



Upside-Down Triangle

Understanding the Consent Theory of Power

By themselves, rulers cannot collect taxes, enforce repressive laws and regulations, keep trains running on time, prepare national budgets, direct traffic, manage ports, print money, repair roads, keep markets supplied with food, make steel, build rockets, train the police and army, issue postage stamps or even milk a cow. People provide these services to the ruler though a variety of organizations and institutions. If people would stop providing these skills, the ruler could not rule.

- Gene Sharp • The Politics of Nonviolent Action

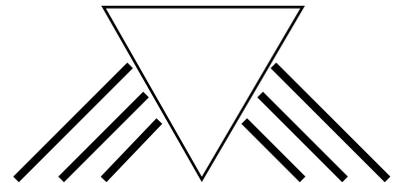
1. Explain the Concept

Traditional power is thought of as a pyramid – people at the top order those below them. Those people can order those below them, and so forth. The President in a CEO orders their managers, their managers in turn make orders to the workers, all the way down to the janitors, secretaries, and other blue collar workers.

But that's not a grassroots way of viewing power. The grassroots way views power as flowing upwards. And there's the model for that, the upside-down triangle.

2. Draw the Model

Draw the model for people, first the upside-down triangle. Then note that it's unstable, it needs *pillars of support* to keep it upright. Get an example and work it. For example, the CEO of a corporation is dependent on their managers, but other *pillars of support* are the company's stockholders, the secretary who keeps track of his schedule, the tech workers who keep their cell phone and e-mail functioning, writers who do not investigate their human rights violations, etc.



3. Allow people to use the model

Give people a few minutes to work the upside-down triangle using their issue. At this stage, people may not be able to identify actual *people or groups of people* and only concepts (like fear) or vague, undefinable groups (like “the general public”).

4. Go Deeper

Review what they have so far. Since people learn through successive approximations – getting more precise each time – now challenge them to tighten up and get more precise. Invite them to take pillar of support and explore it as its own upside-down triangle.

For example, take the writers about the company. They, in turn, are supported to keep the company functioning by their weak union, their readers by not demanding more research, etc.

5. Debrief and apply to their own situations

This is a *strategy* tool because, by doing it repetitively through multiple iterations, you can identify what pillars of support do you have access to or an ability to move. That suggests tactics and odd coalitions that can help you ultimately win.

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