

Solutions Focus Working:
80 real life lessons for successful organisational
change.

Mark McKergow and Jenny Clarke

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series)

Review by Alasdair Macdonald

One-to-one conversation is the simplest model of human interaction for study purposes. The SF approach was originally developed as a form of psychotherapy. Research in therapeutics proceeds from the individual case to follow-up studies and then to controlled comparison studies. In the business sector a very different process is usual. Commonly businesses copy successful competitors, but aim to do it better and cheaper. For specific problems, there are intensive attempts to analyse failure in the hope of drawing better working principles from this analysis. The management guru Parkinson demonstrated these techniques using historical examples from business and economics. (Parkinson, C.N. (1958, 1960, 1962). *Parkinson's Law; The Law and the Profits; Inlaws and Outlaws*. London: John Murray.

This book aims to move such processes forward by using case examples from business which are addressed using SF principles instead of modernist methods. The fourteen studies are drawn from six countries, five in Europe and one in Canada. The point of contact may be one individual in the company, or the whole of a national or international corporation.

Some of the sixteen consultants worked together, but many were sole practitioners in the examples given. Most of the accounts are from practitioners who are relatively recent

converts to the SF approach. The majority were already experienced and competent management consultants drawing on modern and postmodern management theories.

Management consultancy is often thought of as time-consuming and without visible results. It is notable that most of the projects presented here required only brief intervention from the consultants. Some were one-day workshops, and others involved a small number of staff in a limited number of meetings. Feedback reports are available for many of the projects and these show clear and effective changes in working practices leading to better outcomes for the business or the organisation. Mark McKergow describes how a one-day workshop led six managers to devise six new approaches, all of which were helpful. Some of the consultants have also been involved in developing instruments for evaluating and measuring change (Björn Johansson and colleagues, p. 163). These materials are sometimes described in the text and have been published elsewhere.

In each of the accounts, learning points are highlighted. There is a description of the application of the learning point in the specific circumstances of the project. At p. 56 Durnford comments on the use of the Solution Focused Reflecting Team method (as does Monika Houck, p. 129). Peter Röhrig (p. 79) talks of “growing change like a crystal” around the core of one idea. Mona Hojab (p. 85) devised the “Trojan mice”, who may not all penetrate the system but who begin the process of change in some areas. At p. 114 Kirsten Dierolf warns us to “Stay out of ‘ant country’”. In ‘ant country’ we can see directly in front of us, and we can see the horizon, but not the country in between. At the end of the book, these 80 learning points are brought together in the words of the consultants themselves.

In the final chapter, the editors highlight some of the differences between the various accounts. They remark (p. 191) that the words ‘Solution Focus’ need never be mentioned at all. Often the work can go ahead successfully in combination with existing management styles without a need for an overt shift of emphasis by the organisation. The

book's editors have done well to bring these accounts from many different practitioners into a coherent style for the book as a whole.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in bringing about change in organisations. You may well find an example relevant to any specific issue about which you have been consulted, and you will certainly find some learning points to be useful and provocative.

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