

2020

Book Review - Solution Focused Practice Around the World

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Recommended Citation

McKergow, Mark (2020) "Book Review - Solution Focused Practice Around the World," *Journal of Solution Focused Practices*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/journalsfp/vol4/iss1/12>

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BOOK REVIEW**Solution Focused Practice Around the World**

Kirsten Dierolf, Debbie Hogan, Svea van der Hoorn and Sukanya Wignaraja (Editors)

Routledge, 2020, 193 pages, ISBN 978-0367134341, £29.99 paperback (Kindle edition available)

Review by Mark McKergow

Centre for Solutions Focus at Work

This long-awaited volume comprises chapters based on sessions at the first World SF conference in Bad Soden, Germany in September 2017 held at the instigation of Kirsten Dierolf. The event itself was a resounding success with 350 people from many countries and all continents (except Antarctica) and a wide variety of fields coming together, supported by a range of international groups including EBTA, SFBTA, SOLWorld and many national organisations – a veritable ‘festival of SF’.

This collection has taken a while to come together, and it is clear that the editors have been hard at work collecting and clarifying the material. The result is well worth waiting for; a collection of the latest SF ideas, applications and practices which show how the field is both maturing and expanding. Each of the chapters manages to present something new (albeit with a familiar background). In a field which prizes simplicity and rigour, this is no mean feat and the editors should be pleased with their efforts.

The book is in four sections looking at SF theory, organisational work, therapy and (most intriguingly) ‘utilising the everyday in SF practice’. Each of the editors look after a section, and it’s the everyday practice part which begins the book. Debbie Hogan has curated this section which looks at novel ways to use SF in a wide range of contexts. Jonas Wells, Sander van Gor and Guy Shennan share their thoughts about how music’s power to affect body and mood might be used in support of SF work, which is neatly followed by Christiaan van Woerden, a paediatrician who created a hospital service for children in the Caribbean and found his piano a useful tool. Ian Smith contributes a very useful piece about creating SF games for things like preferred futures, resources and exceptions. I liked the way Ian encourages us to invent our own games, as well as using those he presents in the chapter as starting points.

The mobile phone features in two chapters. Anne Marie Wulf looks uses micro-analysis to examine how to make text messages effective SF interventions. In a later section Esther de Wolf and Guy Shennan look at the ‘Extended iSelf’, drawing on extended mind theory to see different ways that smartphones can be brought into our work in a thoughtful and non-gimmicky way as an extension of our mind/bodies. Another interesting chapter is the review of the EBTA Summer Camp experience by Naomi Whitehead, Ursula Buehlmann, Peter Sundman, John Wheeler and Ferdinand Wolf – these events are continuing to be transformative in connecting new practitioners with old hands, as I can personally attest from a week’s farmsteading in Germany last year.

The SF theory section is compiled by Kirsten Dierolf, and contains together five chapters each of which brings something accessible and innovative to the table. Leoš Zatloukal from Czechia has a hand in two of them, with a ‘theory theory’ piece based on Recursive Frame Analysis with Edita Bezdičková, and a ‘practice theory’ chapter about wide and narrow solution-building with Lenka Tkadlčíková. Joe Chan brings news from Singapore about his eight SF markers, illustrated in his work with youth groups. Full disclosure: I have a chapter in this section too, in print for the first time about how SF can be seen to work by ‘stretching the world’ of the client. You’ll have to read the book to find out how useful that is...

Svea van der Hoorn takes on the organisational work section of the book, six chapters which once again bring new ideas from both fresh and experienced voices. I was particularly intrigued to see the chapter about SF and the ‘Clean Space’ approach by Fania Pallikarakis, Klaus Schenck, Tim Newton and Sandra Collin, which builds on the Open Space approach to make even greater use of spatial relationships and differences. Julia Kalenberg brings a nice case about working with a CEO,

while SF mediation is explored by an international consortium of Martina Scheinecker, Peter Röhrig, Sieds Rienks and Leo Blokland. New work by Klaus Schenk and also Susanne Burgstaller is always worth taking time to read and reflect, while Enikő Tegyi and Áron Levendel from Hungary look at using SF to improve meetings – a subject close to many hearts!

The final section, slightly surprisingly, is about SF therapy. After all, this where SF started – but no means the only place where it ends up. Sukanya Wignaraja oversees this part of the book, with Plamen Panayotov from Bulgaria having a hand in two of the chapters in his inimitable and direct style, seeking as ever to incisively point to simplifications which put the client even closer to the centre of the work. Steve Langer and Dragana Knezić share their experience of working with refugee torture survivors, using a short-term SF intervention which makes the work “immensely less painful to the clients and far less daunting for the therapist”. Sounds like a result! The book closes with Pamela King, winner of the 2017 Steve de Shazer Memorial Award for Innovations in Solution Focused Brief Therapy from SFBTA, describing her work solution building with children.

This is a book of great variety, innovation and inspiration. In our field where so many of the basics are widely known and used, it is refreshing to see experienced practitioners keeping going to bring new ideas to the table in ways which expand rather than dilute the SF approach. Another SF world conference is planned for 2022, again in Bad Soden, so it might be a good idea to start planning to be there and building some ideas to bring with you.

The reviewer

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