

GC-ELS: Learning and Coaching Space

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To know and understand the various ways the environment can impact participant experiences
- To be skilled at using a variety of elements to maximise openness, vulnerability and engagement in the coaching or learning space.
- To be skilled at using all the features in Zoom to maximise online delivery

ICF COMPETENCIES

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client

Ability to create a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

4. Coaching Presence

Ability to be fully conscious and create spontaneous relationships with the client, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

[See all competencies](#)

LEARNING AND COACHING SPACE

Learning is no longer restricted to schools and corporate training facilities. Workshops, seminars and coaching groups can be found in a range of locations and contexts, both online and face to face. The range and diversity of groups is increasing, as are the spaces and locations they are held in. The spaces can be optimise for learning with natural light, low noise level, good heating and cooling, and no visual clutter. For a virtual space you also need to consider internet speed, audio and video quality and management of the participants.

Learning is no longer restricted to schools and corporate training facilities. Workshops, seminars and coaching groups can be found in a range of locations and contexts, both online and face to face. You can join a coaching group at your local yoga studio, or attend a parenting workshop at your local bookshop. And your company or organisation might send you on a 3 day retreat in the mountains, or they could enrol you in an online training program. There are also community based groups multiplying daily on social media networks like Facebook and LinkedIn.

The range and diversity of groups is increasing, as are the spaces and locations they are held in. One thing that remains the same though is the optimal conditions for group success.

We know from research that people are more open and willing to grow and therefore more likely to achieve results when the space they are in has some or all of the following features

- Inspiring
- Motivating
- Allows for individual creativity
- Fosters trust
- Encourages social connection
- Provides opportunity for peer collaboration.

So how do we as coaches and facilitators create these “spaces of success”?

Well the answer is different depending on whether that space is online or in a physical location.

Let's have a look at physical spaces

There are countless studies showing the strong relationship between our physical environment and our sense of well being. Things like natural light, noise, heating and cooling, and even visual clutter, can all influence our mood or state of mind. Colour for example is widely used by department stores to encourage certain buying behaviours. Ambient soundtracks are used by Day Spas to relax and calm the mind. And companies all over the world look to interior designers to help create office spaces that encourage creativity and productivity. We only need to look at Google's office designs in its various headquarters to see how important physical space is to people's ability to work, learn and grow. At Google everything from the corridors and ornaments to the colours of paint are carefully analysed and selected.

There are 5 key things to consider when setting up a physical space.

The first is the Size of the room - too small and people will feel claustrophobic, too large and they may feel insecure, or isolated. Or they may feel like they have chosen an unpopular event

Next is Natural light - Natural light is known to boost mood, alertness, concentration and energy levels, so any natural light is good, access to fresh air through windows or doors that open is even better

Temperature - We have all been stuck in conference or board rooms that are either too hot or too cold. It is very difficult to concentrate or focus if the room is outside a comfortable temperature range.

Noise is also a key element to consider - Being able to hear clearly is essential, as is the ability to have silence. A noisy room, or bad acoustics is a key cause of distraction and lack of focus

Finally we have Moveable furniture - it is essential to be able to move chairs and tables into small or large group sizes so you can switch between presentation, general discussion and small group discussion.

So there you have the key, almost non negotiable elements to consider. In addition to these there is the overall interior design of your space which includes things like use of colour, art, flowers or other props. There are many creative and inexpensive ways to optimise your space.

Now let's look at Virtual Spaces

At the time of creating this course the virtual learning space is no longer new. Most schools, universities and companies deliver some sort of online learning. In addition most people will have personal experience of video communication, even if it is just with their kids or family in remote locations. This is good news for those of us running virtual coaching groups or workshops because it means people are not so anxious about the virtual space and are much more accepting when things go wrong (as of course they inevitably will in an online space)

Possible Virtual environments for groups can be broken into 2 broad categories

- Platforms with face to face video (for example Zoom or Webex meeting)
- Chat/messenger only (example facebook groups or community forums)

One of the benefits of virtual group spaces over physical spaces is that the group can keep connecting before and after the training or coaching event. So the possibility for clients to get support or questions answered is far superior to a physical group. However many of the things we listed earlier as criteria for success in group spaces are more difficult to manage. Let's look at some of those using Zoom as an example of a virtual space.

Lighting & Camera Angle are 2 of the first things to consider. The strength of your connection with your clients or students will depend in part on how well they can see you. In some ways you are employing basic filmmaking techniques when you set up your classroom space on Zoom. You should always have good light, natural if possible, directed either directly onto your face, or slightly to the side of your face. Overhead light can also work. The main thing is to avoid a light shining behind you, onto the computer screen because this will completely shadow your face. You should also make sure the camera is level with your eyes (which means raising your computer to chest height) The last thing you want is students or clients looking up your nose.

Background - In a Zoom environment your background very important. You have to think of it in the same way as you would a physical location. You would not invite participants into your bedroom to run your group, likewise you would not have a bed, or excess clutter in your background. There are a range of virtual backgrounds that Zoom provides, but you can also just sit in front of a nice plant or bookcase.

Finally we have Noise. This is more complicated in a Zoom environment because you have to manage not only environmental noise, but also the quality of the sound coming in and out of your microphone. You also have to manage both these things for all your clients and students. When it comes to sound the use of a headset and microphone combined with competent use of the mute function can make a huge difference to the experience of your participants.

The same elements apply to the space you conduct your workshops or coaching programs in. Whether you are planning a 3 days retreat or a one off session, the way you create your space can either positively or negatively impact the experience of your clients.

In this module we will explore the strategies you can use to create optimal spaces both in virtual and face to face environments.

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

[Youtube] [Video Conferencing - Lighting: Don't Be "That Guy"](#)
Brother Fullmer, 2020

[Youtube] [How To Look Good on Video Calls for Zoom FaceTime Skype](#)
HotandFlashy, 2020

[Youtube] [Reverb Part 2 - How poor room acoustics can destroy your conferences](#)
Technication, 2015

[Article] [Zoom Icebreakers: 10 Activities to Energize Your Zoom Meetings](#)
Author: Summit Team Building, 2020

[Youtube] [Flexible Classrooms: Making Space for Personalized Learning](#)
Edutopia, 2017

[Article] [Chapter 9. Trends in Learning Space Design](#)
Malcolm Brown, Dartmouth College

[Article] [Running Successful Online Workshops](#)
Mike Pearce, 2020

[Pinterest] <https://www.pinterest.com.au/GregDSwanson/virtual-classroom/>

[Youtube] [Best of the Conference Room \(PART 1\) - The Office US](#)
The Office, 2020