

# ***Creative Solution Building: Solution Focused Brief Therapy Across Southern Africa***

*Edited by Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs*

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## **Review by Mark McKergow**

This very welcome addition to the international Solution Focused bookshelf is a collection about SF applications in Africa. The book is particularly useful in engaging with the particular contexts and traditions of Southern Africa and showing how SF practice connects with these to give a good 'fit' in this part of the world.

Part of the international spread of SF work in recent years has been the appearance of books and collections about people using the SF approach in different parts of the world. *Solution Focused Practice in Asia*, edited by Debbie and Dave Hogan, Jane Tuomola and Alan Yeo appeared in 2016, and Yasuteru Aoki has been connecting and publishing organisational work in Japan for a decade. The European Brief Therapy Association just released a collection (*Making Waves: Solution Focused Practice in Europe* edited by Tomas Switek, Boyan Strahilov and Plamen Panayotov) celebrating 25 years of SF practice in Europe.

It seems that Africa is the next frontier, and this impressive collection put together by Dr Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs is a marker for the rest of the world to aspire to. The 18 chapters cover a great range of SF work, from schools and universities, private practice (counselling), medical settings, prison, community work and organisational development. The whole thing is bookended by two review chapters from Jacqui van Cziffra-Bergs. The opener is an excellent overview of the advantages (and pitfalls) of putting SFBT into a Southern African setting, from the language to the culture as well as giving an introduction for new readers. The colonial history of the area, where peoples' rights were undermined and unrecognised, makes the SF approach with its validating and accepting stance a particularly rich and relevant strand.

The book associates SF work and the concept of 'ubuntu' – the idea that 'I am because you are'. This fundamentally social approach to life tied in very well with the respectful yet attentive stance so familiar to SF workers around the world. I suspect that our old friend Ludwig Wittgenstein would have been enthusiastic about ubuntu; his recognition that all language is social and interactional has ubuntu running through it like letters through a stick of rock.

The opening chapter also contains helpful summaries of the other chapters, which can help the reader to delve into the most relevant material. And what a range of material there is! I was particularly interested to see six chapters on working in school and university settings, including teachers from rural Kwa-Zulu Natal, alongside sports psychologists and university counsellors. The section on private practice includes chapters on working with children, adolescents and adults (neatly covering the age range). The stories of work on psychiatric wards and in prisons show SF in some very tough settings.

I was delighted to see applications in community and organisational development on the menu, with SFIO stalwart Stanus Cloete contributing a chapter on his work with teams. Thabisane Ncube shares his work using SF in Zimbabwe, where he mentions SF's effects in a country where 'there is often hopelessness and uncertainty about the future, where inflation increases daily and the money you earn is worth less than the paper it's printed on...'. This is a reminder that the challenges faced by people in the south of Africa can be very daunting and very different to those faced by many in other parts of the world, notwithstanding the universality of life's experiences.

The book closes with a reminder and 'check-list' about how to use SF, which gives a nice and appropriate next-step feeling as the text comes to a close.

This is a fine collection, both in terms of the amount of great SF learning and experience contained and also with the range of practice that is on show. SF is clearly making great inroads in Southern Africa, and Jacqui von Cziffra-Bergs and her many collaborators and contributors are to be warmly congratulated. I hope we will be seeing more of them at conferences and in print in the future.

### **About the Reviewer**

Dr Mark McKergow is an international consultant, speaker and author. He is a world pioneer in applying the pragmatic and minimal philosophy of Solutions Focus (SF) to the organisational world, and has led the development of SF strategic planning, negotiation, conflict management and organisational change models, as well as being one of the world's leading group facilitators. With his partner Jenny Clarke, Mark edits and publishes books about SF in organisations, and is engaged in building links between SF and other post-structural approaches and academia. Mark was an editor of InterAction from 2009-2016. He is based in Scotland.