

A New Metaphor for Leadership and some TA thinking.

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When you think of leadership, do you have someone who automatically springs to mind? Are they from stories; history or your own experience? Inevitably, many of us will visualise popular heroic figures that have shown courage, determination of will and expounded heroic effort in their achievements. Many of us will also recall our own high point experience of being led and realise that these figures can be quite different, perhaps not heroic in a conventional sense but creating the right space, time and conditions for us to thrive and succeed. In my own experience this was someone who showed a great belief in my ability, probably more than I did at the time, and who gently nurtured me as an emerging 'talent' in the organisation. When the time came for him and I to move on the loss of this relationship was quite profound to me. We only used to meet every 2 weeks but we stood side by side in overcoming many hurdles and in coping with a fast developing business. He certainly did not act like the classic hero, at times of adversity he did not rescue me but supported and encouraged me in my efforts to deal with the issues we faced. In many cases I stood in front of him not behind, and through this I grew in confidence and ability.

The final decision was, potentially, always his. His organisational power was always and explicitly greater than mine but he never encroached on my team and held firm boundaries between my responsibilities and his.

Working now as an organisational change and development consultant for my own company [Summerhouses: people and development] I realise just how lucky I was. Some people will never encounter such a leader in their entire working lives. His leadership model was not a simple heroic one, but a more complex and flexible one. In TA thinking we can see that the fundamental difference was that his position was clearly I'm OK/ Your OK. A heroic leader may be limited to an I'm OK/ You're Not OK position with a resultant need to continually rescue me and eventually [when, disempowered, I give up] drop me from a great height. Unfortunately the latter model, despite the prevalence of leadership development, assessments and skills training, seems to still be much more common in the UK at least.

As Jackie Orme, the Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development asked in a speech at the Ceridian Executive Forum in March 2009: *"Are we too wedded to a model of heroic leadership, with someone who leads from the front, has all the answers, and doesn't typically look for much dissent from the organisation?"*

In following the often meandering path of my own development I have discovered TA as providing valuable insight into the organisations that we work with. I have also discovered Appreciative Inquiry and Solutions Focus as different but complementary practical approaches and philosophies that can bring significant benefit to my work and consequently to the organisations and individuals that I work with. When the psychological framework of TA and these approaches [which have roots in Positive Psychology and Brief Therapy respectively] intertwine and support each other it feels like an endorsement of my own choices for personal development.

Such is certainly the case with Solutions Focus; I have just completed the SF Professional Certificate with Mark McKergow and Jenny Clarke of SF Work: the centre

for solutions focus at work. This was an excellent learning experience and has given me entrance to the EDGe group of Solutions Focus consultants who meet regularly for development. This community of support; learning and intellectual nourishment is a very similar experience to my meetings with the Cumbria TA group run by Annie Murray. It was at one of these EDGe meetings that Mark McKergow introduced his new metaphor for leadership 'Leader as Host, Host as Leader'ⁱ. This was a very powerful experience for me, at once seeming blindingly obvious [and yet no-one has really explored it before] and a revelation. Also my emotional response to the metaphor was so strong that I was completely engaged by it. My own best experience model as described above was so much closer to the metaphor of host than to the metaphor of hero.

Mark also spoke about the servant leader metaphor as introduced by Robert Greenleafⁱⁱ and now gaining popularity, apparently in the wake of the high profile leadership failures in the financial sector that resulted in the 'credit crunch'. As Mark states, this has been a 'useful counterblast' to the heroic model but has associated problems. In my own case my 'good' leader was always in control, his manner of exercising that control was excellent but for me 'servant leader' does not describe it. The article is available at [LINK](#) and I urge you to read it fully to understand the distinction between the 3 metaphors.

Travelling home on the train, reading the article fully, I began to explore the metaphor and found myself thinking of TA concepts such as the OK Corral and the drama/ winners triangle. In many ways the change of position [as in life position] describes the change from hero to servant or host. This is fundamental and seems to be a significant issue when we examine those current leadership failures. The I'm OK/ Your OK position is compatible with the win/win value espoused by Stephen Coveyⁱⁱⁱ and by many others in the literature on leadership and it is also possible to see that the 'position' determines the 'attitude' i.e. that I'm OK/ Your OK leads us to hold win/win values. For some time I assumed that I'm OK/ Your OK and win/win were the same but I have moderated that view to be that they are not the same, one is a position the other a value, but that they are clearly linked. My 'model' leader worked from an I'm OK/ Your OK position **and** held the win/win value. The problem I have with the servant leader metaphor is that there are elements of deliberate lose/win [and in some respects I'm not OK/ your OK and I'm not 'worthy'] implied by it. I realise this may well be my own take on it but I also know this has been an issue for others coming to terms with the radical shift of hero to servant leader. We seem to go from self interest to self denial in one stroke. Could it be that the host metaphor is the one that truly conveys the ideas of I'm OK/ Your OK and win/win? The host is responsible for the event and visitors/ guests and is rewarded in some way and also shares the enjoyment of the experience.

Next I began to consider the drama and winners triangles. It was the association of rescuing with the hero metaphor that started this train of thought. The hero rescues, which can sometimes be necessary, and could be said to persecute too, in an unrelenting push for victory – demanding greater and greater effort from the followers. It is possible to be a hero without followers but unlikely, and in some respects we can see that the hero needs victims [the wronged/ dispossessed/ distressed/ helpless] as followers. I played at first with the idea of joined drama triangles to depict a recent conflict situation we had dealt with i.e. 2 competing and conflicting teams within an organisation where the 2 team leaders and their teams were at loggerheads. From the victims position our hero is their persecutor and our adversary is our persecutor, and their hero see fig 1.

I have recently qualified as a mediator and this had some real resonance with TA applied to conflict resolution that I was exploring. The hero thrives in a conflict and usually has followers in need of rescuing. The conflict escalates and the possible outcomes are win/lose/ or lose/win or even lose/lose. The position taken is I'm OK/ You're not OK on each side and within each side from the point of view of the rescuer or persecutor.

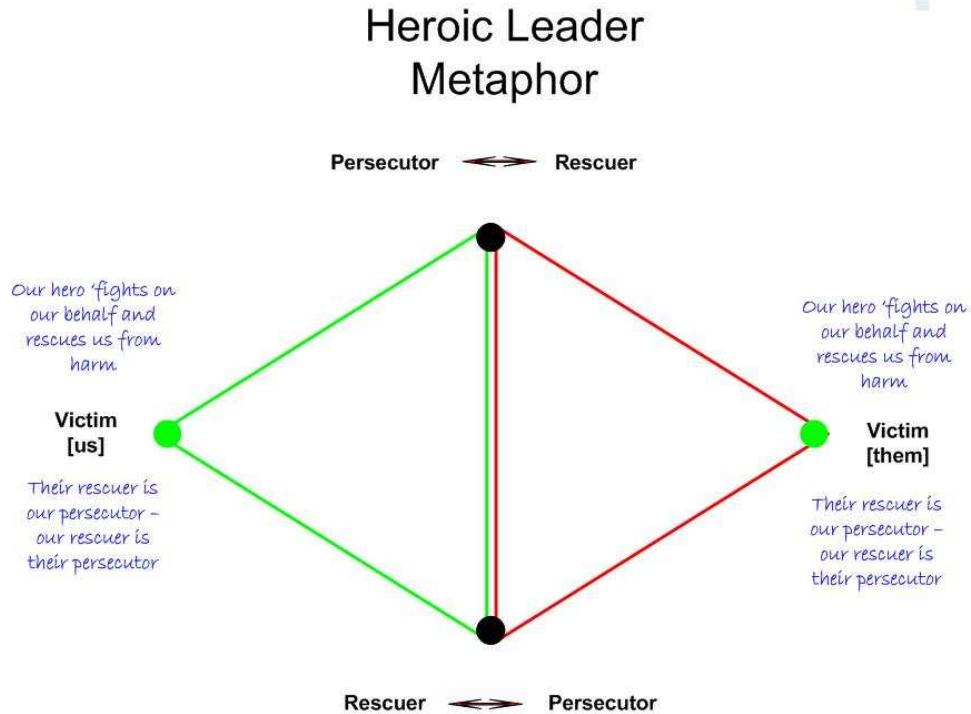


Figure I : heroic leader in conflict

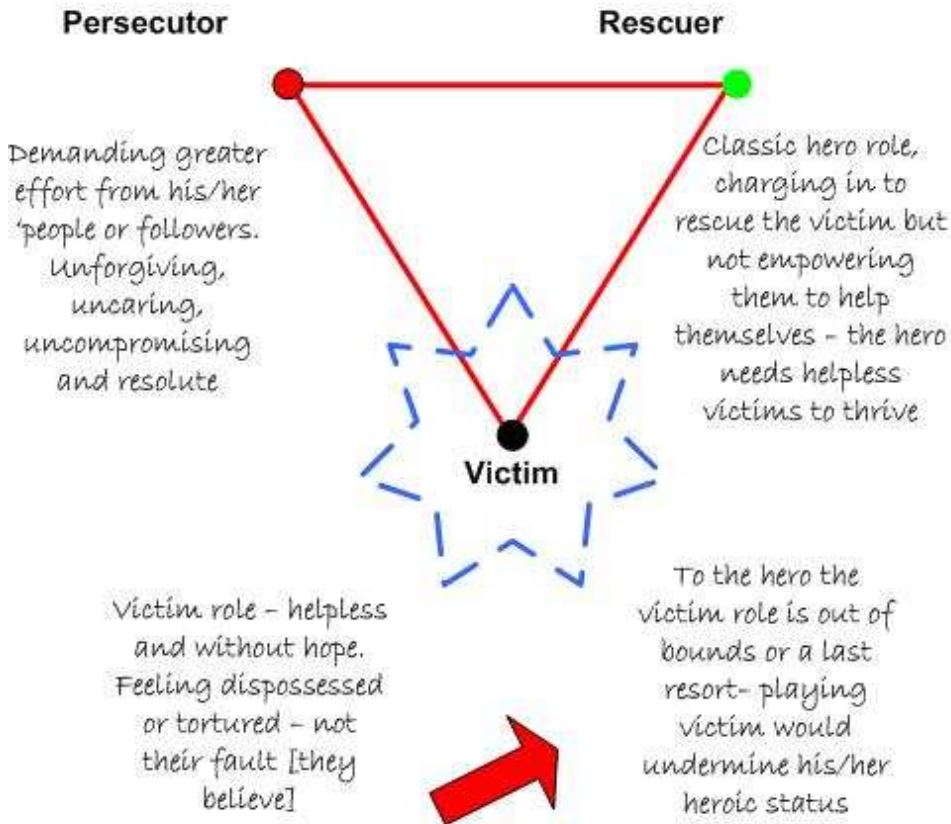
Consider the shift now from drama to winner's triangle – our leader can now be assertive and caring and we can admit our vulnerability rather than play victim. Relate this to the host metaphor and something very interesting happens. Assertive and caring are excellent qualities for a host, what is more the host is able to admit vulnerability whereas this is much harder for the hero [the hero can become victim in certain circumstances but might give up the hero role in doing so]. The shift is complete and very well described by the transition from drama to winners triangles.

Instead of only looking at conflict this lead me to look at leadership behaviours. Could this new metaphor combine elegantly with the drama and winners triangles to provide a profound model for working with individuals on leadership?

Fig 2 reflects my current thinking on this and Mark McKergow and I have had several conversations about it including one in conference with Annie Murray to explore the TA model further.

I have always found that the drama to winners triangle model has great resonance with people – it frequently results in those 'ah yes' moments when people see it, apparently throwing light on their own or others behaviours. The concept of a 'switch' often gives a further 'ah yes' as people reflect on real situations where that appears to have happened. For instance in some cases, we, acting as rescuer, may be switched by the victim into the position of persecutor or even into the position of victim. The switch in those instances is **done** to us, but what about our own ability to 'switch' or transition from these positions?

Heroic Leader Metaphor [Karpman - drama triangle]



Leader as Host Metaphor [Acey Choy - winners triangle]

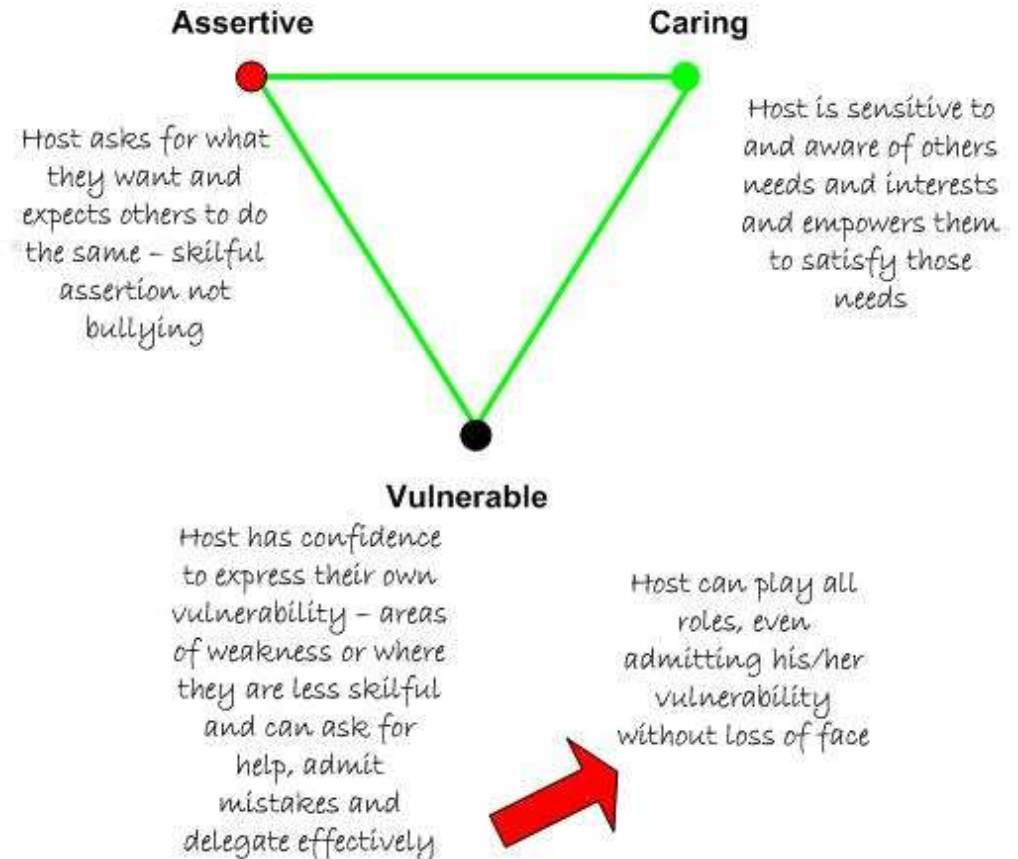


Figure 2: Hero to Host – Drama to Winners Triangle

In our leadership work at Summerhouses, we consider the need for qualities of

- awareness
- clarity
- flexibility
- authenticity

All essential for a good host and at least awareness and flexibility seeming to be important in the servant leader metaphor too.

In this context **awareness** of people's needs and the **flexibility** of style and approach to respond to those needs is an essential quality for our servant and host leaders but probably less so of our hero leader who is instead seen as resolute; single-minded and determined.

In his article Mark refers to flexibility as being an essential attribute for the host and it is the concept of flexibility that for me makes the metaphor come alive. As a host [and to some degree as a servant leader but with the attendant difficulties of association] we are able to move from caring to assertive as the situation demands. This has clear links with Ken Blanchard's situational leadership^v – the leader/manager is sometimes directing, sometimes coaching and supporting or delegating – as the situation demands [requiring awareness]. The host is similarly sometimes directing the proceedings and at other times stepping back to allow others to take a full part. This is when the essential difference occurred to me. The host metaphor allows much greater **movement**, greater flexibility of action and response than either of the other 2 metaphors.

Tim Gallwey^v uses the concept of **mobility** in his 'The Inner Game of Work' describing it as:

Mobility: *The capability to move or be moved. Applied to us it means the ability to move or adapt, change or be changed. It also means the ability to reach ones objectives in a fulfilling manner to reach goals at the right time and in a way we feel good about. Therefore, mobility is not only change but fulfilment and harmony with ones progress.*

Movement, self induced, on the positions of the winners triangle is available to the host, less so to either servant or hero. This led me to consider 3 simple models of the metaphors and how that movement might be expressed. This is shown as my final diagram [yes I am a visual learner] figure 3. Mark describes this movement and flexibility in his article by referring to four balances between apparent opposites where the host must find the 'right point of balance in their role' i.e. by shifting along the spectrum until the balance is achieved.

Something that also stood out for me in Marks article was the Arabic proverb – 'the host is first and last'. This can be taken to describe the sequential steps of issuing invitations preparing, welcoming through to saying goodbye at the end. Perhaps we can also stretch it now to describe the mobility that the host has to lead from the front or enable from the back. The movement of shifting from the ineffective positions of the drama triangle to be assertive and caring and perhaps vulnerable too, using all points of the winners triangle flexibly and effectively.

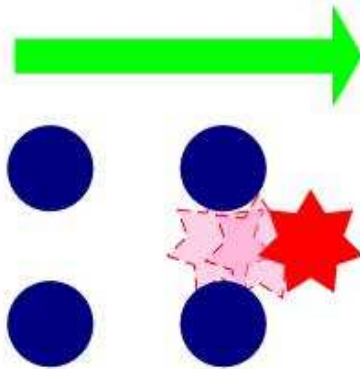
All of this feels like very rich territory indeed. I find it very exciting and the aim of this article is to stimulate some excitement and debate in the IDTA about the new metaphor and the TA frame that it seems to sit so comfortably in. can we further describe the movement required for good leadership and where might other aspects of TA give insight?

I am aware that I am limited in my knowledge being a relative TA newcomer and I invite you to tell me what you think. Mark is still developing the new metaphor and I feel it will catch on quickly and elegantly answer the current need for a new leadership metaphor that is more relevant to our times.

I invite you to send any comments and views to: philaspden@summer-houses.eu

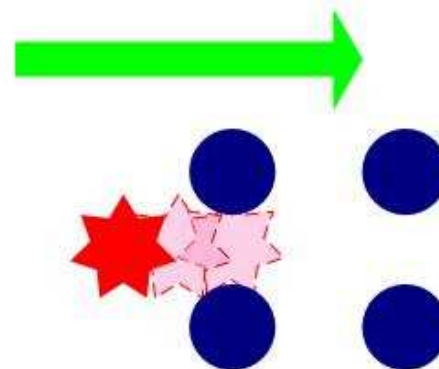
3 Leadership Metaphors

1. Hero



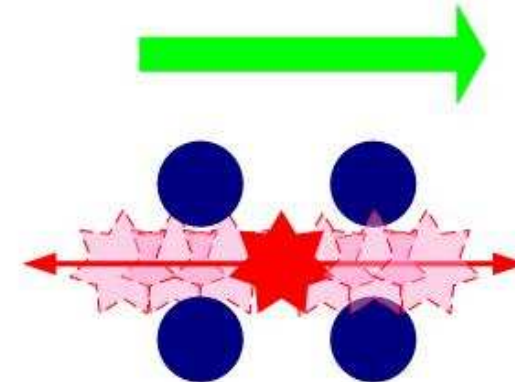
Leads from the front, directive, describes the vision and TELLS people how to achieve it. Energy is used to PULL others in a command and control style. The style feels quite fixed as the hero usually needs followers but could adopt the position of standing square with his/her followers.

2. Servant



Reverses the hero position, enables and empowers others, stands back and lets them define the vision. Energy is used more to PUSH the others through support and encouragement. The style feels fixed as the metaphor is lost if the leader moves position too far and becomes directive. When trust is developed a more central role may emerge.

3. Host



Is in the centre of things, invites; prepares; monitors and adjusts. Energy is used to engage and organise. Host is less fixed in position and can use a range of leadership styles WITHOUT losing the metaphor. The host has mobility and is in many senses both 'first and last'.

Figure 3 – 3 leadership metaphors

References

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