

Introducing the Association for the Quality Development of Solution Focused Consulting and Training

This Journal comes from the Association of Solution Focused Consulting and Training, a not-for-profit organisation registered in Germany in 2008 to support solution focused research, theory and practice.

The SFCT is a membership association with a board, statutes, a bank account and mailing address. In short, the SFCT is a legal entity. There are several advantages to this:

- An association provides visible continuity in quality development. It can gain a reputation and thereby enhance the reputation of those who have earned its quality stamps. Being a full member of the SFCT will mean something.
- Members of the SFCT sign a code of ethics when they join and there is a complaints process should they infringe on it, giving added confidence to their clients.
- Funds enable the organisation to provide services to members. Services include the website, the Journal and, in due course, credible research into the practice of SF in organisational contexts. Research conducted by an association for quality development has more weight than research conducted by individual members from the wider community of SF practitioners.
- The existence of an entity with a mailing address makes it possible for experts from other fields or approaches who are interested in SF to make contact.
- German association law ensures that the SFCT adheres to democratic standards. The board, working on a voluntary basis, is elected by the membership and they are accountable to the membership. A general meeting determines the direction of the association.

Why do we need the SFCT now?

The SFCT started in Germany, where clients are used to looking for official indicators of quality when they are seeking a business partner. The first ideas about founding an association emerged in mid-2007 with the launch of a 14 day training programme for SF coaching and consultancy. Prospective participants specifically asked for an independent quality assurance which they could show to their prospective clients after the course. Some research into the certification market revealed that there was no quality assurance method using SF criteria to assess participants' work. The only option available was to work with another association's certification (for example, associations for coaching or systemic consulting) which would require the participants to do other things than work in an SF way to receive the quality badge. This seemed rather awkward and thus the idea for a German SF quality association was born.

Initially, the idea was to keep the SFCT a local organisation, but when the concept was mentioned to other SF trainers offering longer courses for SF coaching, training and consultancy, there was a lot of interest. What seemed a local need at first, snowballed into a meeting of a dozen founding members from all over the world. In order to make a start, it was decided to develop a first "release" of the SFCT offering within the founding members group and go into new releases as more members joined. The thought was that in order to join something, you need to know what it is first.

The aim was to provide a voice and a focal point, supporting, promoting and disseminating research and the exchange of knowledge, information and good practice in SF in organisations. This meant being able to say something about the what SF is as well as about the quality of SF practice, despite the pitfalls of doing this. We are well aware of the challenge in attempting to describe SF adequately and that Steve de Shazer refused to do it. It may also be seen as contrary to talk about standards and criteria in a non-expert field which asserts that every case is different.

The founding members of SFCT have spent some time trying to tackle this in an SF way so that we can distinguish between “good work” and “good SF work”.

We will not attempt to certify individuals, but instead will review “pieces of work”. In considering “pieces of work”, the reviewer will be aided by a list of observable clues to look for when thinking about whether something has been done in an SF way. In submitting work for review, candidates will provide a commentary describing their thinking and what makes the work qualify as SF. Their clients will be asked to answer questions about how helpful the “piece of work” was for them. Guidance about “Clues” to help candidates and reviewers can be found at the back of this journal. The Clues and summaries of successful submissions are also available on the web site – www.asfct.org.

Why join?

The SFCT offers the benefits of belonging to a membership organisation as listed above. It also offers a web site, a review method that is SF in content and process and visible commitment to quality and development. This journal containing peer reviewed articles, case studies, classic papers from the SF archive and book reviews is available to all members. The published papers receive guidance from a distinguished advisory board, drawn from university faculty and leading members of the SF community.

This will enhance the quality and visibility of SF work in organisations, demonstrating its power and simplicity in a format that will be understood. With SFCT, SF work in organisations can fly its own colours boldly.