

BOOK REVIEWS

The Solutions Focus: Transforming Change for Coaches, Leaders and Consultants by Paul Z Jackson and Mark McKergow (Third Edition)

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This new edition of Jackson & McKergow's classic *The Solutions Focus* constitutes an effort in creativity, integration, rigour and innovation. The book is a remarkable combination of already recognised concepts and new applications. Above all, I find myself visualising the product of a collaboration between two worldwide global experts of different styles and careers. The one comes more from communication and improvisation, the other from science and its practical possibilities, as well as being a musician. Without a shadow of a doubt, both are artists who know how to cooperate.

The Solutions Focus: Transforming Change for Coaches, Leaders and Consultants by Paul Z Jackson and Mark McKergow (third edition)

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“Like awareness, cooperation is a practice. The more skillfully we participate in the process, the more comfortable it becomes. Cooperation is comparable to the way a jazz ensemble improvises (...) You can solo or lay out completely, as best serves the work”.

(Rubin, 2023, pp. 371–372)

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Having said that, I will allow myself a confession. Anticipating this book review sparked joy in me, but also a certain unease. It sparked joy because it was the new edition of one of my favourite books in the solution-focused field, and I had eagerly awaited this update. Yet it sparked unease for the same reason. What to say about such a comprehensive volume? What would it be like, compared to the earlier editions? How, from the authors' own perspectives, have their concepts and models aged?

Although a different experience, reading this new edition reminded me of watching *Get Back*, the documentary on The Beatles, a beautiful new perspective on the *Let it Be* record and film. *Get Back* brought new pictures, new sound, and something the original film couldn't have back then: the dimension of time, which allows us to know now which then-new songs would become classics. Hence, *The Solutions Focus* both gifts us with the best of the original edition, and brings novelties. I will not dwell in comparisons, because the authors dedicate several pages to that in the preface.

In terms of structure, there are three parts. Chapters 1-8 cover the keys to a solution-focused coaching, consultancy and transformation process; chapters 9-13 cover application in various contexts; and finally chapters 14-15 provide the book with an elegant and inspiring closure.

"SF can transform your thinking", warn the authors at the very beginning, and the book really goes in that direction, offering useful ideas and models without making anything seem forced, or comparing SF to other perspectives with an air of superiority. The philosophical and practical principles are described through the acronym SIMPLE, standing for:

- Solutions not problems
- Inbetween-the action is in the interaction
- Make use of what's there
- Possibilities-past, present, future
- Language-simply said
- Every case is different.

SIMPLE is outlined in an inspiring way, with clarity and practicality throughout the first eight chapters, and is in good company alongside other solution tools found throughout the book: Platform, Future Perfect, Scale, Counters, Affirm and Small Actions. Therefore, the book continually intervenes in terms of the knowledge, basic attitude and effectiveness present in actions within an organisation, warns about potential pitfalls, and inspires the reader with good examples from various social and entrepreneurial scenarios.

Another model they share, very helpful for coaches and consultants, is OSKAR:

- Outcome
- Scale
- Know-How and Resources
- Affirm and Action
- Review.

Once again, this model is combined with the solution tools in very practically, with clear examples for executive and team coaching scenarios, training programmes, and organisational change processes.

Deserving special mention is the authors' innovative proposal on solution-focused work in organisational change contexts from a dialogic perspective (for further details on this type of approach, see McKergow, 2020), as well as the inspiration to develop organisations with solution-focused leadership and management, which would interact well with other systemic consultancy proposals. I also believe that applying the principles of *The Solutions Focus* to organisations would create the conditions to make the philosophical and passionate proposals of Tom Peters 'Extreme Humanism' (Peters, 2021) a reality.

In conclusion, this book is essential for those who want to achieve results in professional and organisational scenarios, which, as we know, are complex and require adaptive and sustainable outlooks. As I finish this review, I feel once more as I did with *Get Back*: I have no doubt that I will read it again, and I am eager to share it with others.

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