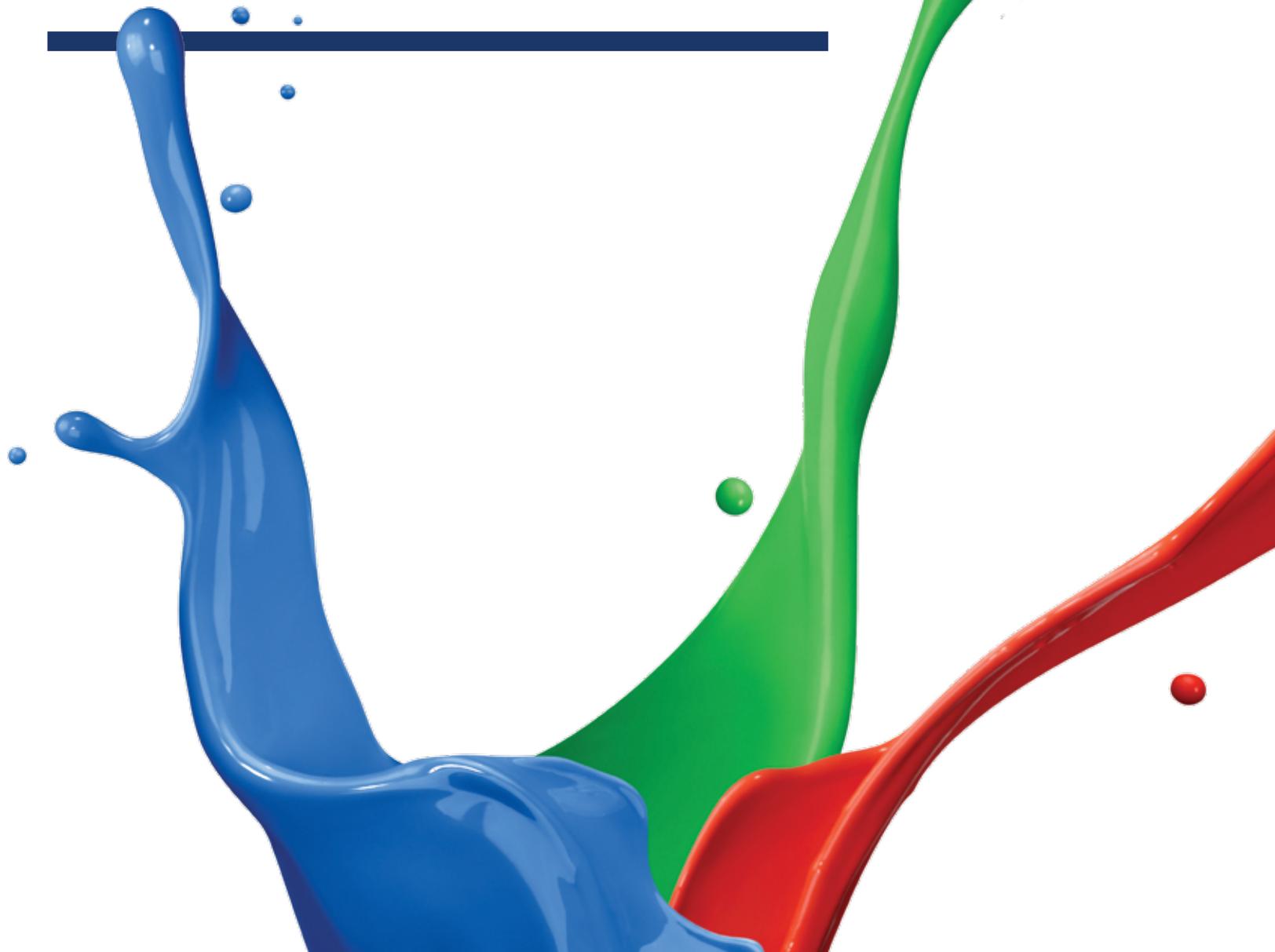


The **SPACE** coaching model: an integrative tool for coach therapists



Counsellor and coach **Rachel Weiss**, along with **Nick Edgerton** and **Professor Stephen Palmer**, explain the origins and methodology of the SPACE model, and show how it provides coach-counsellors and integrated practitioners with a holistic, integrative framework for working with clients.

In 2010, as an accredited counsellor at Rowan Consultancy, I was asked to provide coaching to one of Rowan's organisational customers. Wanting some training in coaching, I chose the certificate in coaching at the Centre for Coaching in London, since the tutors were also qualified therapists. The course introduced me to the GROW¹ coaching model, in which the coach invites the client to describe their **G**oal, the current **R**eality, explores the **O**ptions available for reaching the goal and then the client chooses one of the options as a **W**ay forward. The model seemed simple and practical to me, but lacking in psychological depth. As a counsellor, I knew that obstacles to change and growth were often conditions of worth, interruptions to the cycle of experience or faulty thinking, meaning that choosing a way forward isn't always enough. So I was delighted when Nick Edgerton, the course co-director, presented the SPACE model² he had developed - a holistic model, combining the psychological and the practical³ - ideal for coach therapists. Since then, I keep a stack of SPACE diagrams in my coaching bag.

The SPACE model was developed by Nick Edgerton, and with Professor Stephen Palmer, together they co-authored the first article on SPACE in 2005.² Stephen became interested in the SPACE model as it could be used within counselling, coaching and stress management. When I started teaching the SPACE model at Rowan Consultancy, I contacted Stephen, looking for an article that further outlined the model, its features, applications and links with other coaching models. This article, co-authored by the three of us, is the result.

SPACE (standing for Situation, Physiology, Action, Cognitions, Emotions) is a cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC) model, with roots in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in the way it separates out the different components. Unlike traditional CBT approaches, however, SPACE equalises the components: it does not prioritise how changing your thinking can affect your feelings. In this respect, it builds on Greenberger and Padesky,⁴ who stressed the interconnected areas of behaviour, mind, mood and body, which can all be influenced by environment. Edgerton and Palmer² show how SPACE fits within the CBC and CBT traditions.

What is the SPACE model?

1. Prospecting

The client identifies their goal, usually to change their response to a particular situation. They may identify a habitual response pattern or apply the model to one specific situation. For example, 'Clare' came to me (Rachel) for coaching because she had agreed to a charity abseil down the Forth Road Bridge, but was terrified about doing it. She wanted coaching to help her successfully complete the abseil.

2. Blue work (assessing)

Introduce the SPACE diagram, explaining the five components, and show how each one can influence the other four (see Table 1): ask the client to freeze time and populate the diagram by considering 'What goes on in your SPACE system?' Clare described what she experienced when abseiling. She realised →

Table 1: the five components or modalities of the SPACE model

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Social Context | Other people, beliefs about social roles, customs |
| Physiology | Breathing, heart rate, sweating, tensions, illness, sleeping |
| Actions | What are you doing? What are you not doing? |
| Cognitions | Thoughts, images, memories, expectations, values |
| Emotions | Feelings, moods, affect |

that the key moment for her was when she was standing on the bridge about to step over the ledge. So we froze time at that point, and became curious about what went on in each component for her.

Following the client's responses, record what they say in each area, preferably using a blue pen. Some clients can't distinguish clearly between the different components, so the coach's decision about which area to write in is part of our educational role. Pause and look at the diagram together, noticing which areas are less populated. See Fig 1 for Clare's SPACE diagram with Blue work.

3. Red work (focusing)

Invite the client to identify the Key Stuff in each area and to underline this in red, or add it in red. You can use slight exaggeration to correct understatement eg 'I might fall' to 'I will fall'. The Key Cognition is sometimes referred to as the 'Hot Thought': this is the one so close to the emotion, that the client can't have that thought without experiencing the emotions. Ask 'Can you have that thought and not experience the emotions?' If so, we haven't discovered the Hot Thought yet.

Use your therapeutic skills to increase the client's self-awareness eg use CBT to challenge faulty thinking, or a person-centred approach to empathise and be genuinely curious about inconsistencies. Clare's Hot Thought was 'I'm going to die'. I gently challenged this by asking for evidence, logic and experience. She acknowledged that she wouldn't die and that she trusted her instructor but forgot all this when she stepped on the ledge and looked down.

4. Green work (shifting)

'Imagine you are in that situation again. I'm wondering what you could do differently?' The client suggests alternative Physiology, Actions, Cognitions and Emotions that would be more helpful; sometimes there may be alternative Social Contexts too. Either add these to the diagram in green, or use a new SPACE diagram for these alternative responses. See Fig 2 for Clare's Green responses. I (Rachel) sometimes invite the client to use a Gestalt experiment with new responses. For example, Clare decided to

Figure 1: My Goal: to do sponsored abseil off the Forth Rail Bridge

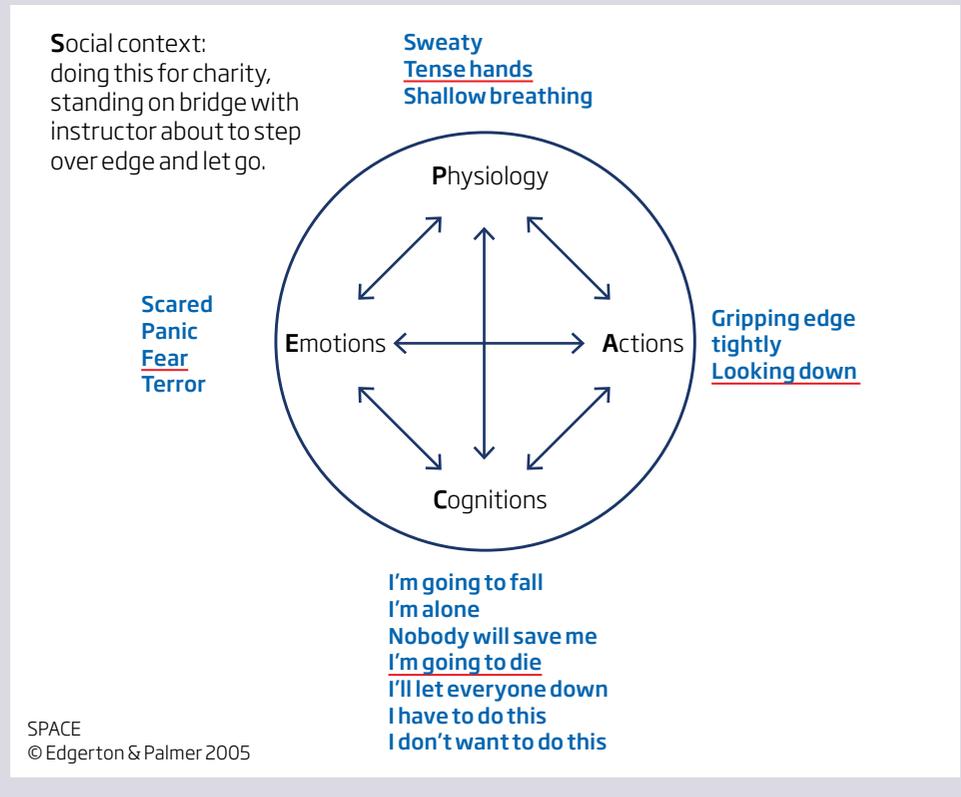


Figure 2: My Goal: to do sponsored abseil off the Forth Rail Bridge

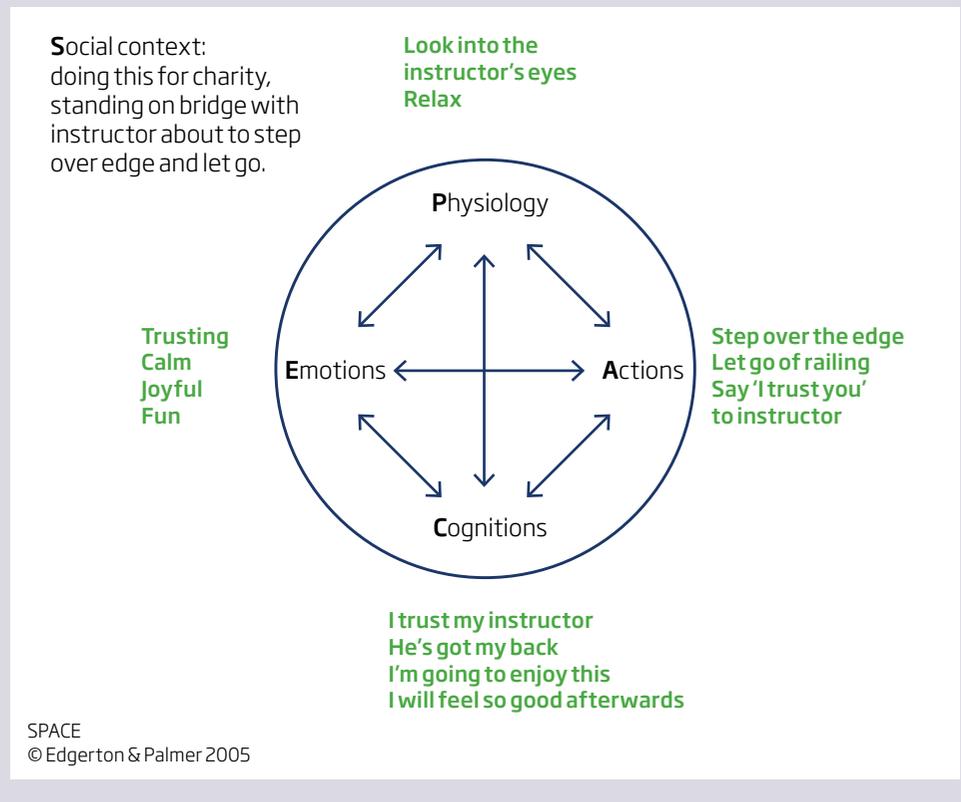
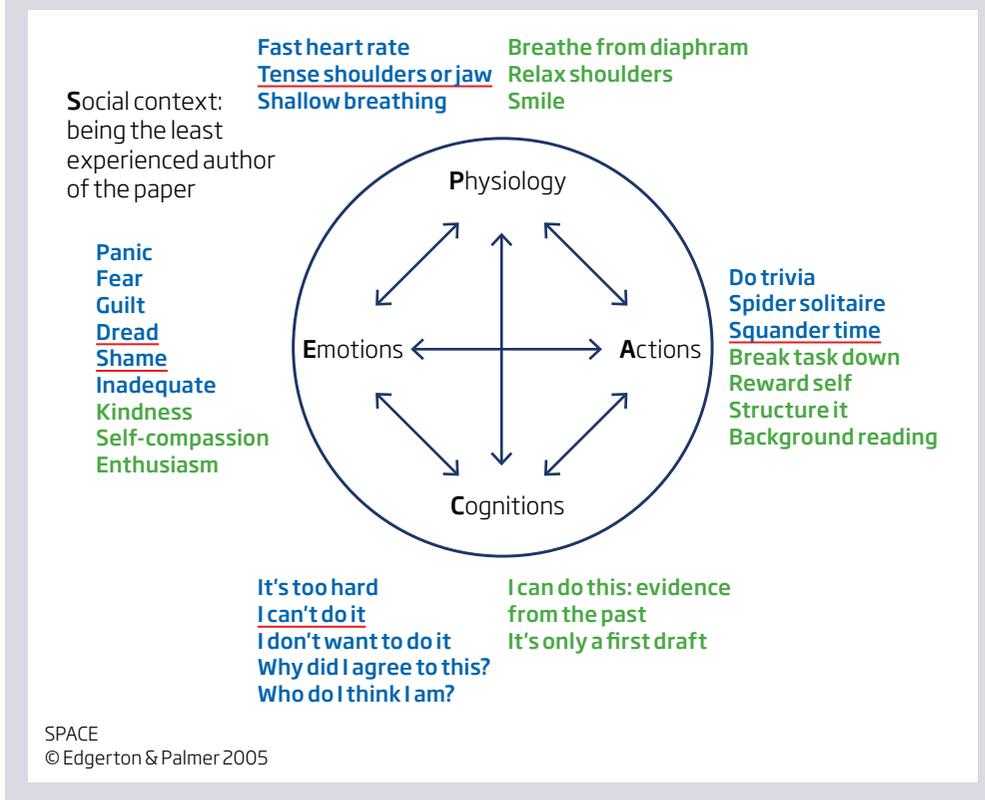


Figure 3: My Goal: to write an article on SPACE for 'Coaching Today'

The client identifies their goal, usually to change their response to a particular situation. They may identify a habitual response pattern or apply the model to one specific situation



deliberately look at her instructor, instead of down (A), to think '*I trust him, he's got my back*' (C) and to relax her shoulders and keep a tight grip on the edge (P). We integrated the four components by standing up as if on the ledge, with me in the position the instructor would take. Clare practised where she would look, what she would think and how she would relax, before stepping over the edge - and then she stepped over the edge, in the safety of the coaching room. As Farrall states, 'A degree of physiological arousal is necessary for practical learning to have any meaning: any of us can demonstrate being assertive when we are calm... the practice scenario works in such a way as to reinstate some of the negative emotional/physiological arousal present in the actual situation' (p15).⁵

5. Rating

Invite the client to reconsider the original situation and rate their Key Emotion (Red) from 1-10. Then imagine adopting all the Green suggestions, and rate the Key Emotion again. The situation hasn't changed, but their response has. Clare's rating on Fear reduced from 9 to 4. She said she felt calmer and more in control of her responses. Clare felt that breaking down

her responses in Fig 1 helped her see the wood rather than the trees and identify areas that she could tackle differently, instead of feeling overwhelmed by a muddle of all the areas.

(NB This description of the model is based on the Centre for Coaching handbook.⁶)

Case study: coaching myself using SPACE (Rachel)

1. Prospecting: My goal is to write the first draft of this article. More generally, I want to reduce feeling guilty about avoiding complex pieces of work, and to tackle them.

2. Blue work (assessing) I completed the SPACE diagram as shown in Fig 3. First, I came up with some Emotions, then lots of Cognitions and some Actions. I noticed that I had nothing in the Physiology section, so I tuned into my body and became aware of my tense shoulders and shallow breathing. I immediately relaxed my shoulders and took some deep breaths, thus illustrating how the model can be used flexibly in a non-linear fashion, since I had skipped straight to Green.

3. Red work (focusing) I identified the Key Stuff. Some were familiar from previous situations, like '*I can't do it*' (C) and having tense shoulders (P). I refuted the Hot Thought with evidence of articles that I had written previously and by lowering my expectations that this one should be perfect first time.

4. Green work (shifting) The familiarity of my Red Key Stuff in areas P and A, meant I immediately recognised more supportive alternatives. But the Key Emotion was not one I had explored before, so it took me some time to realise that I wanted to feel kind to myself and exercise some self-compassion.⁷ One way to be kind to myself is to allow more time to write this article, to do it little and often rather than in one sitting, and to break it down into sub-tasks (A).

5. Rating: My feeling of dread was 8, looking at the Blue and Red, but when I imagine doing all the Green interventions, it drops to 3 (with a small feeling of dread of what my co-authors will say when they read this draft). →

Table 2: links between SPACE, GROW and a Gestalt UOW

| SPACE | GROW | Gestalt Unit of Work (UOW) |
|-------------|-------------|--|
| Prospecting | Goal | Beginning: <i>clarifying the goal</i> |
| Blue | Reality | Beginning: • <i>assess and heighten awareness of the current 'what is'</i> |
| Red | Reality | Beginning/ Transition: • <i>identify and explore figures of interest</i> • <i>choose the figure with most energy</i> Middle: • <i>deepen awareness of the patterns and resistances</i> |
| Green | Options | Middle: • <i>co-create experiments to test alternative ways of doing things</i> |
| Green | Way forward | Transition/Ending: • <i>acknowledge the new 'what is'</i> • <i>explore application of learning to wider context</i> • <i>co-create actions for further application</i> |
| Rating | | Ending • <i>Appreciate the work done</i> |

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How the SPACE model links with coaching and counselling approaches Gestalt

The SPACE model fits well with Gestalt therapy and coaching. In conversation with fellow Gestalt coach, Alastair Callaghan of Glasgow's Kinharvie Institute,⁹ links between SPACE and the Gestalt unit of work (UOW)⁹ were identified, as shown in Table 2.

The identification of figural thoughts, emotions or behaviours (aka Key Stuff) sometimes leads to a broader conversation that moves away from the SPACE process. Trusting this movement away from the process is consistent with the Gestalt practice of going with the emergent flow of the client's interest and energy. The client and coach may not proceed to the Green work, but instead 'fatten' the figures identified in the Red work.

'Fattening the figure' might involve inviting the client to consider how their existing/habitual responses serve them, and what these responses may move them away from. Exploring the Red responses can support the client to appreciate their connected needs and interests, and lead to a greater acceptance of why they act, feel and think in such a way. This acceptance and increased awareness of their needs may go on to inform the Green work, or may lead to an alternative process that supports the client to consider other ways to better meet these needs.

Gestalt theory holds that change cannot be forced, as expressed in Beisser's paradoxical theory of change:¹⁰

'Change occurs when one becomes what he is, not when he tries to become what he is not. Change does not take place through a coercive attempt by the individual or by another person to change him, but it does take place if one takes the time and effort to be what he is - to be fully invested in his current positions. By rejecting the role of change agent, we make meaningful and orderly change possible.'

This fits with the practice of sometimes stopping after the Red stage and not moving on to Green work. It also chimes well with recent moves towards less goal-focused, more transformational coaching.^{11,12}

GROW model

Table 2 shows links with the GROW model. The SPACE diagram adds breadth and structure to the exploration of Reality and Options. It helps deepen the client's awareness of their current Reality, which may open up more Options.

Useful features of SPACE

Power-sharing: The process of completing the model together with the client helps to embed the practice of shared curiosity. SPACE encourages a spirit of shared inquiry.

Illuminating blind spots: The diagram shows which areas the client has left less populated. For example, in the case study about writing this article, Rachel noticed she had nothing in the Physiological quadrant. This reminded her that she often ignores her physical sensations. By inviting the client to reflect on the breadth of Physiological sensations, Actions, Cognitions and Emotions that unfold for them in relation to their situation, the model supports the individual to attend to those components that may normally be blind spots, out of awareness, or ignored. The client may become curious about the reasons they usually ignore these components.

Coach bias is levelled out: Some therapist coaches emphasise feelings, but some of their clients may be emotionally illiterate. With SPACE, clients can focus on their Cognitions or Physical sensations instead, and then become curious at the void in the Emotions section. Some cognitive behavioural therapist coaches may emphasise thoughts and actions; this model levels out the five components and gives them all their space, thus reducing the impact of any coach bias.

Promoting objective curiosity: Clients often say it is helpful to calmly map out what goes on for them in the situation, instead of having it all whirling around in their head. It helps them calm their amygdala and access their problem-solving neo-cortex. Clare knew she got in a state about abseiling, but when she took time to break down her 'state' into components, she could tackle each of them separately and felt less overwhelmed and more in control.

Providing a visual aide-memoir: Many clients choose to take the SPACE sheet away with them, as a reminder of their new coping strategies.

Flexibility: The SPACE model provides a flexible structure, which can be used as a springboard for other approaches, eg Gestalt, systemic.

Spirituality: The SPACE model has been adapted to include Spirituality¹³ as an additional modality ie SPACES.



The process of completing the model together with the client helps to embed the practice of shared curiosity. SPACE encourages a spirit of shared inquiry



Teams: The SPACE model can be used within groups and teams.

Transactional or transformational: Clare's use of SPACE was primarily transactional; she used it to help her abseil off the Forth Rail Bridge. My use was more transformational; it's not only helped me write this article, but is also changing my self-compassion in general (Rachel).

Couples: The SPACE model can be used in couple coaching and counselling. It can provide each partner with an insight and different perspective on how their partner feels, relates and views their shared world.

Limitations of SPACE

Less systemic: The model emphasises the individual's responses, so depending upon how it is applied, it could sideline systemic issues. Alongside the SPACE diagrams, I also carry wooden figures in my coaching bag to map out constellations, when a systemic approach seems more appropriate. However, there are overlaps: the Cognitions in SPACE can illuminate hidden loyalties¹⁴ and lead to useful questioning: 'Who are you being loyal to in maintaining this belief?' ■

Training in the SPACE model

The SPACE model is taught at the Centre for Coaching, London: www.centreforcoaching.com and on the two-day Coaching for Counsellors programme at Rowan Consultancy, Perth www.rowan-consultancy.co.uk

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Professor Stephen Palmer PhD is Adjunct Professor of Coaching Psychology at Aalborg University, Denmark and is an APECS accredited executive coach and supervisor. He is the founder director of the Centre for Coaching, London. He is President of the International Society for Coaching Psychology, Honorary President and Honorary Fellow of the International Stress Management Association, Honorary Fellow and former President and Fellow of the Association for Coaching. He is a Fellow of BACP and in the early 1990s was managing editor of its journal, *Counselling*. He has authored or edited over 50 books including the *Handbook of Coaching Psychology* (with Whybrow) and *Handbook of Counselling* (with McMahon).

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