

Editorial

Evidence or credibility?

There is often talk about the evidence for the success of SF approaches – how much is there, what is it, and when will it be enough? The first two of the questions are relatively straightforward to answer, thanks in large part to the efforts of EBTA Research Coordinator and SFCT member Dr Alasdair Macdonald. His website (www.solutionsdoc.co.uk) currently lists 95 relevant studies (mainly in therapy), 2 meta-analyses and 15 randomised controlled trials showing benefit from SF approaches with 8 showing increased benefit over existing methods. Of 33 comparison studies, 25 favour SF. Effectiveness data are also available from some 4,000 cases with a success rate exceeding 60%, requiring an average of 3 – 5 sessions of therapy time. This is an impressive list. In the organisational world, there is an extensive collection of cases and journal articles assembled over the years, including household name organisations and a wide variety of contexts.

The third question – when will there be ‘enough’ evidence – is much more difficult. We routinely hear, particularly in medical and therapeutic settings, about sceptical professionals asking again and again for ‘the evidence’. It seems that, whatever the actual research findings, there is always some reason for someone to doubt them in their own field of expertise. It seems that what is needed is not more evidence, but credibility. When people continue to question the evidence in the face of a huge pile of it, they are not really questioning the evidence, as if one more study would make all the difference. They are questioning the whole basis of the SF approach as credible and effective.

What would give us more credibility? Clear statements about what we do, and why we do it. Clear connections with contemporary science and philosophy. Practitioners engaging with other fields in constructive ways, remaining clear about

the uniqueness of SF and not pretending it's something else for short-term advantage. Professional and authoritative bodies who look credible to passing visitors and other practitioners. A clear idea of what good SF practice looks like, and how one might notice it in action.

All of this means getting past the gnomic 'not knowing' so familiar in SF circles. A beginner's mind position is a valuable and important tool in our practice. When we come to discuss our work with other professionals, on the other hand, it can quickly become a liability. Without a clear account of the philosophy, elements and awarenesses of the work, SF can start to look naïve, vague and simplistic to those familiar with more structured and explanation-based approaches.

SFACT is at the forefront of attempts to develop a clear and professional position for SF practitioners. This endeavour is not an easy one, given the slippery and emergent nature of SF work, where every case is different. This issue features a revised version of our Clues, itself a bold attempt to make clear the nature of good SF practice without constraining or codifying it. We hope that others in therapy and other fields will be keen to learn from this, join in and forge a common front in support of the continuing development and enhancement of SF.

This issue features many international contexts. Sofie Geisler's reflections on using SF in Mexico show a whole new light on the issues of getting taken seriously, while Nick Greer offers a UK perspective on the delicate role of manager-as-coach. We have cases from South Africa (Stanus Cloete with team development at a hair salon), and an international charity working on intellectual property rights for indigenous people (John Brooker). Our classic paper is seen by some as the 'paper that started it all' – Steve de Shazer and colleagues making their crucial step away from their MRI predecessors in 1987. Harry Korman, who has been involved in SF practice from pretty close to the outset, is our interviewee – his thoughts on his early experiences and the latest micro-analysis research make fascinating reading. We also have a first-rate research digest from David Weber, our first Letter to the Editors, and reviews of the latest SF books.