

SF GAMES - MEANINGS, CONVERSATIONS BY ACTIONS - Tomasz Świtek

Maybe you've heard that idea that solution focused „something”¹ is about asking questions, what is repeated by many sf trainers [by the way I was one of them:)]? I was trained in that way and later on I trained many people in that way. With passing time of my growing experience and close experiencing and listening to the clients very specific conclusion was becoming stronger and stronger. Conclusion was about secondary role of the questions, and primary role of the meanings included / expressed within content of the answers. Later on I developed sessions without any single question which were based on different ways of creating meanings. I was also inspired by the words of Milton Ericsson, who said:

„Change will lead to insight far more often than insight will lead to change!”

From my point of view each answer is based on a kind of insight. Such insight can be stimulated by the questions, but also by any other kind of useful experience. Useful in terms of creating insights which leads to creating new meanings which we're calling „eu-semie”. I decided to continue my adventure with asking questions, but also to be more open to wider range of strategies to create meanings.

Concept of the sf games we've created within our SFA Center-Poland (www.centrumpsr.eu) was based on that mixture of ideas. Sometimes we use questions which later on leads to change, but sometimes we use experiencing by activity, which might be a change itself, and which later on may leads to some next changes or questions.

My work as a group therapist and trainer brought me many questions about creating useful contexts during cooperation with groups or individuals, questions which required to be answered in a useful way, remembering about our Polish context. Therapy or any other „verbal helping activities” are very talkative job to do, and during my work (especially longer ones) with clients or trainees it was easy to observe some signs of being tired by sitting, listening and talking. I was thinking about different ways how to respond and manage such situations as a trainer, therapist, coach. Of course, we can still ask people what and how they want to act. Anyway sometimes it was more useful to have some propositions about connecting conversation with other activities. Concept of creating sf games came through such experience. Inviting games concept to relationships activities with clients broke down pattern that we only talk to each other and try to understand as a primary activity. Games made relationship activities wider - still it was about talking, but also it was about doing things, sometimes just doing and experiencing.

SF games are propositions of connecting sf assumptions, sf conversations with some other activities, so we achieve new contexts where people start to play and may have fun. Creating meanings, also through conversations, which is an ongoing process during such a

¹ I use term Solution Focused Something to express wide range of activities which can be called as being „solution focused” - like therapy, approach, counseling, interventions, mediations, coaching and so on...

play is very often more spontaneous, full of live and energy and much more easy to perform for large number of our trainees and clients.

We connect solution focused with very different ideas of traditional and new games. In this paper I present just some our sf games with hope that you can find it useful and inspiring and that you'll be back to us with your ideas around sf games.

1. SF DOMINO'S GAME

The goal of this game is to support people in small 3-4 persons groups to have nice time with useful conversation/or activities. So they play standard domino game and follow some additional rules which create opportunity to talk/act about them, share stories, performances and experiences, and on that basis notice their strengths. SF domino's game is very close to tradition of having conversations. At least when you follow list of the questions, not a list of the tasks to perform.

INTRODUCTION

SF Dominos requires some preparations in order to use it in practice! First of all you ought to buy a few sets of dominos. Each piece of domino should be numbered on it's back side from 1 to 28. Each number on the particular piece of domino refers to specific question or task on the list. One of such lists you can find below. Type of the questions or tasks on the list should be addressed to specific needs of the participants or you can create general questions which may be useful for most of participants. You should also print lists of the questions/tasks in order to give them to the groups of the participants of the game.

Divide participants into groups of four or three. Give one set of dominos per group and at least one set of printed questions. Then introduce rules which you can find below.

BASIC RULES:

1. Each person have to choose four dominos.
2. The numbers at the back of dominos refer to the numbers of questions/tasks on your lists.
3. Now follow the standard domino rules (sometimes you need to present them to the groups)
4. When you put down dominos you have to answer to the question or complete the task which is given on the list.
5. If you don't want to answer or complete the task, you miss your turn and you exchange the piece of domino for the new one.
6. If you don't have the right number of spots to put down your domino, you take additional one from the pile.
7. When one person is answering the rest of the team can ask additional questions.
8. During the conversation group members can give (and write) compliments on the base of the answer or performance on particular question.

QUESTIONS TO SF DOMINO

Questions – general exceptions!

Conversation about the past!

1. Tell us/your partner about how you showed your strong will.
2. Tell us/your partner how you controlled yourself in a difficult situation.
3. Tell us/your partner how you kept your word.
4. Tell us/your partner how you handled (dealt with) your weakness well.
5. Tell us/your partner how you were able to conquer your fear/worries.
6. Tell us/your partner how you took care of something good for yourself.
7. Tell us/your partner how you took care of something good for somebody else.
8. Tell us/your partner how you had a good time/enjoyed yourself.
9. Tell us/your partner how you were happy with yourself.
10. Tell us/your partner how you enthused about something small.
11. Tell us/your partner how you were happy with somebody else/shared your happiness with somebody else.
12. Tell us/your partner how much you strove for something/tried to do/get something.
13. Tell us/your partner how you found at least a little meaning in life.
14. Tell us/your partner how you were able to take a risk.
15. Tell us/your partner how you managed to resist temptation.
16. Tell us/your partner how you chose something good.
17. Tell us/your partner how you chose to be honest with yourself in a difficult situation.
18. Tell us/your partner how you chose to be honest towards others.
19. Tell us/your partner how you helped somebody else.
20. Tell us/your partner how you “got up”/recovered after an accident.
21. Tell us/your partner how you were able to fight for something.
22. Tell us/your partner how you did something unexpected.
23. Tell us/your partner what and how you were able to change.
24. Tell us/your partner how you were somebody’s friend.
25. Tell us/your partner how you went back to something important.
26. Tell us/your partner how you managed to do something important.
27. Tell us/your partner how you showed your humbleness/humility.
28. Tell us/your partner how you managed to get involved in something important.

TASKS TO SF DOMINO

Tasks – general exceptions!

Performing, playing, acting situations from the past!

You're the actor - your task is to play yourself in one of your life past situations when you did / perform quality, resource, ability listed below. You may need some more actors - invite members of your team - prepare scenario of the scene and play it together. Remember:) Your task is to show it through concrete situation which has happened before, and now you just reconstruct. In case such task is not possible, you can create scenario and play it, as a situation from coming future.

1. Performing strong will.
2. Controlling yourself in a difficult situation.
3. Keeping given words or promises.
4. Dealing well with personal weakness.
5. Conquering your fear/worries.
6. Taking care of something good for yourself.
7. Taking care of something good for somebody else.
8. Having a good time/enjoying yourself.
9. Being happy with yourself.
10. Showing admiration of something small.
11. Sharing your happiness with somebody else.
12. Working hard on achieving something.
13. Being able to play in useful way.
14. Being able to take necessary risk.
15. Managing to resist temptation.
16. Choosing something good.
17. Choosing good reaction.
18. Choosing to be honest towards others.
19. Helping somebody.
20. Rebuilding after difficult situation.
21. Fighting for something good.
22. Doing something unexpected in useful way.
23. Performing change.
24. Having fun with others.
25. Caring about important things.
26. Showing spontaneous reactions.
27. Showing humility.
28. Acting with a kind of diplomacy.

2. SF IN- OR OUT- DOOR GAME

In that game we support people to act together as a team, get in save physical contact with team members, and on that basis follow two directions of conversation – first one connected with specific, future oriented question and second focused on analyzing present experience. That kind of sf game may be one of tools during group building process. In that sf game team we invite game members to act and perform and than to talk. So the conversation is based on the experience. We also invite people to having two kinds of conversation - one about them during that game and experiencing each other, second about their past experiences. Questions about past might be tailored to needs of the specific person or team.

People in small groups follow instructions they receive in envelope. Trainer or therapist is just a person who assist, support and clarify. Please be sure that group members are capable to be part of that game also from physical point of view. Characters you choose as representing particular resource at the envelope tasks should be quite well known in the cultural context of the team.

INTRODUCTION

That game should be played in groups of four (option is three).

Please prepare – balloons, one big envelope, four small or medium envelopes, memory cards (like post it or other small color papers), printed general instruction, printed instructions for „all four colors” (see below).

You put instructions for blue, orange... persons into four small or medium envelopes which you marked with proper color (blue, orange...). Into big envelope you put general instruction, four colored envelopes with instruction for blue, orange..., memory cards. Balloons simply should be available for participants.

After dividing people into groups of four you give them big envelope with its content and ask people to follow instructions. That's all! Have a good time while observing participants. Below you can find general instruction as well as instruction for particular participants.

General instrucion

Here are the instructions for your team. We ask you to follow them now!

Your instruction set includes:

1. One page of general instructions.
2. Four envelopes with tasks for each of you.

3. Memory cards which you can use to write down complements for each other during the game.

Step 1.

Get into groups of four (three if four is not possible). As a group, please pick one of the balloons which are around you in the room. You need just one balloon per group. You may take a second one just in case.

Step 2.

Within your group, please decide together who will be which one of the following colours: **blue, green, red** and **orange**. Please attribute one colour to one person. If you're a team of 3, use just three colours.

Step 3.

Now please walk together 20 meters in a direction chosen by your team. On your way all four (three) of you need to hold the balloon with your **heads** only. Hands, arms and other parts of your body may be used for many purposes apart from touching and holding the balloon. Try to enjoy the experience, going gently and softly as a team

Step 4.

So how was your twenty-meter walk?? Was it fun ...?? You can congratulate each other on your cooperation. What worked well? What and how can you improve? Exchange your impressions...

Now it's time to open the envelope addressed to the person who is **blue**. Please follow the included instructions.

Step 5.

Now please go together 10 meters in a direction chosen by your team. Your task is to go and hold the balloon with your **necks** only. Hands, arms, heads and other parts of your body may be used for many purposes except touching and holding the balloon. Try to go, as a team, gently, softly and having fun...

Step 6.

So how was the trip?? Were you flexible enough...?? You can thank each other for the experience... What worked well? What and how can you improve? Exchange your impressions...

Now it's time to open the envelope addressed to the person who is **green**. Please follow the included instructions.

Step 7

Now please jump together 10 meters a direction chosen by your team. Your task is to jump

and hold the balloon with your **arms** only. Hands, heads and other parts of your body may be used for many purposes except touching and holding the balloon. Try to jump, as a team, gently, softly and having fun...

Step 8

So how about the jumping?? Was it more like rabbit style or kangaroo style?? You can thank each other for the experience... What worked well? What and how can you improve? Exchange your impressions...

Now it's time to open the envelope addressed to the person who is **red**. Please follow the included instructions.

Step 9.

Now please run together 10 meters in a direction chosen by your team. Your task is to run and hold the balloon with your **bellies** only. Hands, heads and other parts of your body may be used for many purposes except touching and holding the balloon. Try to run, as a team, gently, softly and with fun...

Step 10

Were you still able to breathe after the run?? Is your breath deep and fast enough?? You can thank each other for that experience... What worked well? What and how can you improve? Exchange your impressions...

Now it's time to open the envelope addressed to the person who is **orange**. Please follow the included instructions.

Step 11

Find a way to round off this short "game" as a team ... Then do it and come back to our room!

Instructions for the blue envelope!!!

Task for the person who is blue!

Please think about the topic written below and talk about it with your team. You are invited to have a conversation, but you can also try to show or perform it in any way you want!!!

If you had as much determination as Rocky Balboa did, what would you do in differently in any "life fights" in the nearest future? [You can place photo of Rocky Balboa here]

Task for the other team members

Listen carefully and ask and/or summarize when needed. Try to co-create and be part of the conversation around the story told by the person with **blue**.

At the end of the conversation you can write down on memory cards some compliments for the storyteller and give them to her/him.

Instructions for the green envelope!!!

Task for the person who is green!

Please think about the topic written below and talk about it with your team.

You are invited to have a conversation, but you can also try to show or perform it in any way you want!!!

If you had as much “resource-sensibility” and “crime-sensibility” as Colombo did, what would you do in a different way in any “life investigations” in the nearest future? [You can place photo of Colombo here]

Task for the other team members

Listen carefully and ask and/or summarize when needed. Try to co-create and be part of the conversation around the story told by the person with **green**.

At the end of the conversation you can write down on memory cards some compliments for the storyteller and give them to her/him.

Instructions for the red envelope!!!

Task for the person who is red!

Please think about the topic written below and talk about it with your team.

You are invited to have a conversation, but you can also try to show or perform it in any way you want!!!

If you had as much trust in others as hobbit Frodo did, what would you do differently in any “life choices” in the nearest future? [You can place photo of Frodo here]

Task for the other team members

Listen carefully and ask and/or summarize when needed. Try to co-create and be part of the conversation around the story told by the person with **red**.

At the end of the conversation you can write down on memory cards some compliments

for the storyteller and give them to her/him.

Instructions for the orange envelope!!!

Task for the person who is orange!

Please think about the topic written below and talk about it with your team. You are invited to have a conversation, but you can also try to show or perform it in any way you want!!!

If you had as much passion about something as Winnie to Pooh did about honey, what would you do in a different way in any “life cooking” situations in the nearest future? [You can place photo of Winnie to Pooh here]

Task for the other team members

Listen carefully and ask and/or summarize when needed. Try to co-create and be part of the conversation around the story told by the person with **orange**. At the end of the conversation you can write down on memory cards some compliments for the storyteller and give them to her/him.

3. RESOURCE'S BALLOON GAME

Resource's balloon game is based on action and having fast cognitive associations. In our practice we invite people to balloon game in the situations when working on enhancing clients ability to identify own resources seems to required. It also allow client to reinforce conscious thinking from the resource perspective and helps clients to rebuild set of personal meanings about their potentials. We use balloons since for many people they're closely associated with having fun, and from the technical point of view their speed of movement after hitting is quite slow.

In order to play resource's balloon game you split group into teams of two. Each pair receive balloon which needs to be inflated. Names of the players can be marked on the balloon. You present basic tools which are:

1. You play by hitting balloon one by one.
2. You can hit the balloon only with your hands and only after you say what you are good at! (e.g. - playing rock & roll , cooking, jumping, showing love, persistence).
3. You score points when your partner misses the balloon or can't say what he/she is good at. You play as long as one of you scores 5 points
4. You can check your partner twice during the game. Just say: CHECK and ask your partner to give you the proof for what he/she said. The proof must to be based on

personal experience and real situations from the past. During such short talk you can compliment story teller.

In groups where you might see it as something useful you can create tournament and play real championship in this „sport” activity. You can create next and next teams of two and encourage people to name more of their resources.

After the game, especially when you did just one shift, players mark balloons not only with their names, but also they write down or draw their resources around their names. Children and adults love to play. To make it more conscious before the game you can invite people to warm up activity what means making list of personal resources. You can also change the rule and the task of the player is to name the resource of the game partner. In such situations warm up exercises seems to be even more required. You can use it in pairs: parent-child, mother - father, wife - husband, or even at the „safe” teams chief - worker.

4. SF STORY PLAYING GAME

SF story playing game is one based on participant’s full improvisation and basically was created for working with large groups, but later on was also applied for smaller groups. We use it sometimes as a strong warming up events exercise, sometimes we use it when sayings „body can say more than words can” or „moving body is a good way to move stones of words” might be applied into understanding of the group process.

In this article we present you one of many sf story playing games, which was created as one of the first of that kind (That story was cocreated by Artur Lewiński and Tomasz Świtek with the wolf name EBTA ☺). The main hero of the story is little wolfie, which can be named as you want, our’s name is Aruba. Story is quite short and describes some „adventures” happening to Aruba. During that „adventures” Aruba is experiencing, doing, performing some resources.

You may introduce exercise to the group members:

„You’ll hear the story about little wolf called Aruba. Please try to behave as you would be that wolf and perform skills Aruba’s discovered about herself in woolfy life.”

Then read or say that story and the group members try to be Aruba and behave like Aruba behaves during the story.

A story about little wolf Aruba.

Once upon a time, in a mysterious distant land, far, far away from here there lived a little woolfy called Aruba. Life in a forest, as we all know, can be truly dangerous on times – there are lots of traps waiting for little wolves like Aruba. But there are also sunny sides of forests of course.

Little Aruba had to learn different skills to cope with both sides of life in a forest.

Once, when Aruba's parents (the old wolves) went to hunt for food and Aruba felt so alone, she found out she could focus *her perceptions beyond worries by dancing without music*. It brought so much fun!

When her parents were coming back home, she found out that *showing warm feelings* was so exciting and soothing at the same time.

One day when Aruba's parents were seriously ill and she had to go and get food for the family – she found herself in a very difficult situation: a huge grizzli attacked her. To her great surprise, Aruba found out that she could *protect herself by running away*. When she grew a little and became more mature, she discovered that she could also *protect herself by fighting back*. And fighting for important, essential things came easily.

When she grew up a little bit more and became responsible, she got to a point where she found out she could *resist temptations*.

Not always of course ☺ For such situations, she had a solution that worked best of all: *she laughed spontaneously and joke about herself!!!!* Usually, in such cases she kept falling on the ground – once she almost died of laughter.

Fortunately she survived ☺

You probably wonder what was the most important thing in Aruba's life . Even if you don't: I'll tell you anyway: *it was making friends !* Usually in a very specific way: *by giving them a warm, warm hug*.

After telling the story and it's performing by the group members you need to create some space for interactions, having jokes, some emotional ventilation.

Next you divide group into smaller teams of 3-4 members. You remind them all resources which were performed by the Aruba during story, by writing them down on the flipchart or via digital screen presentation. You remind about abilities:

- focusing perceptions beyond worries by dancing without music
- showing warm feeling
- protecting herself by running away
- fighting back for sth important
- resisting temptations
- making friends
- laughing spontaneously & joking about herself
- giving friends a warm, warm hug.

After summarizing Aruba's resources you invite group members to share at least with one real story based on their exceptions, when they presented similar quality and or you invite group members to create short, concrete description of performing such quality in real life, possibly in near future.

5. SUMMARIZATION

Do you feel any inspiration? Do we connect with your experience and ways of working with clients? Let's hope for this!

We've described four different games, based on different contexts, ways of activity, but still sharing some common factors, common spirit. Shortly summarizing:

- experiencing through sf games can be milestone in creating useful meanings,
- mixing conversations with activities may create space for new possibilities,
- depending on clients needs proportion between talking and doing should be well tailored,
- bringing context of fun, play can support clients in the process of change,
- each traditional game can be adopted to sf practice,
- games should be created through knowing clients and professional contexts, thus our games structure should be always adapted to particular contexts.

There're different ways to create, describe and stay in contact with personal goals, preferred situation shape, external and internal resources, utilizing personal and external experience. Games are just more funny way to enjoy our job toward clients preferred outcomes.

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