

# Practicing Positive CBT. From Reducing Distress to Building Success

**Fredrike Bannink**

Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 320 pages, ISBN 978-1119952695, £29.99

*Review by Renilde Vervoort*

**A**fter reading Fredrike Bannink's book on Conflict Management, I was ready to learn about Positive CBT. Bannink trained as a clinical psychologist and teaches CBT, SFBT and Positive Psychology to psychologists and psychiatrists. The author describes the target audience of this book as "professionals who would like to adopt a (more) positive approach to psychotherapy and CBT, or who would simply like to increase the range of techniques available to them". The aim of this book is to explore how traditional CBT becomes Positive CBT. Positive CBT is based on Solution-Focused Brief Therapy and Positive Psychology, and will be directed towards clients' preferred futures and strengths instead of their past problems and deficits.

So far so good. I don't know CBT well, but I do use the ABC model occasionally with clients, especially for anger management or people dealing with anxieties. It served its purpose well. I was indeed ready to discover Positive CBT.

The first part is about the theory. In the first chapter Bannink explains what Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT is. The next chapter tackles "What is Positive CBT?" The author describes the shortcomings of the problem-oriented therapies and proposes replacing these by a strength-based and a solution-oriented approach. Interestingly all the examples of questions or reactions towards the client Bannink suggests as being Positive CBT questions are, in fact, SF questions. This becomes even clearer in the two-page table "Differences between traditional CBT and Positive CBT": all of what the author calls Positive CBT is simply SFBT and/or Positive Psychology. The table is a bit awkwardly placed in the text: it

should probably follow the subtitle “Differences between traditional CBT and Positive CBT”, which now stands a bit lost with only one sentence.

In the third chapter, “Possibilities of Positive CBT”, Bannink reflects on what is already positive in traditional CBT, such as focusing on strengths or building hope. So what are the possibilities of even more positive CBT? Again the examples are SF questions. In chapter four, “Two Positive Sources”, Bannink describes Positive Psychology as source one, and SFBT as source two. She also compares both, which seems irrelevant since one is a science and the other is an empirically-based model. This comparison is followed by some information about neuroscience, which is a bit out of place in this chapter. Here Bannink surprises me with her statement when she writes: “Oxytocin, also named “liquid trust”, can be bought as a nasal spray. Maybe therapists could use the spray to help clients to trust each other more than they usually do when starting therapy?” I think this is ethically a doubtful stance and find it questionable advice.

Here follows Part II: “Applications”. This is the biggest chunk of the book. It is a practical guide for therapists on how to weave SF and the findings of Positive Psychology into their way of working or how to drastically change certain approaches. I will not go into detail here. Suffice to say that therapists who are trained in the traditional problem-solving way of thinking will find it hard to let go of their regular approach to focus on solutions instead. Bannink acknowledges this problem by explaining in detail how the therapist can make the change. Appendices included in the book will be helpful for the therapist, providing concise instructions or questions.

Part III is called “More Applications” and describes working with couples and groups, with children and families, in the workplace and the future. For SF practitioners there are no surprises here: again Bannink draws heavily on SFBT.

Bannink has written a book for CBT therapists, as stated in the Preface. Since I am not part of the target audience, it would be unfair of me to judge the book. It seems encompassing and practical enough: exercises, cases, FAQs, protocols,

websites, etc. complete the book. It will undoubtedly offer inspiration and new tools for traditional therapists looking for new ways of working. However, for SF practitioners and people familiar with Positive Psychology, it offers nothing new.

Also, I wonder if Bannink is not unnecessarily clouding the waters. Why not simply explain the possibilities and ways of working of SFBT and/or Positive Psychology to CBT therapists? And call it just that; the title of this book could simply be: "SFBT and Positive Psychology for CBT therapists". This would be honest and straightforward and I would not have been tempted to read it, since it is clear what it is about. Is it necessary to coin yet another name, Positive CBT? It seems confusing and unnecessary, condescending even. Therapists and coaches alike will adjust their interventions or borrow from other approaches or therapies when the situation calls for it. And so will CBT therapists too, no doubt.

**Dr. Renilde Vervoort** is the founder and director of Positive Solution Coaching. She extensively uses SF in her work and also draws knowledge and information from the field of Positive Psychology to incorporate into the interventions with her clients.