

BOOK REVIEWS

Go Beyond: Solution-Focused Organisational Development and Design – Book 2 Support the Evolution of Complex Systems by Elvira Kalmar

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Go Beyond: Solution-Focused Organisational Development and Design – Book 2 Support the Evolution of Complex Systems by Elvira Kalmar *SolutionSurfers*, 2025, 242 pages, ISBN 978-3695105557, \$37.90 paperback

Having read and reviewed this book's predecessor, I approached Book 2 with both expectancy and, if I am honest, a measure of caution. Book 1 drew me in at the level of interaction—conversations, reframing, practical tools I could immediately use with individuals and teams. Book 2 moves decisively into the territory of Organisational Development and Design. It is the next stage of the journey. And the shift is significant.

The same high production standards are evident: clear layout, vibrant graphics, intelligent diagrams and the now-familiar icons marking Case Stories, Tools and Exercises. These design elements are not cosmetic; they scaffold understanding. The Case Stories in particular ground the theory in lived organisational reality. The Tools and Exercises continue to embody the Solution Focused ethos—resource-oriented, future-directed, and practical.

Importantly, Book 2 complements and references Book 1 throughout. Where Book 1 introduced the mindset of the Work Evolutionist, Book 2 provides the architecture. It extends the conversation from “How do we evolve interactions?” to “How do we evolve systems?” That is a bigger claim—and one that may initially trigger scepticism in readers like me.

I suspect some will recognise the internal voice:

“That would never work with our Board.”

“Our organisation is too complex.”

“We tried something like that before.”

I felt it too—particularly when reading the Detailed Design Phase of the Solution Focused OD process. The process is structured into three phases:

1. **Contracting**
2. **Strategic Design**

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3. Detailed Design

I am comfortable in the first two phases. Contracting and Strategic Design align closely with my own experience of applying the Solution Focused Approach: clarifying best hopes, identifying stakeholders, co-constructing preferred futures, building shared imagination. These phases feel congruent with my practice and belief system.

The third phase challenged me. Detailed Design moves from aspiration into structural embodiment—governance, roles, processes, systems. Here my scepticism surfaced—not cynicism, but the kind of quiet scepticism that says, “*Hmm, yes—in theory...*”

And yet, this discomfort may be the point.

Book 2 is faithful to the Solution Focused Approach while incorporating robust organisational development theory to explain why it works. It does not abandon practice for theory, nor theory for practice. Instead, it bridges them. I was reminded of Robert Cialdini’s observation that a scientist is never fully satisfied with something working in practice until it is proven in theory. Perhaps OD practitioners share that trait. We are wary of what sounds inspiring but lacks explanatory grounding. Book 2 offers that grounding.

The reference to Jay Galbraith’s Star Model is particularly helpful. By linking behaviour to strategy, structure, processes, rewards, and people practices, the book makes a compelling case that cultural shifts occur not through slogans but through design. The Solution Focused Approach, when embedded in organisational architecture, influences behaviour—and behaviour influences culture, performance, and purpose. The shifts that occur are described not as dramatic transformations, but as *evolutions*. That distinction is powerful. Evolution suggests continuity, adaptation, and sustainability rather than disruption for disruption’s sake.

The Key Assumptions at the beginning of the book particularly resonated with me:

1. Organisations are living systems.
2. Evolution instead of transformation.
3. Emergence above control.
4. Complex living systems do not wait for top-down decisions to change.
5. We have governance models that show the way forward.
6. Positive Deviance is the engine of evolution.
7. Everything you need to elevate a system is in the system already.

These premises echo the deepest currents of the Solution Focused Approach. They acknowledge the inevitability and constancy of change. They recognise that development is not imposed but emerges. They shift leadership from authority to influence. In this way, the approach feels aligned with high-involvement design philosophies and initiatives such as Ireland's Health and Safety Authority's Work Positive framework, which empowers those closest to the work—the “street level”—to shape improvement. This is not Top-Down Design. It is shared imagination turned into shared structure.

What Book 2 ultimately asks of the reader is trust. Trust in the process, trust that small, well-designed shifts can accumulate, and that governance and structure can embody resource-focused assumptions rather than deficit-driven ones. Trust that evolution, grounded in positive deviance and internal strengths, can sway systems over time.

For me, the real value of Book 2 lies in this tension. It stretches me beyond my comfort zone. It exposes where I am confident and where I am hesitant. It invites experimentation. It challenges the sceptical reflex and replaces it with curiosity.

Book 1 inspired me; book 2 tests me.

Together, they form a coherent journey—from interaction to infrastructure, conversation to design, mindset to model. If Book 1 invited us to become Work Evolutionists, Book 2 shows us what that means at systemic scale.

I am up for the challenge. And I am grateful that these two books walk alongside me as I attempt it.

Go Beyond Book 2 is currently available in paperback from [Amazon.de](https://www.amazon.de) at a reduced price. Check the links on the book website <https://www.gobeyond-project.com/book>.

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