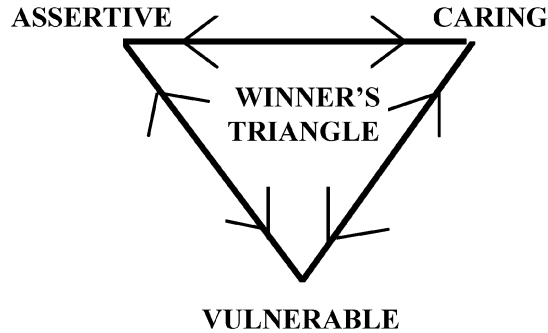
**Characteristics:** Ask for what they want.  
Say no to what they don't want.  
Give feedback and initiate negotiation.  
Make changes in order to get their needs met. Do not punish.

**Skills:** Assertion skills.

**Reality:** Concern for the vulnerable person.

**Characteristics:** Do not do the thinking and problem solving. Do not take over, unless asked (and they want to). Do not do more than their share. Do not do things they do not want to do.

**Skill:** Listening skills, Self-awareness



**Reality:** Suffering or potentially suffering.

**Characteristics:** Use Adult ego state for thinking and problem solving.  
Awareness - use their feelings as data for problem solving.

**Skill:** Problem solving, self-awareness..

**Figure 2** The Winner's Triangle (Choy, 1990).

avoidance of responsibility, which the Drama Triangle has clarified. Where I might use that self awareness to feed my guilt, self-rejection or sense of failure, which could get me stuck even deeper in destructive dynamics, the Winner's Triangle offers an alternative, a choice, a shift. While easy to label as simply taking responsibility for myself, it is often much harder to actually do.

### The Winner's Triangle

The three positions in the Winner's Triangle (Figure 2) correspond directly to those in the Drama Triangle. I will examine them in the reverse order to that used above, so as to work my way towards the converse to Victim, which I find the most subtle.

Firstly I will briefly return to my domestic scenario to provide an initial illustration of the three positions. Imagine that having given Tim my punitive ultimatum to clear up in five minutes or lose five weeks pocket money, I catch my partner's eye. She looks sadly at me, and her real vulnerability frees me to feel dissatisfied with myself. I too am able to risk being Vulnerable: 'Tim, look I'm sorry I blew up, I was out of order'. I am then able to move to Assertive: 'However, we have visitors coming in half an hour, and you have left a mess. What do you want to do?'

Tim is able to meet me with his own vulnerability: 'Dad, you really scared me when you shouted and I don't like it when you and Mum argue. Can you help me put the rubbish in the outside bin, 'cause I haven't got my shoes downstairs?'

My partner responds in Caring position: 'Look, Tim, Dad has to get changed. I'll tell you what, I'm going upstairs, and I'll bring your shoes down for you. That way you can get the satisfaction of doing the whole clearing job for yourself. What do you say?' Tim accepts responsibility with a giving vulnerability: 'I s'pose it was me who made the mess'. I am more than happy with the resolution which is better than I could have imagined and am able to be Caring: 'Tim, would you like to play a bit of football after the visitors have gone? You see I need some exercise too, and I could leave going for a run for another day'. However, I am also Assertive: 'I want you to be considerate about keeping the lounge tidy for all of us if you make a mess'.

By taking responsibility for self, we can no longer remain in the Persecutor position. We move to Assertive, no longer looking to put blame on others, nor to punish them. In Assertive behaviour we are clear about our own needs and boundaries, but also open to those of others, which enables us to negotiate. This taking of responsibility for self is the essential shift between the dynamics of the Drama Triangle and the Winner's Triangle. In the positions of the Winner's Triangle there is potential to contribute to some kind of positive outcome, which is not feasible while in the Drama Triangle.

In the same way as Persecutor position corresponds to Assertive, so Rescuer corresponds to the Caring position. The person behaving in Carer does not abdicate their own needs, nor overlook the boundaries of their motivation or ability to assist others. They do not carry the illusion that they can take over another's problem and solve it for them, without diminishing or disempowering them. Whatever commitment the Carer makes can be relied on, and is given fully, without pulling back again. If they cannot fulfil their commitment they are accountable. They are available to be sensitive to the other person's experience and needs, because they are responsible for themselves.

The converse to Victim is Vulnerable. When exploring the Vulnerable position in the Winner's Triangle with managers in action learning sets or training courses, participants have often suggested that they would rather call it something other than vulnerable. Nevertheless, attempts to rename it have never been wholly successful. We have had to return to exploring the challenge of vulnerability, recognising that the wish to change the name reflects the intensity of our cultural and individual struggle with the paradox of vulnerability.

To be Vulnerable conjures up being weak, disempowered or exposed to abuse. It is something we often learn instinctively to avoid or hide, not only from others, but also from ourselves. It is in attempting to avoid experiencing my vulnerability that I am likely to resort to the powerlessness of being Victim, the disempowerment of taking over as Rescuer, or the abusiveness of being Persecutor.

When I am Vulnerable, taking responsibility for myself may simply take the form of admitting that I cannot manage, and asking others for help. However, I do not

assume someone else has to help me, nor do I resent them if they choose not to. The thought of experiencing my vulnerability can be scary, even frightening. Paradoxically, the actual experience can lead to unexpected empowerment.

### **The Challenge of Daring to be Vulnerable**

I find the image of an infant helpful in understanding better the paradoxes inherent in vulnerability. In its defencelessness, guilelessness and transparency, the infant exerts tremendous power on others. They are likely to respond to its needs, give of themselves unselfconsciously and with corresponding transparency and defenceless behaviour. Vulnerability is, I believe, very powerful.

This was brought home to me yet again recently by the very difficult experience of a practitioner with her managers. Having asked for a reference from her short term employer in applying for two permanent posts for which she was well qualified, she was puzzled at not being shortlisted for either post. She then asked to see her reference, which her immediate boss told her had been written by the organisational manager (and based on her boss's notes on a proforma). The practitioner's shock when she saw the reference was such that she approached her boss, confronting her with its injustice. Her boss was defensive, blaming her own manager in turn for it. Unable to cope, the practitioner left hurriedly to deal with her feelings.

The reference damned her 'with faint praise' to the extent that she was not at all surprised that she had not been called for interview. She was deeply hurt by the injustice. Her qualities and strengths were not acknowledged at all. She decided to request to see it again and raise her feelings with both managers. It became clear that both were in very defensive (Victim/Persecutor) mode. Despite her instinctive efforts to protect herself, she showed her hurt in a very vulnerable moment, breaking into tears momentarily in front of both.

The effect of her real vulnerability was dramatic on the two defensive managers. The reality of her pain reached through their irresponsibility in a way that hours of argument could not have. They opened to what they had done and both made strenuous efforts to make up for it and to demonstrate how they valued their employee. She, in turn, was able to become Assertive, resisting any attempts to push her into Victim, by them Rescuing. They both then experienced their own vulnerability about the Persecutory role they had adopted in the reference (punishing the practitioner, because they did not want to lose her to another job). They then moved on from vulnerability to a more Caring position. The next reference was very different, and led to a successful interview in a permanent post elsewhere.

As well as demonstrating to me the paradoxical power we can access by just being who we are at moments of vulnerability, this experience also showed me something else. It re-enforced how, when someone takes a position in the Winner's Triangle, it is more difficult for others in the dynamic to continue in the Drama Triangle. They are faced with a choice of first awareness and then of change. They may have to withdraw, or might even move into the Winner's Triangle themselves. Of course they



may resist all the more this unwillingness to play their game and resort to greater intensity of persecutory, rescuer or victim behaviour. Extremely testing as this is, by taking responsibility for oneself, it is possible to maintain one's congruence and make decisions that feel right through vulnerable (not kamikazi), assertive or caring behaviour.

The incident referred to above also reminds me yet again of the resistance I have to being Vulnerable. My preference would be to take the Assertive position. However, very often, my route to assertiveness has to go through vulnerability first. So often, being vulnerable appears to be the door into the Winner's Triangle. However brief the moment of vulnerability, the experience enables me to paradoxically access my own reality in which I find my empowerment. I can then access my assertiveness. If I attempt to avoid my vulnerability, as did the two managers initially, I will end up playing Victim, Rescuer or most likely, Persecutor, in the 'circularity' of the Drama Triangle.

The essence of the Winner's Triangle is not about putting on a particular role, just because it can be more advantageous in the long term. The three positions defy manipulation. It is about being true to ourselves at a given moment, being who we really are in a way that does not disempower another, while being in tune with what is right for ourselves. It is this kind of effectiveness that corresponds to emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998). When compared with the destructive stuckness of the Drama Triangle, the experience of daring to be Vulnerable, Caring or Assertive (whichever is really me at that moment), can be dramatically empowering. Most of all, it can lead to options and outcomes that are more creative than anything that might be planned beforehand. This appears to happen simply through the opportunistic synergy that is freed when people respond to one another courageously as themselves, without defences and games.

An image that illustrated this synergy for me (in the opening to the TV programme *The Southbank Show*) used an animation of Michaelangelo's Creation of Adam on the Cistine Chapel ceiling. The outstretched fingers of Life respond with electric power (literally showing a lightning flash) to Adam's hand reaching out without effort. He accesses the empowerment that is his potential, but which can only be achieved through a risk of vulnerability, confidence or love (three qualities that correspond to the three positions of the Winner's Triangle).

Although the terminology of the Triangles is derived from Transactional Analysis, the model corresponds, I believe, to the more contemporary concept of emotional intelligence. This comprises a set of qualities that can be developed collaboratively with others through honest and sensitive relationships. I propose that the Drama and Winner's Triangles can be a facilitative tool to provide a shared language and accessible understanding in the building of such intelligence and the behaviour it leads to. A creative and inspiring approach to this is taken by Zander & Zander (2000) who show that far from an image of aspiring to dreary, dutiful, correct behaviour, this process is exciting and expansive. They use the term 'downward spiral' to describe dynamics similar to those in the Drama Triangle. 'The Art of Possibility' is their exponential alternative.

### **Case Examples of Applications of the Drama and Winner's Triangles**

There is no simple formula for awareness raising and the ensuing personal choice to express higher self rather than neurotic self. Nevertheless, there is a simplicity about how I have approached applying the model. I usually introduce the two Triangles by suggesting they be tested to see whether they have durability as a model that can be applied in the professional and personal lives of the group. Describing it briefly with a handout diagramming both triangles, I invariably get a response to my domestic illustration of the row with my son (see earlier). Most can identify immediately with such application to domestic relationships in their own lives. I then suggest they test out the model in relation to professional interactions, exploring this in pairs.

Following a plenary discussion and further exploration of different experiences of how to move from Drama to Winner's, most people have sufficient grasp of the model. It is then possible to return to the model at a later date, when a situation or problem is being explored. This, I find, is most effectively done with a question about whether what is being described corresponds to a position in one of the triangles. The model becomes a framework for a language about responsibility taking, which gets applied in a variety of situations because it focuses on process rather than content.

When a group of people who work together in a masters course, an action learning set or a training programme become familiar enough with the language of the two triangles, it becomes a short hand to raise and recognise the level of awareness towards an emotionally intelligent choice of behaviour. Whilst the tutor or facilitator initially makes the connection with the triangles, it gradually becomes a common language taken up by members of the group, e.g. 'Where do you see yourself in the two Triangles?' The next questions are likely to be, 'What do you want to happen?' and 'Does anyone see a way of reframing or changing the meaning of what is happening to enable a move into the Winner's Triangle?'

I have found the model very powerful in supervising or consulting individuals as well as groups. Practitioners, counsellors and supervisors frequently share the model with their client or supervisee as a tool for collaborative exploration. The following examples are derived from a decade of application with managers and practitioners. They illustrate how people have used the Triangles model to get beyond stuck or destructive patterns of interaction at both an individual level and with implications for wider organisational learning and effectiveness. Many of these awarenesses (emotional intelligences?) have been achieved in supportive yet challenging action learning sets. (To protect anonymity the examples have been altered and 'mix and matched'.)

(a)

A social worker responded to questions of whether she saw firstly her client, and later herself in the Drama Triangle. She recognised how her drive to be helper often took her into Rescuer mode. She saw how she could prevent her clients from being able to access their own problem-solving ability, inviting Victim behaviour. She also recognised how a particular client could flip her into Victim by having a go at her

(Persecutor); how, in meetings with the client, her team leader would Rescue her from the client's aggression, only to be Victimised by the same Persecutory client, inviting the social worker to then come in as Rescuer to her team leader. The unsatisfactory pattern was broken by the social worker recognising her pattern (becoming Vulnerable) and redefining her helping role (in Caring position) as enabling her client to take the steps that she wanted to take for herself (client moving from Vulnerable to Assertive). This also changed the dynamic with her team leader who was less patronising in the face of her growing assertiveness.

(b)

A training officer was running courses on joint assessment which were going badly wrong. Staff were resisting and Persecuting her efforts. By exploring the triangles with colleagues in an action learning set, she recognised where she was in fact Persecuting them with expectations of practice that were too developed for the context they were working in. She was also able to see how she was trying to Rescue managers from their responsibility to carry forward the implementation of the joint assessment process. By using the Triangles model, she clarified the boundaries of her own role as trainer, and changed her input to the project group to advisor rather than implementer. This changed the balance of ownership for both staff and managers. The multi-organisational implementation of joint assessment was able to move on with the right people carrying their own issues.

(c)

In response to courageous and balanced feedback from a colleague in an action learning set (Burgess, 1999) a manager slowly recognised liabilities in his no-nonsense approach: 'I only want "can-do" people who can "stand the heat in the kitchen"'. Asked if he could identify this statement within the positions of the Drama Triangle, he acknowledged how he could be Persecuting people who faced him with their vulnerability about the personal demands of a 'more for less' environment. He recognised that he feared accessing his own vulnerability about whether he could really cope himself (beneath his brash, macho exterior). Listening to another's vulnerability faced him with his own. By recognising his anxiety and how he defended himself from it, he was able to enter his fear (being Vulnerable) and experience his ability to survive it.

He was thereby enabled to more effectively respond to the vulnerability of his staff (in Caring position). Yet he was also able to maintain clear boundaries about what he could and could not do. This accessing of a deeper level of his own integrity helped him to be clearer about organisational issues and requirements (Assertive), in a way that helped staff to find their own solutions (also Assertive). Because they experienced a validation of their own struggles, by being listened to and not ridiculed as weak, they were able to maintain responsibility for themselves. This stopped them from resorting

to Victim position, and by moving through Vulnerable, to being more Assertive in finding ways of coping for themselves. The longer term impact on the culture in the locality office moved away from persecutory blame to appreciation of collaborative learning, in which mistakes were important data for improvement.

(d)

The subtleties of partnership and joint agency working were defeating health and social services representatives on a project group. They found themselves stuck in competitive behaviour in which past inequalities were resented and held on to. When one participant explored her frustration and Vulnerability in an action learning set, the response of her multi-agency colleagues validated her position as mirroring their own experiences. She was able to acknowledge in microcosm how feelings and experiences were similar across the agencies. She also was struck by how much of a common vision to provide effective services there was.

By recognising the Persecutor/Victim behaviour that was going on, the presenter of the issue was able to make the journey through Vulnerable to Assertive by developing an alliance with colleagues in the set that could model replacing the negative and unacknowledged coalitions in her project group. These new networks inspired the presenter to replicate such alliances with her colleagues in the original problematic partnership project. While things changed only slowly, there was enough of a glimmer of hope to inspire continuing to work on positive alliances within the project group, to increasingly displace the previous pattern of competitive and blaming behaviour.

(e)

A social work student on practice placement was subtly discriminated against because of her race by administrative staff in the office. She was courageous enough to take this up with her practice teacher who, in trying to take it forward came up against the inertia of denial that reflected the local previous culture. Her initial response was to hit out angrily at her own manager and his manager. Their defensiveness increased as they experienced feeling Victim, and responded in Persecutory ways to justify their sense of inadequacy.

With the help of a colleague's low key consultation, the practice teacher saw her own behaviour as Persecutory (and as replicating a similar quality in the racism). She then acted from her Vulnerability and asked to meet with both managers. She acknowledged her unhelpful blame of them and shared her helplessness in the face of the racism of some influential administrative colleagues. This elicited her managers' own admission of feeling unable to shift the pattern. From what they feared could have spiralled into hopelessness, they began to find a way forward by resolving to share their sense of helplessness (Vulnerability), yet also their determination to find some way of dealing with the racism.

They decided to be open about their struggle to effectively change the culture with their colleagues in three teams that shared the same office. They experienced vulnerability particularly with their black colleagues, with whom they had to drop their shield of political correctness. From the refreshing frankness of the first meeting came the creatively different idea of developing office events to celebrate the qualities and contributions of different minority groups.

This started an Assertive tide through mutually enjoyable events involving local community groups. Even the original 'perpetrators' began to participate. Instead of feeling persecuted by politically correct finger-pointing, they experienced a Caring culture in which they could share their better selves, and be a part of the enjoyment of multi-culturalism. They were enabled to move on from their previous Persecutory exclusion. The student had long gone, but her successors and the local office had gained greatly from her Assertive stand. It had percolated beyond her into the organisation, to draw others into opportunities within the Winner's Triangle through tough but worthwhile growing pains. While initially a colleague in consultant role asked questions about the Triangles, others too were soon able to use this language to foster new meanings and behaviours.

(f)

A female manager presented to her colleagues in an action learning set her problem with a staff member over boundaries and time-keeping. The situation had now drifted to the edge of a disciplinary/grievance process. As she explored this she became aware of how she tended to take more responsibility than was her role for the actions of her staff.

Colleagues in the action learning set shared their own vulnerability over their tendency, as women, to Rescue, both in their own families and in work teams. This helped her to clarify her boundaries to more appropriately place accountability on her staff member in an Assertive way. The outcome was that the staff member decided to leave for another post, having been effectively shown that Victim/Persecutor was not going to work. This pre-empted what had appeared to be an inevitable, protracted and highly resource-intensive formal disciplinary process, which had little likelihood of any constructive outcome.

(g)

A male member of a management team was frustrated by the passivity that he and his experienced colleagues showed in their service management team meetings with the Head of Service. She chaired the meeting in a controlling manner which was never challenged. He decided to risk talking to a female colleague about his frustration, and to his relief, his Vulnerability was reciprocated. Using the Triangles model, they both recognised that they were part of the problem, of which their bosses' behaviour was just a symptom. Another symptom was their own tendency to blame (Persecute) the

problem on the Head of Service's domineering style. This, they recognised, enabled them to abdicate any responsibility for sitting passively through management meetings (Victim), re-enforcing her tendency to do all the talking (Rescue).

Once they checked their initial Persecutory tendency to put all the responsibility for the situation on their boss, they were able to move into more Assertive mode and strategise towards change. They noted that whenever anyone did challenge the control of the boss, she was easily able to shoot them down in flames (Persecute). This was simply because their colleagues sat back and watched (Persecuting or Victim?), never offering support within the meeting, though there was always much said afterwards and outside the meeting (Victim). The potential to contribute talent and energy to the service objectives was being lost on personalised agendas, often at unconscious levels.

They resolved to make a difference by engaging colleagues in alliances before the meeting, over important issues that they wanted to take forward. They avoided the tendency to simply oppose the boss (Persecute) and focused on changes that both their boss and colleagues would have an investment in. By arranging a minimum of three of them in alliances on any issue that was to be raised, they always knew there would be support. At first, they even practised before management meetings. This changed the previous dynamic into a more collaborative process (Assertive).

None of the feared pitch battles with the boss happened. She clearly began to appreciate that she no longer had to do all the work and to value her team's contributions. The original male member of the management team found that his individual supervision sessions with his boss also improved and became more balanced in both power and contributions. For the first time he began to experience real support from a Caring supervisor. This mirrored the change to proactive, collaborative behaviour over service improvement goals (Assertive). Personal agendas (in the Drama Triangle) were no longer the main dynamic in the management meetings.

## **Conclusions**

From these few examples, the potential for both individual and organisational learning that use of the Triangles model can offer may be more evident. This learning relates to seeing emotional intelligence is a journey rather than a destination. 'None of us is perfect ... we inevitably have a profile of strengths and limits' (Goleman, 1998, p. 25). The capacities of emotional intelligence build upon one another just as behaviour in the Winner's Triangle can influence others towards greater integrity and generate constructive options.

In the complex, constantly changing and often chaotic world of today's public sector services, the demands on practitioners and managers ask for new ways of dealing with contradictions. Requirements such as partnership with potential competitors and collaboration with customers who may not want the service call for paradigm shifts that involve individual and organisational growth.

... as work becomes more complex and collaborative, companies where people work together best have a competitive edge.

In the new workplace, with its emphasis on flexibility, teams and a strong customer orientation, this crucial set of emotional competencies is becoming increasingly essential for excellence in every job and in every part of the world. (Goleman, 1998, p. 29)

Emotional intelligence can be learned by individuals, while 'fine-tuning the interpersonal dynamics that make groups smarter' requires the organisation to prioritise its values 'in the concrete terms of hiring, training and development, performance evaluation and promotions' (Goleman, 1998, p. 315).

My close involvement over the last decade in the development of public sector managers and staff means that I am acutely aware of the constraints on releasing staff from the workplace for training and development. So too am I mindful of the challenges that individuals and teams face in aspiring to invest reflectiveness into their practice. I often joke with colleagues that I am working on the pill or the injection that can be taken instead of the training programme. On a serious basis, I have worked with hundreds of managers and staff to invest in action learning programmes (Burgess, 1999) which clearly bear fruit in addressing problem-solving and development needs and make longer term differences to effectiveness.

Within these action learning sets as well as other training and education programmes, the Drama and Winner's Triangles have provided an effective and quickly accessible tool for individuals and teams to evaluate and make choices for growth in emotional intelligence. I recommend readers to explore the model, try it out, and evaluate its effectiveness for managers and staff who are looking for ready tools to assist personal and professional effectiveness. While it is not a quick fix, it can provide results that endure.

In the flux of constant change, there are increasingly times when the only still point of sanity and survival is in strengthening one's personal integrity and congruence. A model as simple as the Triangles can provide a touchstone towards more constructive relationships and cultures. Its advantage is that it fosters acceptance (Caring) rather than rejection (Persecuting) of unsatisfactory behaviour in a way that fosters ownership and choices to move on. Collaboratively the model can provide colleagues with a common understanding and language with which to encourage one another out of destructive patterns into more constructive options.

*It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us ...  
And as we let our own light shine,  
We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear,  
Our presence automatically liberates others!*

(Williamson, 1996, 190–191, used by Nelson Mandela in his Inaugural Speech)

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