

## Back to the Future using Cocreative Spirals

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One of the risks for a practitioner is that client material will trigger our own issues, and we may unwittingly respond in a way that has more to do with our own needs than the clients. Sills & Mazzetti (2009) presented the comparative script system as a tool for supervisors, commenting in their abstract that it could be useful as "... a framework for focusing on the key issues in supervision; a practical instrument for understanding and visually representing transference-countertransference dynamics; and a clarification of the boundary between supervision and therapy." (p. 305)

Based on a previous article published within the UK by Sills & Salters (1991), the version by Sills & Mazzetti shows the diagram for the comparative script system as a circle divided into quarters containing a sequence of:

A – Repetitions of the dynamics of original experiences and events, leading to

B – Meaning making: assumptions about self, others, and the world, leading to

C – Patterns of thinking and feeling, expectations and imaginations, leading to

D – Observable behaviour and communication style, which in turn leads back to A.

They indicate that D is how we interact with others, and that a stimulus enters C to start off the sequence.

They also label A and B as the 'Past – There and Then', whereas D and C are labelled as the 'Present - Here and Now'.

Sills & Mazzetti suggest that the diagram can be used in supervision, where the supervisee can be prompted to fill in the

sections to represent the client. This process will also identify areas where the practitioner may need to ask more questions of the client, or pay more attention. They go on to give an example based on a client's script system, with A as a bleak, friendless childhood - leading to B where the belief is that others have fun and I am alone - leading to C where the pattern is to feel envious and alienated - leading to D where the observable behaviour is passive and the client does nothing and withdraws.

They propose that the model can also be used to identify key issues for the supervisee's professional development, such as discovering a previously unidentified area for development if it is seen that the supervisee tends to be biased towards working with clients predominantly in a particular section of the circle. They also suggest that the model can be used to explore the relational field between a supervisee and their clients. For this, they suggest showing two circles with one for the client and the other for the supervisee, and drawn so that the 'Here and Now' sections are placed together. In other words, the circles are drawn so that one is flipped and they are now mirror images. In that way, a supervisee can enter the information about D - current patterns of thinking and feeling, and C - current observable behaviour, for themselves and for the client. They can then consider how the 'Back There and Then' entries might be different or the same, and how that might impact on the way they are working with the client.

Sills & Mazzetti also suggest that use of the model can be helpful in maintaining the professional boundary of supervision; to do this they recommend that the supervisor leaves blank the sections of the circle relating to the supervisee that relate to the 'Back There and Then' information. They explain that, although the supervisee's attention needs to be drawn to the

possibility that their own 'Back There and Then' experiences are impacting on their professional work, anything further about that should be conducted as therapy rather than supervision.

My personal experience has been that this is often an unnecessary precaution. The 'test' for me is whether the supervisee can remain in the here-and-now whilst discussing the contents of their own circle. Clearly, if they begin to regress at this point, they have a therapy issue to deal with. However, many supervisees are able to discuss their script issues without regressing, and are also capable of putting their own appropriate boundary around any aspects where they realise they need more therapy.

I have also developed a variation on the original model, adding neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) to the mix, and presenting it in a manner that better fits developmental transactional analysis applications. I have re-labelled the four quarters of the circle, introduced the arrows as operating in two sequences with one in each direction, and suggest that the circle may be thought of as part of a spiral to indicate the ongoing nature of our development as we resolve issues sequentially. I have named it the cocreative (Summers & Tudor 2000) spiral to emphasise that the practitioner and client, or practitioner and supervisor, jointly contribute to whatever emerges as the diagram is used as a model of how to move into the past and then back to the future. In other words, prompting the client, or supervisee, around the circle to the past and then back again to the future means that the practitioner, or supervisor, has contributed at a psychological level to the new outcome. An important, and essential, element of this is that the practitioner or supervisor demonstrates complete confidence in the process, because they understand constructionism (Allen & Allen 1977) and how this is

supported by neuroscience research that tells us that memory does not exist what we call memories are in fact our reconstructions of previous events.

As shown in Figure 1, the sections become:

1. Area for improvement – this relates to the Sills & Mazzetti item C, where the stimulus triggers unhelpful patterns of thinking and feeling, and will typically be what the client describes as their problem or issue.
2. Observable behaviours – as in the Sills & Mazzetti item D, the practitioner may need to prompt the client to describe their own behaviour that follows the pattern that has just been stimulated. This in itself may be very helpful to a client, who may never have stopped to consider how their pattern of thinking and feeling leads inevitably to some behaviour that often makes the situation worse.
3. Historical behaviour – this is similar to but not the same as the Sills & Mazzetti item A - rather than prompting the client to go back to original experiences, they can be asked to think about when in the past they have behaved in a similar manner. This is to help them to realise how we all operate repeating patterns over many years. It will usually be enough that they go back to their earliest recollection even if that is not early childhood.
4. Possible early beliefs – again, this is similar to but not quite the same as the Sills & Mazzetti item B - if a client understands about the theory of script, then this would represent their early childhood decision making but it is not necessary to present the analysis in this way. Instead, the client can be asked to 'speculate' about what kind of belief 'someone'

is likely to have that would lead to the historical behaviour that they have just described. 'Speculate' and 'someone' are deliberately vague, and are designed to give implicit permission for a client to become unconsciously aware of their script beliefs whilst consciously believing that they are merely imagining a possible scenario.

At this point, the client has cycled around the four sections and it is time to reverse the sequence:

5. Changed beliefs – the client is invited to think about how the possible early beliefs that they have identified could be changed into beliefs that are more empowering and more in line with current reality. In effect, this may be a decontamination (Berne 1961). It may of course also become a deconfusion (Berne 1961) sometimes, or what I think of as a self-deconfusion when a client has a significant 'aha' experience that involves all internal ego states (Hay 1992/2009) (or their structural ego states (Berne 1961) or their ego states using any other model of ego states that refers to the entire structure and not just the observable behaviour).
6. Changed history – this relies on the constructionist model as confirmed by neuroscience research, as explained above. As part of this step, we can use an NLP technique known as time line therapy (see Hay 2001 for a description of one way of using this) where a client is invited to imagine a different history, in such a way that they become totally engaged with what they see, hear and feel. This 'tricks' their brain into believing that what they are imagining has really happened and hence they begin to reconstruct

different memories from then on. At this stage, therefore, we invite the client to imagine, vividly, their own past in the way it would have been had they adopted a different, and more empowering, early belief.

7. Changed behaviour – the client now identifies new ways of exhibiting observable behaviours. We may reinforce this with any of the techniques we know related to action planning, stroking patterns, rehearsal/role playing and so on as necessary.
8. Area of Growth – this final reworking is to prompt the client to recognise that their original Area for Improvement has been changed into an Area of Growth. The idea of using a spiral for the diagram is to make the point that each cycling around and back again means that the client has grown and that future cycles will build upon the previous developments. Physis (Berne 1968) will ensure that we continue to grow towards our full potential.

This process can of course be repeated as necessary, as new issues emerge. Figure 2 shows how the spiral continues, overlaid with smaller spirals in the same way that Hay (2009) described the Russian dolls effect when writing about Levin's (1982) cycles of development.

Figure 3 takes this further, showing how there might be several different areas of growth for an individual, and with sequences of the spiral within each. This might represent different issues with the same practitioner but could also be a representation of what is happening as the individual consults with, for instance, one of more of each of the following roles: coach, therapist, counsellor, manager, etc, or that a supervisee consults with different supervisors.

## References

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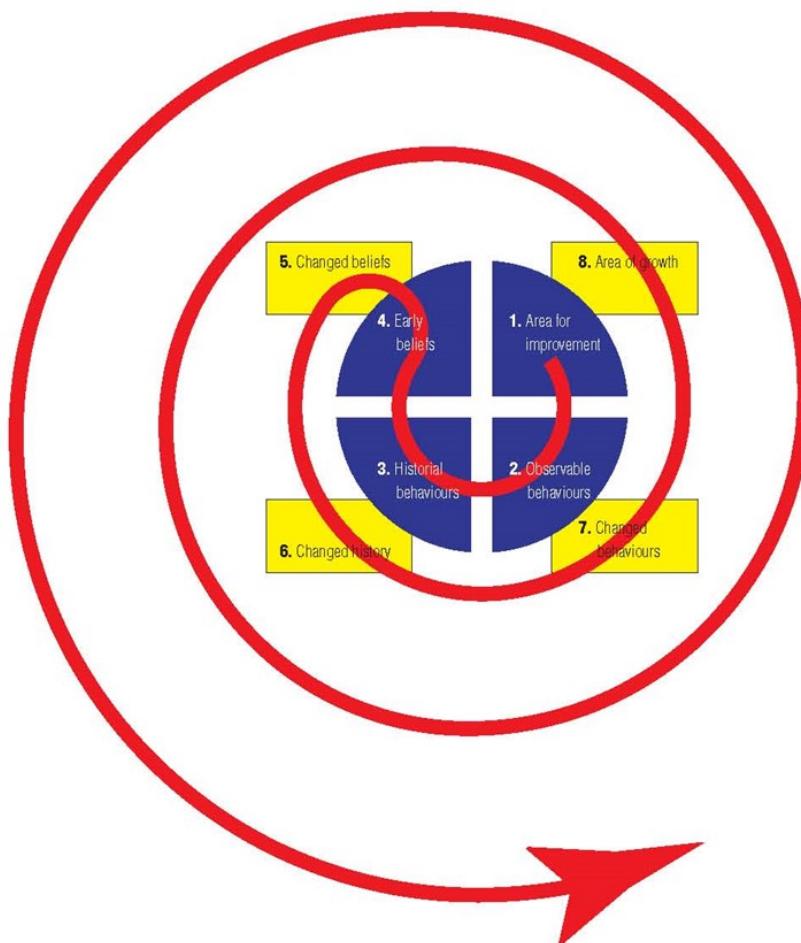
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*With acknowledgements to Diane Richardson for the diagrams*



*Figure 1: The Cocreative Spiral (or Back to the Future)*

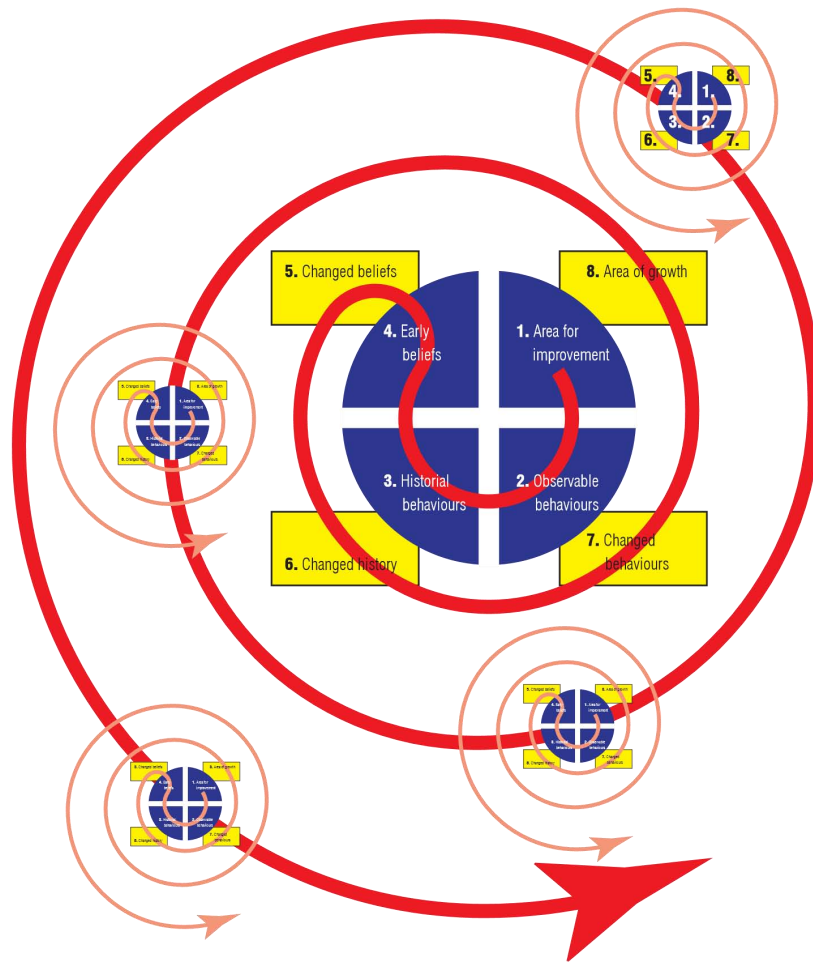


Figure 2: Spirals within Spirals

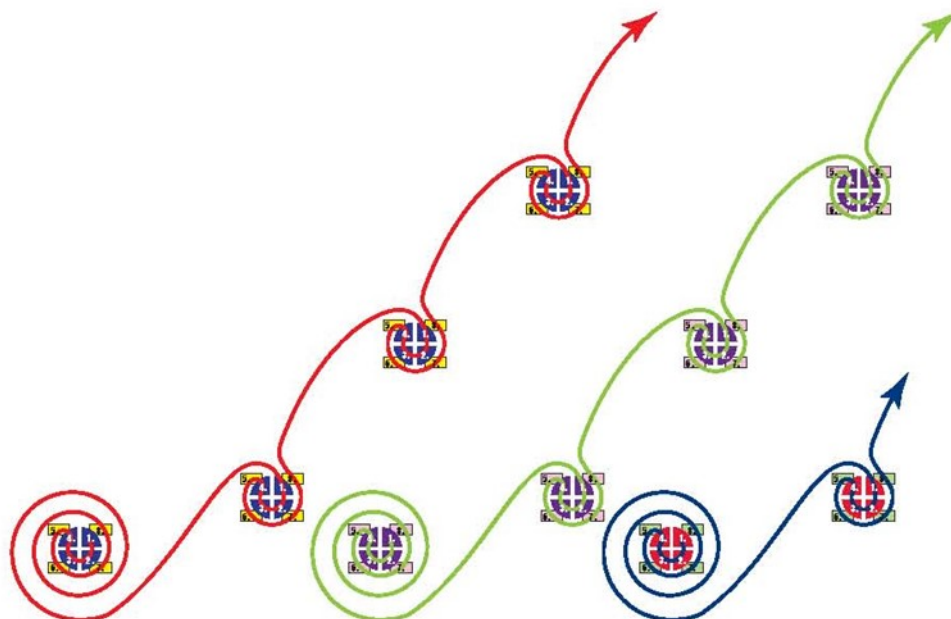


Figure 3: Sequences of Spirals within Spirals