

Fundamental Supervisory Practices

Center for Public Leadership and Governance

UNC-School of Government

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Topics covered in today's session:

- Examine how assumptions and mental models influence your behavior and results and how these relate to your effectiveness as a supervisor.
- Explore the ladder of inference and its impact on effective communication.
- Introduce the Drama Triangle and practice applying effective communication strategies to remain out of the Drama Triangle and promote positive work relationships.

The Drama Triangle

(based on work of Stanley Karpman)

Foundations of the Drama Triangle

- People carry out roles that have become necessary to affirm how they feel about themselves and others.
- When the feelings toward self and others are based on discounts, that person must assume a consistent view to make the outcomes of his/her relationship predictable.

The Roles in the Drama Triangle

Persecutor

- Criticizes others without understanding the reasons behind other's actions
- Assumes a negative intent when one is not present
- Usually gives judgmental and non-specific criticism
- Often uses sarcasm to make a point
- Examples of Persecutor Behavior:
 - A manager does not ask staff for their input because "they never have anything useful to say."
 - Personalizing criticism: i.e., using terms like "bad attitude", "unprofessional", "paranoid", "stupid"
 - Over-generalizing criticism: i.e., "you never" or "you always".

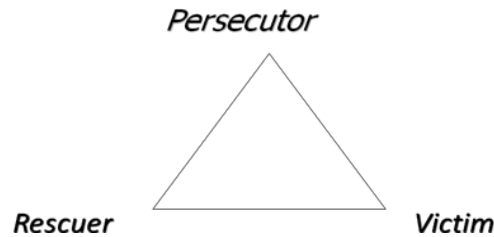
Victim

- Role assumed when a person discounts his/her ability and relies on someone else to "take care of them"
- Allows criticism that may not be warranted; affirms low self-esteem.
- Places responsibility for success or failure on someone else rather than solving own problems when they have ability to solve problems
- Examples of Victim Behavior:
 - Failing to confront another person whose behavior is creating problems.
 - Blindly blaming one's self when things do not work out as expected.
 - Discounting one's own ability to succeed.

Rescuer

- Role assumed when one discounts another's ability to handle their own problems or takes responsibility for doing for another when that person can has ability to solve own problems
- Affirms own ego need to help others
- Keeps others dependent to meet own needs
- Assumes higher, righteous purpose for actions
- Examples of Rescuer Behavior:
 - Giving suggestions without inquiring about other's ideas.
 - Negotiating compromises between Persecutors and Victims.

Implications of the Drama Triangle



- A. The Drama Triangle acts like a magnet; when one person enters the Triangle, others tend to join in dysfunctional behavior. For example, if a colleague complains about all the work she has to do (Victim behavior), we tend to agree by comparing how busy we are (Victim behavior) or giving her suggestions on how to deal with her workload.
- B. In top-down authority structures, supervisors and managers are often expected to take on dysfunctional roles: particularly Persecutor and Rescuer.
- C. People work most effectively together when they take responsibility for their own behavior and problems.
- D. Our expectations of others are usually met. Playing the Drama Triangle is self-sealing and self-fulfilling.
- E. Every Victim plays a part in his/her own victimization.
- F. Every Rescuer/Victim transaction ultimately turns into a Persecutor/Victim transaction.
- G. Playing the Triangle can have the following effects:
 - Causes miscommunication
 - Deters effective problem solving
 - Impedes commitment and performance
 - Lessens accountability
 - Creates organizational defensive routines
 - Discourages responsibility-taking
- H. You must see yourself in the Triangle in order to stay out of it! Recognize what governing values you are operating from and make the choice to step out of the Triangle.
- I. Recognize that problems usually stem from multiple people playing roles in the Triangle.

The Self-fulfilling role of the Persecutor

GOVERNING VALUES	BEHAVIORS/COMMUNICATION STYLE	CONSEQUENCES
<p>Others are not as competent, as trustworthy, or as motivated as I am.</p> <p>The actions of most people are driven by negative intent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Giving judgmental and non-specific criticism. ▪ Not asking stakeholders for their input because, "They never have anything useful to contribute". ▪ Personalizing criticism, i.e., using terms like "bad attitude", "unprofessional", or "paranoid". ▪ Over-generalizing criticism; i.e., "You never" or "You always". ▪ Warning or threatening others (often in anger) without first giving them an opportunity to discuss the problem. ▪ Giving directives and orders in non-emergencies. ▪ Micro-managing and usurping the chain of command. ▪ Focusing on failures and violations rather than successes. ▪ Setting up problem solving as "win-lose" struggles that must be won. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others become submissive and defensive • Others avoid dealing with the Persecutor • Others defer decisions to the Persecutor • Others feel demoralized, lack self esteem, and confidence • Limits discussable options • Others avoid taking responsibility for fear of being blamed and demeaned

Examples

A supervisor gives an assignment to an employee knowing that he likely does not have the skills and knowledge to do the work, and then criticizes the employee for unacceptable work.

An employee is seen by the supervisor doing something the supervisor deems as inappropriate but is not against the rules. The supervisor verbally criticizes the employee and threatens to tell the department head about the behavior.

A supervisor returns a report to a subordinate and tells her that it is unacceptable, to redo it. The subordinate redoes the report to the best of her ability and the supervisor tells her that the report is still unacceptable and that he will get someone else to do it.

A person asks his companion to give him feedback as to how well his presentation had gone at the staff meeting they just attended. The companion gave the person specific feedback about his presentation that included both positive and negative items. The person got angry and told his companion he was just jealous and if he didn't have anything good to say he could just shut up.

A wife asks her husband to do some laundry while she is out shopping. While his wife is gone, the husband washes two loads of clothes and dries one load. She returns and unloads the dryer and finds that he has put a couple of cotton things in the dryer which have shrunk. She tells her husband that he has ruined some clothes. She continues by saying that she asked him for a little help and all he did was mess things up. She says she doesn't want him touching the clothes again.

The Self-fulfilling role of the Rescuer

GOVERNING VALUES	BEHAVIORS/COMMUNICATION STYLE	CONSEQUENCES
<p>Others cannot solve problems without my help; it is my duty to solve problems for others.</p> <p>I can make you better and happier because I can solve your problems better than you.</p> <p>"Selfless service"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solving problems for others. Giving suggestions without inquiring about the other person's reasoning Negotiating compromises between Persecutors and Victims. Giving advice without being asked for help. Failing to delegate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others become dependent on the Rescuer (play the Victim role) Others avoid taking responsibility, deferring instead to the Rescuer The Victim blames (Persecutes) the Rescuer when the solution does not work effectively The Rescuer feels resentful and unappreciated

Examples

A 12-year old child complained to his mother that the grade he received was unfair. He would not take his complaint to the teacher, so the mother goes to the teacher and complains about the grade.

A counselor arranges transportation for a client who has been late for appointments because the client "couldn't find a regular ride and there are no buses in the area".

You loan a friend \$200 to pay off a bill that is overdue. The friend has a decent job and obviously leads "the good life". You loan her the money out of your savings account and the friend promises to pay you the first chance she gets.

An employee comes to you and asks for help with a work task. You respond by saying "I've done this many times before, it's easy for me to do it. I'll help you out and do it for you."

A teacher comes to her principal and complains that one of her students is disrupting her class and she can't deal with him. The principal, knowing this student's reputation from other classes, tells the teacher she will talk to the student again, set some limits, and suspend him if he doesn't turn it around.

The Self-fulfilling role of the Victim

GOVERNING VALUES	ACTION STRATEGIES	CONSEQUENCES
<p>Others are responsible for my situation.</p> <p>Due to factors such as risk, lack of authority, or inability, I cannot solve problems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failing to confront another person whose behavior is creating problems. Blindly blaming one's self when things do not work out as expected. Blaming others for one's own failures. Not trying to accomplish things on the assumption that the effort will result in failure. Abdicating responsibility, for example, telling a staff member to "handle a problem" without discussing how he or she proposes to deal with the problem. Acting helpless, for example, whining or complaining about "what they are doing to me" or responds to suggestions by saying "Yes, but..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others observe that you act incompetent and inadequate You avoid risks Others observe that you defer to them rather than taking responsibility Others observe that you refuse to take responsibility or that you hold yourself totally responsible when others share in that responsibility

Examples

You find yourself overwhelmed with work and take on an important new task assigned you by your supervisor even though you know you will have to work evenings and weekends to finish it.

A man has been married just a short time and finds himself deeply in debt because he and his new wife took a long, expensive honeymoon which his wife wanted. Then he rented an apartment that requires him to pay considerably more rent than he can afford because she says she would not be comfortable in anything less.

An employee comes to you complaining of the fact that he has a lot of distractions at home and cannot do all the work assigned to him. You agree to do the work until his home life straightens out.

Your supervisor hands you a report that you had turned in previously and tells you it is badly written and needs to be improved. You accept the report without knowing what is wrong with it.

You go to your fellow worker and share with him a personal problem which could destroy your marriage. He gives you advice to keep your mouth shut about things and let the situation blow over. You follow his advice even though you are not confident that it is the best thing to do.

Four days later you come home from work and your spouse has left a note telling you she wants a divorce and she has gone to Florida with a friend (and much of your money).

BEING HELPFUL and AVOIDING THE RESCUE TRIANGLE

TIPS FOR SUPERVISORS

Being helpful is the process of influencing others in a fashion that leads them to use their own ability, skill, or knowledge to solve their problems. Help also may be defined as providing an individual with needed resources when the individual is unable to achieve these needed resources because of insurmountable limitations.

The fundamental principle in helping is making it possible for the person in need, whether he or she be client, friend, child, student, employee, co-worker or patient, to achieve what is necessary to solve their problem in a way that does not diminish them. For those in the role of providing help, the following conditions seem consistent with avoiding the roles described by the Rescue Triangle:

1. The supervisor must be confident in his or her ability and aware of his or her areas of sensitivity. Being in a helping position to enhance one's self esteem or sense of worth makes a person vulnerable to the rescuer, persecutor, or victim role. Effective helpers feel competent in their skills and are motivated to foster competence in others.
2. Expect the best from your employees. This does not mean that you must have unrealistic expectations about how well things are going to go, but it does mean that you expect your employees to have the ability, *should they choose*, to deal with their own problems. Research studies have proven that the self-fulfilling prophecy is true-- we often get what we expect, good or bad.
3. The supervisor must be congruent. There must be consistency in what one says and does. This means that the supervisor must act in accordance with his or her espoused beliefs, values and principles. Being congruent is essential if you are to be credible and develop authentic, non-role relationships.
4. Clarification of consequences and imposition of consequences when the employee's behavior warrants it are essential to reinforce the belief that the employee must be responsible for his or her behavior. The consequences should be known beforehand and be reasonable for the situation.
5. Accept no excuses for failure; rather, focus on evaluating what happened and explore with the employee what could have been done differently to be successful. Accepting excuses for failure, no matter how well articulated or persuasive the excuse may be, discounts the employee's ability to act more responsibly.

6. Do not do things you feel pressured to do for employees that they can do for themselves. (For example, you do something for the employee because you feel if you don't take action the employee will fail.) Ask yourself if you have done all you can to enable the employee to take appropriate action.
7. When an employee fails to carry out their responsibilities you should confront the failure without feeling they have let you down. Only the employee is responsible for the actual behavior and is the victim of their own doing. You should not contribute to the victim role by angry recriminations (Persecution) or feeling sorry for the employee.
8. Support any effort on the employee's part to be more responsible and effective. Appreciate the difficulty of change and the scary feelings often associated with change. For some, simple achievements such as taking full responsibility for a task or project represent a major effort to overcome self-doubt.
9. Verbally and emotionally support any effort on the employee's part to take responsible action if the employee has the necessary skill, knowledge, and understanding to take the action in the first place.

Given the suggestions above, the following actions are considered helpful if done in the proper context:

1. Sharing relevant information.
2. Helping employee develop alternative actions to solve a problem.
3. Helping employee explore the consequences of possible actions.
4. Supporting responsible employee choices even though the choices might not be choices you would make.
5. Open sharing of thoughts and feelings regarding the employee. This includes giving the employee honest feedback regarding his or her behavior.
6. Giving the employee encouragement and support to try new behaviors.
7. Modeling responsible behavior, positive expectations, and honesty.

Actions that diminish strength of employees:

1. Doing things for the employees they can do for themselves.
2. Doing things for the employee because the employee does not know how to do something. Instead, train the employee or provide other resources to help the employee learn how to do it by themselves.
3. Being critical of a person's failure rather than helping him or her analyze the failure and identify ways he or she can be more successful the next time.
4. Giving advice or telling the employee what to do (as opposed to sharing information and helping the employee to define alternative courses of action).
5. Giving employee instructions to do something he or she does not have the skills, experience, or knowledge to accomplish or failing to help the employee evaluate his or her preparedness to take an action or complete a task.
6. Providing employees information they should have acquired themselves because it is easier to do it that way.

Staying out of the Drama Triangle

Directions: *Identify the Drama Triangle role the speaker is taking for each statement below. Write out exactly what you would say to respond to keep out of the Drama Triangle using an active listening response.*

1. Your subordinate says to you, "I am so tired of writing reports; that's all I ever do. What a bore this job is!"
2. Your employee tells you "you sure have an old -fashioned way of dealing with people and I think it puts people down!"
3. At one time your employee had been very dependable and hard working. Recently, his performance has been unsatisfactory. You set up a meeting to discuss his performance. He begins the meeting by saying, "these new employees working for me are a real pain. They don't know what they are doing. I know I could do a better job if we could just hire better employees."
4. At lunch, your employee says to you, "I just can't make ends meet in this job anymore. I just don't get paid enough in this job." (The employee's job performance has been sound.)
5. Your subordinate, Ann, supervises Fred. Ann says, "Next week I will be conducting Fred's performance review. He has been here for three years and his performance has only gotten worse. He misses more and more work. What should I tell him?"
6. A citizen calls you to complain about one of your employees. The citizen says "I talked to Fred and he was extremely short and rude with me. He said that you are his boss but that you would give me the same non- answer Fred did! I am a taxpayer and deserve an answer!"

AVOIDING THE TRIANGLE CASE STUDIES

Read the following situations and develop a response that avoids the roles of the triangle. As the supervisor, what specifically would you do and say.

1. Glenda Grimes is a 56 year old employee who has always done acceptable work and is very reliable. She is a nervous person who is often tentative in relating to people. She has mostly worked by herself, but now has a new coworker. One day she approaches you and says that she is having a very difficult time getting along with the new girl in the office who is young, outgoing and pretty. Glenda says that the girl talks a lot and disturbs her concentration and often asks Glenda questions about her life which bothers her a great deal. She wants you to have a talk with the new girl and tell her not to ask such personal questions and talk less while she works.
2. Harry Cotton, is an employee who has 20 years of work experience. You have supervised him for the last two years and know that he is a hard worker and helps out his co-workers whenever he is asked. He comes to you asking you to talk to the manager about relieving him of an important assignment because he is overburdened at the time and says he is experiencing stress symptoms, headaches, and some minor chest pains and diarrhea. The manager had given Harry the assignment directly and had informed you after the fact.
3. Your administrative specialist had been complaining that she had too much work to do. Despite her complaints her work was uniformly of high quality. Consequently, you have made every effort to hold back work assignments and take on extra work yourself to ease her problem. During the last two weeks you have noticed that she now leaves on time every day, takes her full breaks and spends a considerable amount of time talking to people who come into the office and to people who call her on the phone. Now she no longer complains about the amount of work she has to do, continues to do very high quality work and takes initiative in handling office problems often anticipating the need to do something that you failed to do or had forgotten to do. You often leave work late in order to complete everything that needs to get done.
4. Your 10 year old daughter asks you to talk with her math teacher because the teacher never calls on her in class and has criticized her in front of the whole class just for talking to the boy in front of her. She says the only reason she had talked to the boy in the first place was that she did not know the assignment the teacher had just given them. She says she is afraid she is going to lose her good grade because the teacher marks you down for class participation and class behavior.

5. Jennifer Gilder is a new employee who came to your department with excellent credentials. She has two years' experience in her work and has a good educational background. Each time you give her an assignment, she asks questions about how to do the simple things that you believe she should know how to do. When she is working she asks that you check her work at frequent intervals so that she doesn't make a mistake. You hear from a few colleagues that she was an abused child and it is very likely that she lives with an abusive husband. She appears to feel inadequate and is very reluctant to say anything. She will do anything you ask her to do and normally she does a good job.
6. Joyce Jones, an employee who reports to you, has been late 5 times in the last few months. You have talked to her and each time she says she is sorry but she has been having some personal problems that caused her to be late. You have told her that if she is late again you will issue a written warning. While she is at work, she is an excellent worker and is as productive as anyone you have. You hear from one of the supervisors in another department that Joyce is having marital difficulty in that her husband is an alcoholic and often abuses her and gives her no help in caring for their 4 year old child. Joyce comes in 45 minutes late this morning and did not call in.
7. Carl Jones, a supervisor who reports to you, comes to you with a project proposal which he is having trouble writing. He says he is very frustrated and just doesn't have the knowledge to get it right. Furthermore, he doesn't want to risk it being a poor proposal. He asks you to finish the project proposal for him. Carl has always been a top performer, but he is rarely responsible for writing project proposals.
8. Marvin Cruise, one of your employees, has been coming to work late, keeping more to himself and showing signs of depression. Four months ago his wife died in an auto accident. You called him in to give him a major assignment because all of your other staff members are busy. You know he has all the knowledge and skills to complete the task. There is a fairly tight deadline but the project is doable in the time allowed. When you call him in and describe the assignment, Marvin says, he is sorry but he just doesn't think he can do the task and he thinks you know why. He says he will do anything else that doesn't require him to concentrate or think about it.

**Fundamental Supervisory Practices
Communication Reflection Questions**

What insights do you have from the last two sessions on how communication, the ladder of inference and active listening impact your role as a supervisor?

What are you learning about your preferred role in the drama triangle?

What triggers can pull you into the Drama Triangle?

What strategies can you use to get out of the Drama Triangle?

What are you learning about your communication patterns?

How will the skills you learned over the last 2 sessions help you as a supervisor?

Performance Conversation Planning Worksheet

My goals for this performance conversation are:

Possible “triggers” to suck me into the Drama Triangle:

(Knowing this in advance can help you remember to take a pause, and breathe, before responding.)

“IDEAL Performance Conversation Steps”

<p>1. Identify what happened to cause the meeting and check for agreement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write out your opening statement to specifically describe the behavior that caused the conversation.
<p>2. Describe the impact of the problem and listen to the employee’s perspective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write out an “I message” to explain how the behavior affects productivity, customer service, work group relationships, etc. and describe the performance standard that is not being met. What active listening skills will you use to respond to the employee?
<p>3. Explore possible solutions to the problem and listen to employee concerns and ideas.</p>
<p>4. Agree on a plan of action to improve performance including a time to follow-up.</p>
<p>5. Learn from the Performance Discussion</p>