



Book Review

Solution Focused Practice in Asia

Edited by Debbie Hogan, Dave Hogan, Jane Tuomola and Alan K L Yeo

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Introduction (Picture of cover of book)

For as long as I can remember, all storytelling by anyone interested in Solution Focused Practice, has been met by Debbie Hogan's encouragement to "tell it, y'all, write it.... it is going to be in our book". And so it is. A reality.

However, if you thought that this book is only for those who are going to work or have worked in Asia, think again. This book is not only a window onto Asia but is sure to provide a cross-pollination of ideas and learning for those who work primarily with occidental clients.

These stories show how creatively and sensitively SF has been applied with individuals, groups, communities and even whole organisations, from the boardroom to the least skilled worker. As you read these short stories you will be encouraged to think anew and challenged to approach your clients creatively, to listen with wide-eyed wonder and to find what works for them as you collaborate with them, without sacrificing the essence of SF, yet enabling the work you do to serve each population, uniquely.

These are more than case studies. They are the experiences of SF Practitioners: their stories and reflections of their applied practice and what has worked with their clients. The stories highlight just how versatile SF Practice is internationally - across multiple cultures in Asia. The authors highlight the applications, often in awe, wonder and sheer delight, as they describe their clients not only, "getting it!", but also the practitioners experiencing the beauty of that "AHA" moment again and again!

The 48 storytellers have proudly showcased their craft and brought it alive in the 50 brief chapters of no more than 3-4 pages, in a wide array of settings, set out in 5 sections of practice.

For the purposes of this review for SFIO, it is my intention to focus in depth on the section on SF practice in organisations (Section 5). However, I provide an overview of the entire book for those who wish to dip in and learn and cross-pollinate ideas.

1. Content

2. Section 1: Solution focused practice in therapeutic settings in Asia

These twelve chapters highlight the sensitivity practitioners exercised with their clients and how this facilitated positive outcomes, focusing on language use, idiomatic expressions, words and phrases familiar to clients, respect for their values, and tailoring what was helpful to fit cultural and economic conditions.

3. Section 2: Solution focused practice in supervision in Asia

Seven practitioners provides stories about the use of SF practice in the professional supervision of case managers, speech therapists, counselling students and counsellors, educators in an international school, government projects, and managers in the social and educational sectors. Largely the stories reveal that SF works when the client's frame of reference or culture is sensitively handled and the SF approach of "working at the surface" is applied.

4. Section 3: Solution focused practice in education in Asia

Eight chapters highlight how SF has benefitted multiple stakeholders in educational settings, from working with primary school children and adolescents, through dealing with school bullying and youth at risk.

5. Section 4: Solution focused practice in coaching in Asia

Coaching has really taken off in Asia and is happening in almost every setting. Eight coaches describe their experiences with executives in corporates, CEO's and SME business owners, in professional practices, using individual and team coaching, while ensuring that cultural adaptations are made to ensure the value of SF.

6. Section 5: Solution focused practice in organisations in Asia

Nine chapters showcase eight stories that reveal where SF has been applied in four very different countries and cultures, namely Singapore, Japan, India and Indonesia; not only efficiently and effectively, but also respectfully, in a face-saving manner, with people and organisations empowered and hope -'full'.

7. Stories told

8. *SF Inside- Why the 'SF Inside' concept can be useful in organisational development.*

A Japanese factory setting provides a learning experience for Yasuteru Aoki as he tells how he shifted his view and his practice as an SF consultant from the need to install a ready-made SF program to his desire to go in search of already existing resources in client organisations that resonate with SF ideas, to tap into their pre-existing inner resources' and to amplify them. Makes work so much easier and fun!

9. *Managing change and organisational culture*

Arvind Wable describes how he found the SF approach, with it's positive rather than critical attitude, well-suited to the Indian context (and probably to any culture where harsh feedback is not well-received), since this created a non-threatening environment for exploring and finding solutions. He emphasises the value of the 'conversational style' of SF, and small steps that made change manageable and do-able! Maybe this is what the team you are dealing with might need?

10. *Change your conversation, change your organisation - SF consulting leveraging strategic methods of collaboration.*

This chapter from my colleague and friend, Denise Wright, was her final contribution as an executive coach and OD facilitator. She died soon after in 2017 of a terminal illness. This was Denise at her best!

In this story, she describes the facilitation of culture change for an Asian-based R&D centre of a global pharmaceutical company over an 18 month period; from the initial briefing to celebration of the outcomes achieved of a more collaborative culture and high performing cohesion in the senior management team. She describes how she ensured she was working with customers for change, exploring their best hopes for the future and shared preferred future, what they were doing well already and what was already in place, what they needed to get right and immediate next steps.

Denise's reflections suggest that within rich multi-cultural environments in which many companies operate, consciously managing conversations builds a collaborative, cohesive and committed workforce. Isn't this what all organisations need and want?

11. Work smarter, not harder.

Debbie Hogan shares how she supported a Group CEO in Asia and his leadership team to develop a shared mind-set that led to significant expansion and growth of the company and personal benefits for the individuals. This is a classic SF project we can all learn from. Key aspects of SF are identifiable in their team processes: the team's agreement on the platform for change and their desired outcome; their best hopes or miracle picture; scaling and highlighting strengths and competencies of each task group.

12. See it and make it happen

Indry Wardhani, a consultant in Indonesia, tell of how she worked to 'motivate' the management in a construction company. Yes, requests come in all shapes and sizes! She skilfully weaves the application of SF with her knowledge of her countrymen and plays to their visually creative strengths to deliver improved communication, a decrease in conflict and a more agreeable working environment. The secret of her success? She suggests that by daring to be different, leveraging the cultural strengths, asking SF questions and affirming people, she achieved the required results. Isn't this what we all want?

13. Conflict resolution goes Mother Goose

Karen McDonald Louis describes working with 2 NGO's in Asia who run orphanages together. When conflict loomed its ugly head and threatened the partnership, a multi-cultural team of Asians and American consultants facilitated a conflict resolution process that played to the client values and led to reconciliation. Why the reference to Mother Goose? Read the poem she wrote and you will find out.

14. *The solution focused approach in a children's home*

Edwin Choy shares how he co-created a solution focused process with the superintendent of a residential care home that positively impacted the entire staff, as well as 12 youths at risk. His story highlights the paradigm shift that occurred for the staff, from a problem solving to a strength-based approach to dealing with youth at risk and the power of compliments to change behaviour and create a virtuous circle to sustain the change and transform lives. A real miracle story.

15. *Working less, doing more*

Dave Hogan tells a very intimate story of not only helping a leader to do more with his business and working less, so that he was able to achieve a more balanced lifestyle. And isn't this what many people want? He shared how the leader learned to let go of all the 'monkeys' that belonged to others and so freed himself up to do what he wanted to do in his personal and work life. This story truly shows how change happens one person at a time, through changing our conversations.

By the way, the leader in question, the founder and managing director of Lifestyle Retreats, was so delighted with his shift that he was willing to have his name published in the book!

16. What works?

The 8 storytellers have proudly showcased their craft and brought it alive in the brief chapters of no more than 3-4 pages, in a wide array of settings.

These are more than case studies. They are the experiences of SF Practitioners: their stories, reflections, photos and drawings of their applied practice and what has worked with their clients.

Organisations in both the public and private sector are represented, ultimately all telling stories in different ways of how individuals' lives have been positively impacted, how the organisation has been impacted and the impact this has had on their clients.

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22. Reflection

I reflected on 3 questions while exploring this book.

23. How to badge this book?

This book is 283 pages in length and is a collection of concise but detailed information about the practice of SF in Asia. While the stories are short, the book is almost a reference book of SF work in Asia to date, although it does not teach.

24. More information please!

Despite the book being 283 pages in length, I really wanted more information in almost case study style, particularly about SF in organisations: what had been the process and timeframes, what had worked, what had been some of the real life challenges they faced and how they had overcome these. Is there a venue where these back-stories can be shared?

25. Separate books?

I wondered if it might be helpful to separate the 5 practices into separate books that showcased the therapeutic, educational and supervision stories and another which highlighted Coaching and SF in organisations, given that not many people work in both therapeutic and organisational settings.

26. Summary

This is probably the definitive book on SF practice in Asia. The stories are brief and showcase SF practices, processes and outcomes in Asia. Audiences are provided a unique view of the Asian mind-set and values. Practitioners who work in the 5 different practices can easily choose the relevant area to read and are likely to be prompted to apply SF creatively in whatever cultural setting they find themselves.

Look out for Kenneth Kwan's book recently published in Singapore for more SF practices in Asia called: "Small steps to big changes. Create the change you want now." Find out more about this book and purchase it [here](#).

27. Lilian Ing

Lilian is an Executive and Organisational Coach, Facilitator and Psychologist. Over the past 20 years, she has worked with individuals, teams and organisations to enable them to clarify and take steps toward living their dreams, by leveraging their strengths and dealing with the challenges along the way. She is a registered clinical psychologist and coach and holds qualifications in marketing and organisation development. She fully embraces the Solution Focused approach which changed her life 10 years ago, from being a problem detective to a solution explorer, in both her personal and work life.

She serves on the board of SFIO and is passionate about seeing SF flourish in other people's lives and organisations. She also trains and supervises people in the social and educational sector, volunteers with a not-for-profit organisation and has contributed to on books on coaching and SF in Asia. Lilian is based in Singapore.