

# BEING and DOING SF in large-scale settings

*Hosted by Susanne Burgstaller*

Questions for this session from the participants:

- How to scale SF from 1on1 to the levels above?
- How do ecosystems work? How to influence them?
- How to access the decision makers?
- Where are possible starting points for change in ecosystems?
- How to work with non-SF people?
- How to use the energy?
- How to set up the process to create value?

What might we see you DOING all day as a Solution Focused Coach in large scale settings? (Whether as an internal or external coach or as an „ecosystem influencer“?)

DOING SF when Coaching Organisations and Ecosystems:

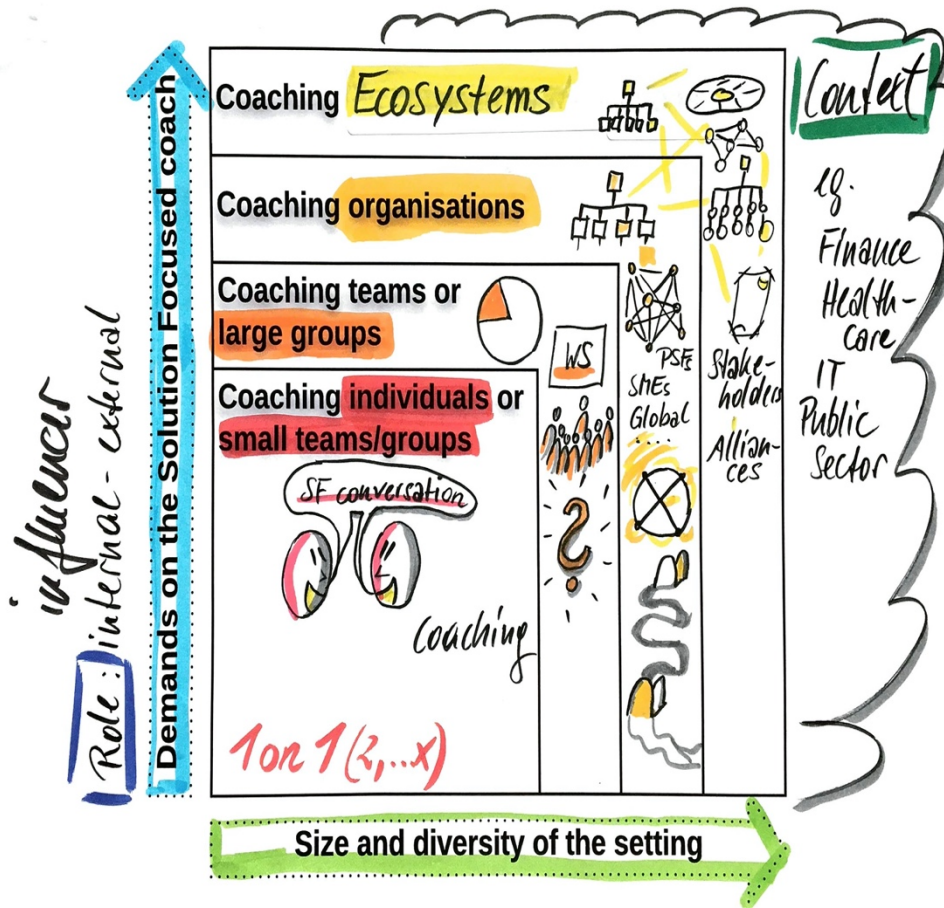
Thinking a lot about:

- how to embed SF in a bigger process, knowing that you can't manage ecosystems or decide or control them. You can only feed them positive signals (see Capra)
- What player am I in the ecosystem? (Organisations should ask that too!)
- What is the benefit to the bigger system from our side?
- How can we focus the system (rather than disturb it)?
- How to take on an enabling focus? – How do we enable the results we would like to see?
- How to make change simple?
- What to leave? Take with you into the future? Create anew?
- Organising events for sharing experiments and solutions
- Keeping goals in mind
- Keeping the process ongoing
- Pointing to what has already been achieved, what are we still learning?
- Asking the „right“ questions and networking to find out
- Seeing many organisations from the inside
- Linking people to each other
- Looking at the glass half full

- Founding a change makers network – „you have been „uncovered“ as a change agent, make them detect others
- Looking at the margins- this is where interesting things happen in an ecosystem
- Making yourself one of them
- Doing small things with big impact
- Having informal meetings only
- Thinking about: who should talk to whom? – create forums, bring people together
- Starting and growing networks
- Establish an open space area for people to meet – citizens and workers, e.g.
- Finding and combining (new) „flavours that customers can pick
- Tickling the interest to experiment
- Hosting: being present, reachable, inviting
- Stepping back – not doing or interfering, observe from the balcony
- Moving between tickling and stepping back
- Displaying excited curiosity – seductive part!
- Asking: how many people might benefit from your learning?

### What do you notice yourself paying attention to as an SF coach in these settings?

- Unconditional belief: clients do their very best to collaborate
- Energy, e.g. eagerness, signs of satisfaction
- My feelings and intuitions
- Language people use: e.g. clichés and learned phrases – draw attention to more concrete language
- Words: put in an SF flavour
- Who is speaking? Who is quiet?
- Interactions: where do they take place? For how long?
- Non-verbal signals, e.g. how do people enter a room
- Naming resources
- Try to catch everything that is moving in the direction they want to go



Model1: Different settings for Solution Focused work

The Model above is taken from my article "Being and Doing Solution Focus as an Organisational Coach"<sup>1</sup>. The following extract from the article, explains the different settings:

<sup>1</sup> Published in "Solution Focused Practice Around the World" edited by Kirsten Dierolf.

## Different settings require different solution focused skills and practices

As the size and diversity of the setting increases, so do the demands on the skills and practices of the Solution Focused practitioner, each setting requiring additional or more nuanced skills and a shift in the focus of the work. With “setting” I refer specifically to the scope of the activity of the organisational coach, while “context” denotes the particularities of a customer’s environment, such as the industry, the size and purpose of the organisation or its current situation.

For the purpose of this article I am using the term “organisational coach” to refer to a variety of roles. While clearly internal roles carry more clout regarding decision-making, implementation power and a better fit with the system, the external coach is sometimes regarded as more impartial, freer and better able to generate a difference that helps foster the changes the organisation wants to bring about.

### **1. Coaching individuals, teams or small groups**

The distinguishing factor of this setting is that Solution Focused coaches directly and personally lead the conversations they hold. This is usually done with either a single person or a small group of people. The focus of the work is similar to that of the therapist: responding spontaneously and in the moment to how the conversation unfolds while bearing the Solution Focused model in mind. Even though there may be some variations, coaching and therapy sessions normally “follow the same process” and there is “no marked difference other than content” (Iveson, George & Ratner, 2012, p. 7). Examples of this work may be business coaching of individual managers, or coaching a board team towards effective cooperation or a new strategy.

### **2. Coaching large teams and groups**

In this setting the work is usually done through conducting workshops, team building- or even large group events. The distinguishing factor here is that working with a larger group, Solution Focused practitioners usually cannot hold conversations with everyone present directly and in person. They need to split up the group into subgroups and rely on the groups themselves to make the best possible use of the questions offered to them.

The focus of work is therefore to prepare an event design that proposes powerful questions to the groups involved, allows them to actively engage with their topics and hold lively and productive conversations. When facilitating, the Solution Focused worker needs to attentively guide these conversations and respond in the moment to changing needs.

Preparing such an event requires being able to carefully think through a group process, imagining the conversational flow and polishing the questions like gems. Facilitating such a workshop requires excellent improvisation skills focused on dealing with groups and a “balance between a range of groupwork techniques” (Sharry, 2007, p. 49).

### **3. Coaching organisations**

Work in this setting involves facilitating change journeys or other organisational development missions, such as designing and implementing a new strategy, optimising business processes, effecting changes in company structures, cultural change or all of the above

combined. It requires designing a Solution Focused process of cooperation with an organisation which may stretch over a longer period of time - sometimes a few months, sometimes a few years – depending on the scope of the transformation required. This initially involves engaging the sponsors and relevant stakeholders with an image of their preferred future, and thereafter co-creating the process iteratively in a series of stages or sprints, re-visiting their idea of the preferred future and re-contracting continuously.

The focus of the work is on co-creating with the sponsor a Solution Focused roadmap for the transformation journey, planning and facilitating a series of events and meetings, as well holding many structured or unstructured conversations during and around them. The work may also involve laying down Solution Focused pathways for conversations in the organization by “infecting” internal facilitators, creating or adapting organisational tools, or defining new meeting protocols. When working in this setting it is becoming increasingly necessary to have some understanding of the business domain the organization is part of, or about process or organizational design options for complex organisations.

#### **4. Coaching “in-between” organisations**

Work in this setting may involve aligning a common strategy between several organisations or communities, cluster building, community-citizen work, or coordinating policies or strategies in a socio-political or macroeconomic context. It requires holding the thread in a multi-stakeholder process often involving a time-span of several years and more players than the worker can ever meet, as well as planning and facilitating many structured and unstructured interventions.

The focus of the work is on network building, establishing good will and cooperation with different groups, forging alliances as well as accepting differences that cannot be bridged. It requires regular stakeholder monitoring, drawing up constantly shifting stakeholder maps and engaging with them actively. It also calls for solid Solution Focused negotiation and conflict management skills, coping with many and often competing demands, and being able to sometimes work without a clear contract or identifiable sponsor.

With thanks for note writing to: [Susanne Burgstaller](#)