

The Adventures of Max Mediator



**Companies and institutions are
plagued with internal politics...**

A Newport and Wildman Presentation

Presenter

Tony Newport

Companies and institutions are plagued with internal politics...

If helpers don't know what's in the shadows, they are naïve.

If they believe that shadow-side realities win out more often than not, they are cynical.

Helpers should be neither naïve nor cynical.

Rather they should pursue a course of upbeat realism.

Gerald Egan, *The Skilled Helper*. 5th ed 1994

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On The Shadow Side

Behavioural traits of difficult people

Quick to get on the defensive

- **Quick to get on the offensive**

Generally unwilling to accept responsibility

- **Good at blaming others**

Rarely shows empathy for opposing points of view

- **Frequently plays the victim**

Knows how to enlist powerful support

Plays for time and frequently procrastinates

On The Naive Side

Behavioural traits of reasonable people

Quick to identify common ground

- **Rarely attacks**

Willing to look at solutions

- **Always prepared to share their load of responsibility**

Slow to blame

- **Good at accommodating**

Willing to empathise and listen

- **Uses powerful support as a last resort**

Gives people time to sort themselves out

A Dangerous Synchronicity

Employees who play for time and frequently procrastinate

Managers, Supervisors and Colleagues who give people time to sort themselves out

Employees who exhibit difficult behaviours create real pressure on reasonable people

In the workplace this provokes two classic responses



Avoidance



and



Accommodation

The Consequences

Angry and frustrated co-workers

A dysfunctional team



A general lack of respect for the chain of command

- **Staff off on work stress**

- **Staff taking sides**

Continued poor work performance

- **Declining morale**

Intensifying conflict incidents

- **Bullying and harassment**

The Angst

So...

Who You Gunna
Call?

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Max Mediator

The problem in a nutshell

Difficult people who play for time and frequently procrastinate

Matched with reasonable people who give people time to sort themselves out

Matched with a workplace plagued with internal politics

Public sector workplaces head the long list of workplaces where this is common

Private sector workplaces are not immune

On The Upbeat Side

Be Neither Naïve

Max Mediator will save you!

Nor Cynical

Let's mediate to protect our backside.

Be Realistic and Upbeat

Mediation could work.

Let's look at all options.

Then let's make the best decision.

Upbeat Realism and Mediation

The Fundamentals

Mediation could work. Let's look at all options. Then let's make the best decision.

1. Conceive of a pathway to mediation that embraces all difficult options if that is what is required
2. Obtain commitment from all key stakeholders **BEFORE** you commence your conflict management intervention

Conceive of a Pathway To Mediation



That Embraces All of the Difficult Options

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MEDIATION



Embracing the difficult options turns mediation on its head

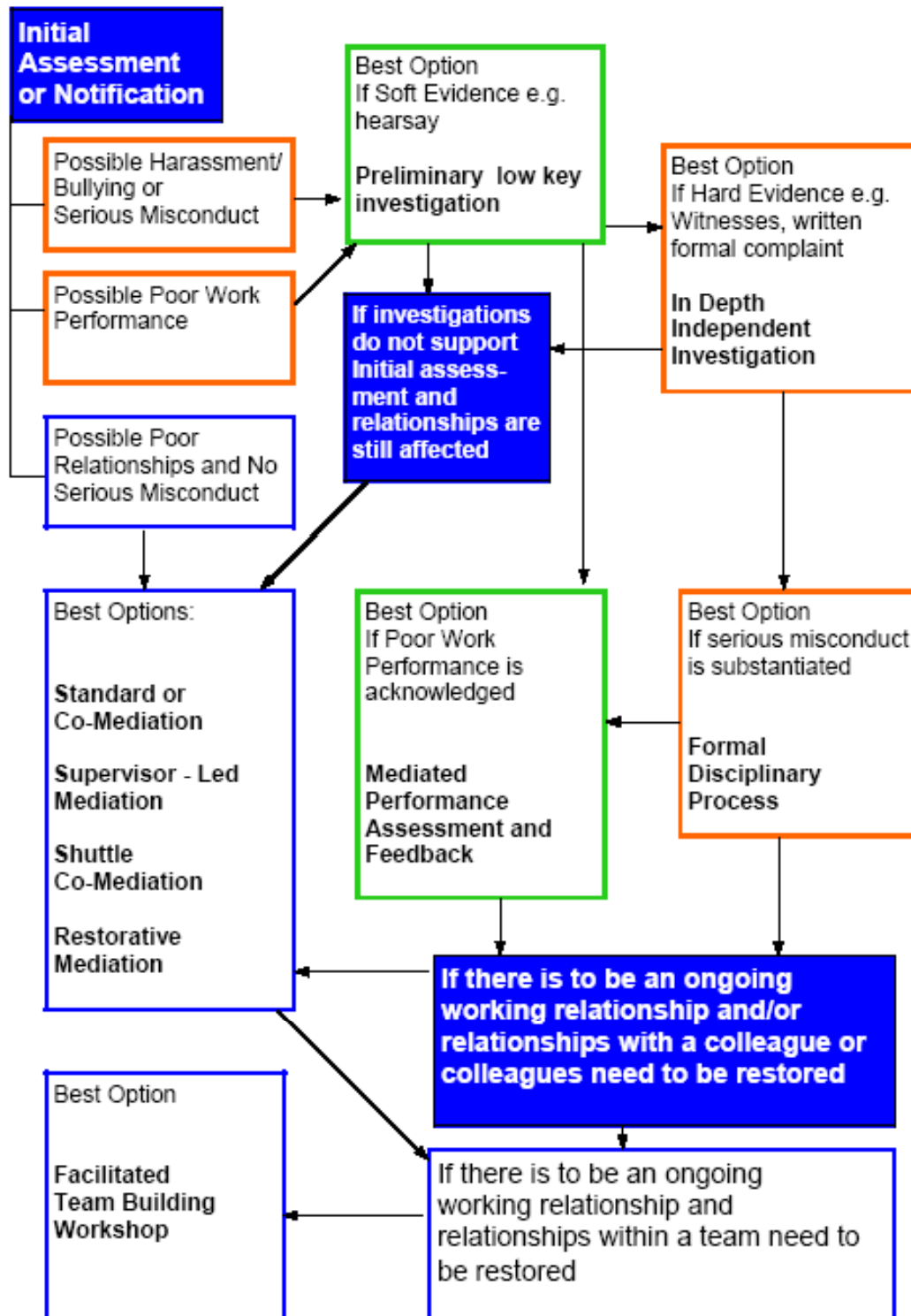
Mostly we are being asked to mediate to avoid difficult options such as investigation, discipline etc

We are now saying in many cases in the workplace if you are not prepared to embrace the difficult options first mediation will fail

Let's look at our two case studies

Participants are invited to share their own experiences

Work Place Conflict Resolution - Mediation Pathway



The Importance of Obtaining Commitment



If you are not at the table ...

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The Importance of Obtaining Commitment



... you are part of the meal

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Those Who Are Not Committed



Make Excellent Saboteurs!

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A Basic Conflict Management Intervention (CMI)



Assess

Identify Strategies

Obtain Commitment

Implement Strategies

Acknowledge Goals &
Achievements



A Basic CMI Conflict Management Intervention

Assessment

Speak with all key
stakeholders separately

Expand inquiry if
necessary



A Basic CMI

Conflict Management Intervention

Identify Strategies
(part one)

Processes and Tools



Processes:

mediation, investigation, discipline,
conciliation, facilitation

Tools:

standard mediation, supervisor-led
mediation, co-mediation, mediated
performance assessment and feedback,
multi party mediation, distance
mediation, facilitated team building

Some Useful Tools



Know Where You Stand – see handout

In many conflicts that result in mediation the chain of command has been subverted.

Even though all workplaces have detailed grievance processes this is one fundamental that frequently gets ignored.

This handout forms part of almost every agreement that gets drafted.

Voluntary boards and committees are often in breach of this one.

Some Useful Tools



Mediated Performance Assessment and Feedback

In many conflicts poor performance is at the heart of the conflict

For supervisors and team members engaged in the accommodation – avoidance dance this often results in destructive REACTIVE relationships

This tool is designed to teach supervisors how to support people to be responsible

This tool is designed to build PROACTIVE and constructive relationships

Please see handout for more information

Some Useful Tools



Low Key Investigation

When participants are reluctant to mediate it is vital that you are prepared to investigate their workplace behaviours.

This does not have to be intrusive.

We have designed a progressive questionnaire for allegations or suspicions of bullying and harassment type behaviours and for poor work performance.

Please find handouts extracted from our Workplace Conflict Management Services document

The full document is available for those who wish to leave their email address.

A Basic CMI

Conflict Management Intervention

Identify Strategies
(part two)

Support and Support
Persons



Support:

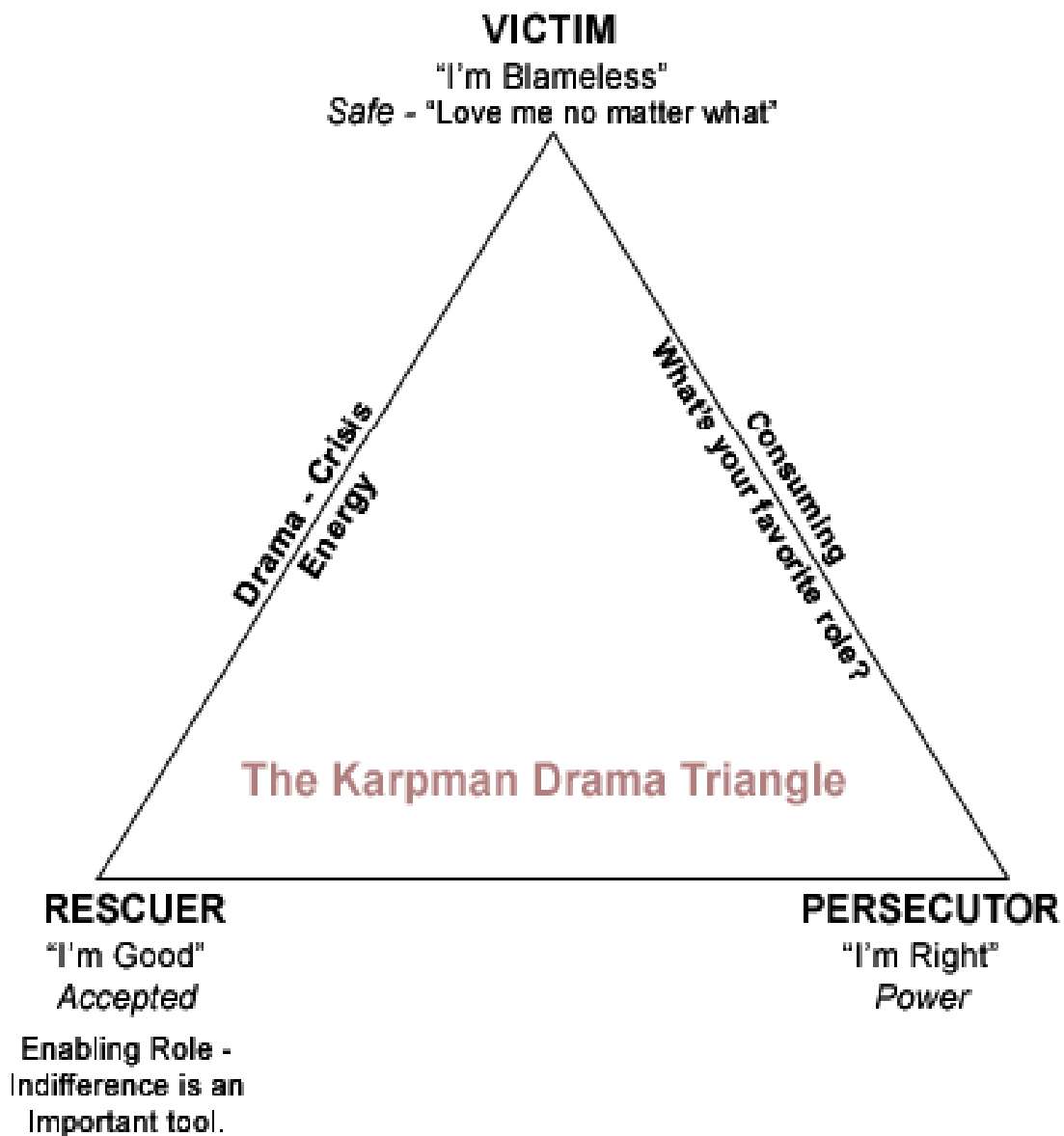
coaching and mentoring, counselling,
debriefing, vocational assessment,
rehabilitation

Support persons:

unions, HR, family, doctors, lawyers,
counsellors, rehab coordinators, friends
and colleagues

The Importance of Support

Understanding Our Role

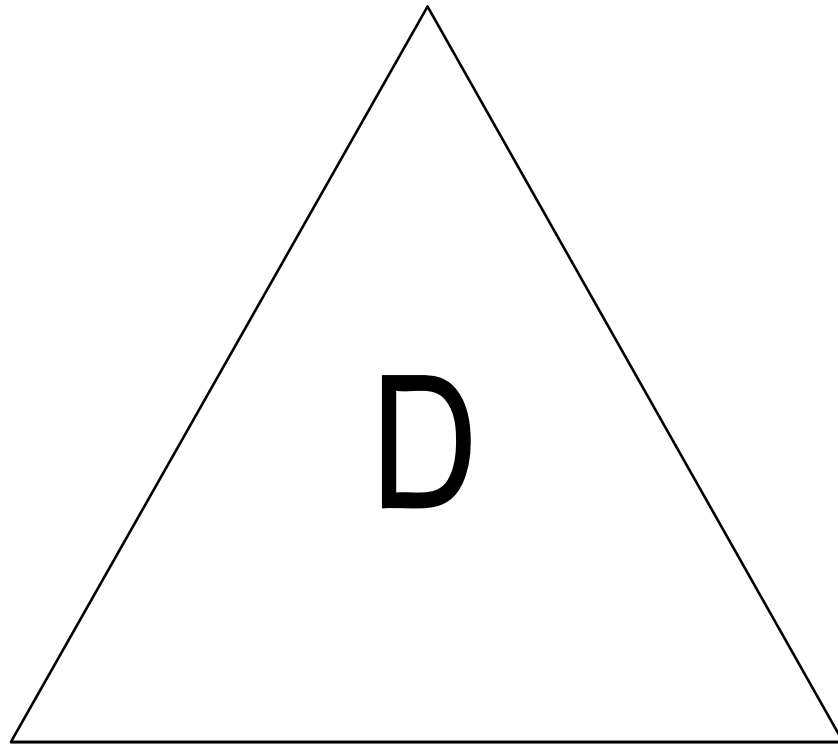


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The Supervisor's Dilemma

Adapted From Karpman

Alleged Victim Employee



Supervisor
Rescuer

Alleged Persecutor
Employee

The Dilemma?

Both employees want the supervisor to support **them**

The Importance of Support

In mediation most support people start off as rescuers including the mediator.



We have to be very careful of two critical behaviours involved in rescuing:

Enabling – basically justifying the victim's role by taking responsibility for things they could do for themselves

Advocating – a more sophisticated form of enabling where we can be manipulated into firing the victim's bullets

We need all rescuers at the same table

A Basic CMI

Conflict Management Intervention

(continued)

Obtain Commitment

WCS:

Appoint a Workplace
Conflict Supervisor



WCT

Organise a Workplace Conflict
Management Team that includes:

- Chain of Command
- HR
- Unions and other support persons

A Basic CMI Conflict Management Intervention

Implement Strategies

Monitor progress
Adapt if necessary

Acknowledge Goals and Achievements

Sign completed agreements
Resume normal supervision

Flexibility

In conflict management linear progress often means you are heading for a very steep cliff

We need to think and act more flexibly

Resolve is getting back up after falling over

Fear is being afraid of falling over in the first place

Force is reducing a pathway to walking the plank

Supporting People to be Responsible

You won't always say
and do the right thing.
That's impossible



If you can conceive of
a pathway to resolving a conflict

Then you can conceive of a strategy
to support people to be responsible.

That's good enough!

The Real World

“The real world is full of paradox and mystery and strangeness and can't be accounted for in 'how-to-books'”

Johnnie Moore

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This is how it is

People are funny

and

Relationships are
messy

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Workplace Conflict Management Services

