

Re-Visioning the Emergence of Solution-Focused Practice

Jonas Wells Shares Rumours on SF History

Solution Focus in Organisations (SFIO)

Sunday 30 June 2019 – Global online

Before we start...

"You can never predict the future by the past, because the past is changing all the time." Michail Bakhtin

"It is perhaps difficult to see just how radical solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) is without looking at its historical roots." Insoo Kim Berg

For me:

- a) Research into book of SF assumptions and presuppositions
- b) Fascination with comment by Peter de Jong about early SF
- c) About being intellectually honest (in my role as trainer)

Let's interact and learn a little from each other!

Invitation to write in the chat room

- What would please you the most to be different from our time together here?

Outline of today's seminar

- Have a look at an attempted chronology/timeline of SF development
- Go briefly through Milton Erickson and MRI
- Spend more time looking at the early period of SF (before it was called SF)
- Explore the radicality of Steve de Shazer
- A cheer for Eve Lipchik
- How it all changed again with the "nymphomania case"
- Lessons and questions for future SF development

Beginnings with Milton H. Erickson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kXZCdL9GWQ>



From Milton (article 1954, 1000 case files, Jay Haley's writing):

- Idea of utilisation – use what's there
- Future-oriented method of working
- Non-normative (not prescriptive)
- Outlandish tasks
- Therapist as responsible for results
- Notion of making therapy as short as possible
- Faith in people's resources and their ability to know what he/she needs

Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto

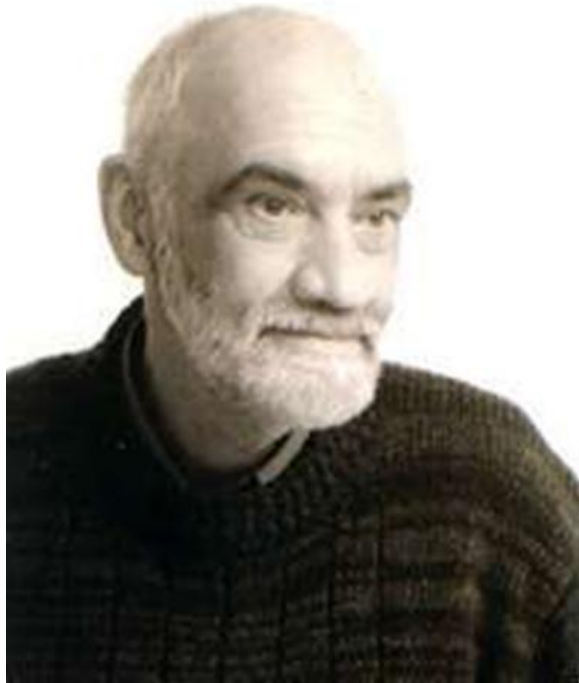


- Beginnings of brief therapy (as an alternative to traditional psychiatry),
- Gregory Bateson and systems thinking

Don Jackson, Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, Jay Haley etc

- Not so much the problem, but client's way of solving it that inadvertently perpetuates it. Therefore, task is to interrupt ineffective attempted solutions
- Focus on observable behavioural interaction in the present
- No attempt to understand problem or underlying causes – stay on the surface
- Promoting change rather than insight, understanding or growth
- Small steps is enough
- Shift from what's inside and why to what's between and what's next
- Working model of the observing team and task of designing interventions

Enter the radicality of Steve de Shazer



- A tale of a social worker's (mis)understanding of Milton H. Erickson
- Does not try to explain, only describe
- Research question: "What is the therapist doing that is useful?"
Changes in 1980s to "What is the therapist and client doing that is useful?"
- Not after a theory of human behaviour, instead a theory of therapy
- A true believer of interaction – therefore impossible to theorise outside of the interaction in which the behaviour takes place
- The client particular way of cooperating replaces resistance as reason for therapy
- Envisions descriptions of therapy interaction in no less than three paradigms in Brief Therapy. Steve discards the former as he goes along:
 1. Systemic (MRI style), 2. Ecosystemic, 3. Poststructural/Wittgensteinian and Social constructionist (and lays path open for small step 4. Enactivism/Embodiment)

The early period of SF development

- Recursive element: Research, theory and practice (I'd like to add socio-cultural context to this somehow)
- A colourful group with similar stance: SdS, Insoo, Eve Lipchik, Elam Nunnaly, Jim Derks, Marilyn LaCourt etc
- Counting head nods – points study to look at what therapist is doing (leads to cooperating)
- Co-operating replaces resistance (Death of Resistance)
- A client's desire for more positive feedback changes idea of system
- The case of the family with 27 problems: First Formula Session Task
- Eco-systemic approach developed – Mechanic and engineering to Maps and Model
- Three versions of how the Miracle Question came about
- Experimentation with language in interview
- The idea of skeleton keys



How about we play with a scene from 1985?

We are going reenact a short dialogue from this point in time in 1985.

I need two volunteers:

Who wants to play Brian Cade?

Who wants to play Steve de Shazer?

I will put the script in the chat room.

Eve Lipchik's role in SF development



- Holocaust survivor
- Prioritizes relation to client; uncomfortable with interruptions in the interview; argues that *anything in the suprasystem* can lead to change
- Early champion of interview as more important than intervention
- Very early asks "how will you know when you don't need to come here anymore?"
- First to use question: "is something of this miracle happening already?"
- Coping questions
- "Listen with a constructive ear" – connected to death of resistance idea
- Pioneers SF work in context of domestic violence

The Nymphomania Case

- Wife and husband come to therapy, "a case of nymphomania"
- Wife resists talk of exceptions, she wanted sex uncontaminated by compulsion, sees it as a problem requiring "deep therapy".
- Turns to husband who felt reduced to a stud: "For me, it's a sleep problem", Wife: "Do you have any cures for insomnia?"
- Cooperation on the construction of a solution ensued. Two weeks later everything is fine.
- Implications: Complaint is undecidable. Words are not representations. New meaning of problem emerges in the context that fitted the client.
- Signals that misunderstanding is most probable in interaction
- Wittgenstein: "We can only know what a word means by how the participants in the conversation use it"
- Case fits best with post-structural discourse – Reality and meaning are developed through negotiation, are not discovered or uncovered, there is no deep structure to reveal.

Giveaways – tentative learnings for me today

1.

- Experience, not knowledge
- Participation/Acceptance/Openness, not manipulation or control
- Dialogue/Dialectic, not methodology

= SF as an investigation of POSSIBILITIES, not actualities

2.

- Importance of ethics and personal politics
- Learning SF is a process, in time, of thinking on your own and together with others about assumptions/presuppositions and how they show (and make effect) in interaction observed in practice. It takes two.
- Taking clients seriously – to thus listen very carefully

= SF as a RESPONSE-based approach to change, not question-lead

Further investigation for me...

- What is the intellectually developed nature of **Buddhism/Taoism** in regards to SF thinking and practice? Precious little written on this in the history even though its regarded as central. Which implications on practice would it have if this was expanded upon?
- The historical significance of **John Weakland** (compared to Gregory Bateson) on SF development. He seems to be much more influential over time. What is it in Weakland's way of working that we could be made more aware of, and what difference would that make?
- The ethics of **Eve Lipchik and Yvonne Dolan** bring a sensitivity worth exploring further. Open and true with their own view. Deals with politics in an overt and respectful way, much like how Narrative Therapy does but more subtly and less intrusive. I'd like to learn more about how they do this and practice it.