Introduction

Welcome to the pages of this short article. After organizing in 2012 with my colleagues Artur Lewinski and Jacek Szczepkowski EBTA annual conference in Torun, Poland under the title "Upside down – SF paradigms – revolutions & evolutions" topic of exploring useful practices became even more named in my conscious practice than before. Conference book under the same title was our attempt to collect articles about diversity of SF styles (Lewinski, A., & Szczepkowski, J., & Switek, T. 2012). In 2018 EBTA annual conference in Sofia and EBTA 25'years anniversary has created great opportunity to continue sharing ideas around useful practices. This year my personal remark is also connected with my 20 years anniversary of using SFBT in my practice – with individuals, couples, groups and organizations. Part of that experiences I was trying to describe to my Polish colleagues at the book called Solutions paths, book written from clients perspective and narration (Switek, T., 2009).

Each of us knows very well basics assumptions and techniques, sometimes called as basic tenets of SFBT (SFBTA, 2013). Each training, at least basic ones, are about goals, preferred future descriptions, exceptions, scaling, resources, complimenting and so on… The most known source of understanding of what is basic in SFBT have been connected to works done in Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee by Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and the team (De Jong, P., & Berg, I. K. 2013; Berg, I. K., & Miller, S. D. 1992). Giving attention to SF diversity, at least in some part of the Europe, alternative understandings around SF have been connected to tradition known as Bruges Model taken from Korzybski Institute and Luc Isebaert's works, as well as, his team (Isebaert, L. 2017). In this article I'll shortly give a look to my understandings around Milwaukee and Bruges styles and I'll try to focus on what's different in my practice, when I do something differently than people who follows Milwaukee style of doing SFBT.

Twenty years ago I was amazed by SFBT ideas and descriptions. Papers from Luc Isebaert (Isebaert, L., & Cabié, M. C. 1997), Frank Thomas (Thomas, F. Cockburn, J. 1998), Insoo Kim Berg (Berg, I. K., & Miller, S. D. 1992) or Steve de Shazer (de Shazer,

S. 1985, de Shazer, S. 1994) were very inspirational for me. I truly believed that at BFTC Milwaukee's Team was following Steve's idea "Do not think, but observe" (De Shazer, S. (N.D.-a)) and was looking for what works in therapy by having observations and conversations with clients beyond any stiff assumption (de Shazer, S. 1988). Not any specific theory about clients, but just clients were primary source of inspiration to find out what works in therapy, what's useful for them in current situations and contexts. Similarly idea of the free choice of the client as an ethic in psychotherapy described by Luc Isebaert was a trigger which took my attention and finally created context for my choice to follow SFBT, no other approaches (Isebaert, L., & Cabié, M. C. 1997).

<u>Around useful purposefulness ....</u>

Whatever happens in the SFBT is to happen "for something". The sense of purposefulness accompanies me during my meeting with client many times from the very beginning! Typical interventions focusing on defining goals in the form of questions like "What needs to happen here to think that it was worthwhile to come to this meeting"? are intended to introduce a purpose aspect (Durrant, M. 1993). It is worth remembering that the search for purposefulness is also an adventure of the therapist with himself. Each of us can ask ourselves the question "What will help you think that what you did during the meeting was worth doing? Whatever we do, let us do it' for the purpose'.

The premise of purpose is connected in our method with another assumption concerning the search for usefulness. Usefulness in a solution-focused approach seems to be one of the basic building blocks of this method (Sharry, J., Madden, B., Darmody, M. 2001). The search for what works: within the framework of therapy and in the client's life, in a romantic description of the history of SFBT formation, could be compared to the history of St. Graal's search. Strong focus on usefulness is also well presented by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kimberg in their short article, where they summarize and show efforts in brief family tradition to focus on what is useful from Milton Erickson, through works of MRI up to BFTC experiences (de Shazer, S., Berg, I.K., 1995, pp. 249-252). At the same article they presented little bit different line of thinking to MRI ideas, which in BFTC goes:

1. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
2. Once you know what works, do more of it.
3. If it doesn't work, don't do it again: Do something different.

When I refer these words to the method itself, it instantly encourages me to go beyond the rules of the method in every situation where they do not work. This, however, is striking with the idea that was created later on – idea of trusting the model: "Trust the model!". Although it's quite challenging to find out who introduced that idea into SFBT field, I've heard it so many times during conversations at the conferences and workshops. At least at some cased I'd impression that words "Trust the model" means give priority to the gps navigation than to your experience of the territory. One of the practical aspects in SFBT applications lies precisely in solving the above outlined dilemma. Practitioners who are guided by the useful purposefulness principle easier find flexibility in creating the forms and content offered to the client during the SFBT application process. For the purpose of my practice I decided that one of the principles of the SFBT consists in exceeding its principles in the name of useful purposefulness. In other words, the value of looking for what is useful to the client is more valuable than the value of any SFBT rule being implemented in a rigid way. Looking for other words, I am willing to say that I have to trust the model, that is, to show distrust to the model, because it is only a map and not a reality. A map created "somewhere and once "and applied "here and now".

Based on this understanding, I have created three categories of SFBT activities for my practice. In my reflection on SFBT practice I try to use categories: it is typical for SFBT, it is quasi-typical for SFBT, it is a-typical for SFBT. However, the typology criterion is not a sieve that determines my practical choices, but rather a suggestion that determines the order of my choices. Unless I do otherwise, the general tendency is from what is more typical, through quasi-typical, toward atypical forms and contents (I describe it more precisely in next paragraphs).

When we take into account useful purposefulness, it is worth to ask ourselves what is our criterion to determine whether or not it is useful. How to recognize that what we are doing in the process of using SFBT because of its usefulness makes sense.

My understanding of SFBT allows me to define this approach as assisting the client in the "transition" from what is less wanted towards what is more wanted, based on every necessary source of inspiration. Combining this with Steve de Shazer words that SFBT was created to help the client achieve what she/he wants (taken from verbal stories – no written referral), the main criterion for assessing the degree of useful purposefulness is its value to what extent the intervention helps, supports the client's chances of achieving what the client wants, what the client chooses in the matter we are working on. Therefore, a strong recommendation in all SFBT traditions is to co-consider with the client the question: "To what extent and what is useful for you?"

Circles of SF practice

Through years of practice, exploring SF world during conferences, seminars, workshops, reading books and finally writing some articles and books by myself, I've created SF map of practices. As I mentioned before map is about three circles, boxes or just spaces which I call – 1- typical, 2 - quasi typical and 3 - atypical SF activities. Three categories of practice: by therapist thinking and acting which can be described through SF history, tradition and definitions as typical, quasi typical or atypical for this approach. (of course depending on personal preferences and sources one can make some rearrangements )

1. Examples typical for SF practice (most SF schools, traditions, models) (Szczepkowski, J., 2010; Jackson, P., McKergow, M., 2010; Macdonad, A.J., 2011, ) :

   - focusing on „what does the client want in the particular context, as she/he perceived it?"

   - supporting creations of the pictures of something called as preferred future, state, situation,

   - as priority enhancing clients experience by utilizing exceptions idea,
   - working mainly within clients frames and perspectives,
   - utilizing potentials of clients language - especially looking for solutions dynamics (do not mix with content about solution),

- working rather from the perspective of dynamic and subjective frames and language games,

- on the quest toward more wanted looking for anything what can be seen as clients resource, and when appropriate compliments clients,

- treating client as the important part of the process and thus seeing that person as: the expert or the person with the useful knowledge, experience,

- asking questions as typical strategy, especially those based on the last answer

- focusing on verbal communication and acting.

2. Quasi typical for SF practice (for example: some from Bruges Model – Korzybski Institute and Luc Isebaert (Isebert, L., 2017), some from Eve Lipchik (Lipchik, E., 2002), some from FT (Frank's Therapy) by Frank Thomas (personal conversations), some from Resource Activation Model by Michael Hjerth (personal conversations; also read in this book chapter by M. Hjerth), some from CoLeC model by Plamen Panayotov (before known as Simple Therapy – Panyotov, P., 2011; also read in this book chapter by P. Panayotov), some from Situations Focused Model by Tomasz Switek (Switek, T., 2014):

- when necessary utilizing external sources of inspiration - like therapist experience with others, or knowledge,

- proposing therapist's interpretations, hypothesis especially on the basis of getting authorization,

- using different names within approach like: instead of the problem - not wanted, instead of solution - more wanted, instead of simplicity - sufficient complexity, instead of Milwaukee types of relationship - Bruges's types of relationship), or just "cooperation relationship", instead of preferred future - preferred situation), client as the owner of life (not an expert),

- encouraging therapist to think and co create meanings,

- seeing therapy or meetings for clients as a place for conversations, and also as a place for creating different experiences through - sounds, movements, pictures - like body work, pictures, drawing, painting, playing, utilizing drama and so on),

- utilizing idea of creating useful meanings – (eu-semie),

- asking clients about useful questions,

- introducing more emotional aspects of the human being,

- focusing on creating personal styles appropriate for therapist and client in "here and now",

- following client's expectations by answering their questions.

3. Atypical:

- utilizing different strategies from different approaches (as long as possible with SF flavor), especially or exclusively when more typical strategies do not work.

Situations Focused

My personal practice finally resulted in creating Situations Focused Model within SFBT tradition. "Official" presentations was made many times during EBTA and SFBTA conferences, as well as, at the article published in 2014 at International Journal of Solution Focused Practices (Switek, T. 2014). I took decision to use word "situations" to describe basic idea of this model, and I see reasons for that also in Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg words that brief therapy is "a therapy organized around the context which people built for themselves and/or in which they find themselves" (de Shazer, S., Berg, I.K., 1995, p. 250). As I described it more precisely in the article I mentioned earlier "The situations focused model defines the term *situation* as the status of the circumstances, factors, or the combination of circumstances at a specific point (present) or nonspecific point (preferred or data) in time that contains components and their understandings. In other words, a situation is the way in which something is positioned and connected with its surroundings. This definition of "situation" is based on that in the *American Heritage Dictionary* ("Situation," n.d.). The neutrality of description also demonstrates the attempt to consider all aspects as possibly containing positives and negatives, and advantages and disadvantages. " (Switek, T. 2014, p. 47). At the same article I mentioned earlier Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg write „ problems are seen as situational, i.e., problems are more a result of the definition of the situation than they are a result of any causative underlying maladjustments or psychopathology or systemic disfunctions." (de Shazer, S., Berg, I.K., 1995, p. 251) In Situations Focused Model we give focus to Current Situation,

Preferred Situation and Data Situation where individual is active part of building that situational contexts.

Last year (2018) during travel to the World SF Conference in Bad Soden I was lucky to visit Wittenberg city known also from Martin Luther's Thesis. I decided by chance to join this tradition and I published my own SF thesis in Wittenberg using social media (in this case SF means Situations Focused).

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1. We assist our clients in achieving what is more wanted by them in particular context. Different parties give input of what might be wanted, choice is done by clients.
2. We use all required sources of inspiration/maps - clients', others, ours - to enhance clients' chance to obtain what is more wanted giving priority to clients' ones.
3. We're focused on useful experiences - so we introduce variety of activities during our meetings with clients.

4. We co-construct useful thinking, meanings about the past, the present, and the future. Names/labels are just given, names include and at the same time exclude some aspects, so we pay attention to both sides of this function.

5. We think and act in terms of sufficient complexity.

6. We think that descriptions of what is wanted/unwanted are useful and in many situations they require reinforcement or substitution by different strategies.
7. We remember that having conversation means so much more than asking questions, so we're focused on co-creating conversation's content by all cooperative means.
8. We're in knowing stance - slow knowing, appropriate knowing, but still in knowing stance - clients, others and our "meanings" are equally potential source of inspiration, and the choice is on the client's side. Knowing means potential understandings / potential perceptions about something beyond any claim to be right.
9. The structure of the first and the following sessions can be recognized only after sessions are finished, so we're constantly in experiment mode, adapting all our experience in co-creating useful meetings with our clients.
10. We do remember about our SF tradition and practices, although during work with

clients we're acting in flexible, tentative and still deliberate way to open our minds for useful practices.

11. ....to be defined day by day of observing, thinking and co-creating meanings with the client who will come.


<u>Letter to my SF Colleagues</u>


So now please read a short letter I wrote to you my Dear SF practitioner:

"Hi! It's just personal letter for you, who wants to take a risk and read it! Welcome to my SF illusions world. Years and years of the practice, learning, teaching, client by client ...change is constant, nothing is the same ...old patterns must be adopted, thus reshaped in many ways... stay in open mind position ...try to forget your approach name ...your approach name is to usefully assist your clients in shifting toward more wanted...

Indeed, you know! You know pretty well what Solution Focused means, and SFBT diversity too!!! ...and while the fifth client during that day entering your room, even the way to welcome her/him is becoming kind of unknown... you have to learn all of that since beginning, all must be verified! Such Situation! You act in "now and here", just inspired by "there and then"!

Defining too much what "not knowing "means, what "solution focused" means... may result in knowing too much during session ...too much to follow that particular client preferences! During dialogue with clients we tend to know too much about process and we pretend too much about not knowing around client's issues. When you trust the model than you follow SF suggestion to use different patterns even new ones, because you don't trust the model! Our approach requires from us to go beyond it, each time when SFA doesn't work! The only question is how to recognize when & how!

Would you mind to consider how many choices are made by the SF approach rules and assumptions instead of the client? If you really want to continue BFTC work keep going on your way and challenge past in order to find out what works today! SFBT was never created enough to preserve, and will never be... so question the name, question assumptions, question practice! Therapy "room" is also part of client's life! How does client want to live that part of life?

Let me give example. Forcing idea that all potential ideas we have to find out are only within client's experiences & hearts is something our clients want from us? Clients are experts as long as they do not ask for our- therapist-contributions! When they do, we play the game with "suppose"! Utilizing in our practice only client's experiences seems to be unwanted by many clients – their free choice is also about sources of inspiration. You can think that SF is about assisting clients in shifting from "less wanted" toward "more wanted' on the basis of every required source of inspiration. So even more you can think that SF is about creating useful experiences through questions, conversations and actions.

At least in Poland, at my workplaces I met clients who claim that they really need and can utilize external sources of inspiration. Your perceptions might be a profound contribution to client's ones! Think about your live, my dear SF pro! For how many times did you use external sources of inspiration within your developments? Let the client choose. Just ask the client by the beginning of the session:

Do you choose to achieve preferred change only on the basis
of yours ideas or every required ones?

My experience is that about 98% of my clients just want to achieve change and on this quest they can utilize all necessary ideas. On that basis it's obvious in my practice that clients also ask questions and I try to respond! Than we're trying to figure out what to do next! Between enhancing client's experiences and connecting them with external ones there's beauty of utilization and usefulness. Part of the clients are able to co-construct preferred situation's description only by choosing pre-prepared components! Once upon a time BFTC team was saying that clients are so unique that they need unique and tailored solutions for their lives.  Do you think that therapy is also part of the client's life? If so, clients need unique and tailored ways to achieve what's more wanted and the same refers to ways of supporting them on this quest! The only moment to know what to do, how to react is in now! In now you redefine again and again your approach! So please! Just challenge!!! Challenge every assumption created there & then, while you use it here & now! Work beyond any approach name, try to go with the flow of the meeting, never trust the model without distrust! Each assumption you do implement in your practice requires alternative one, in case the first one will not

work! Try to remember that there're many ways to achieve change - also direct and indirect talks about that! ...please "forgive me", I'll not give myself kind of a "gift", by making something so truly SF to limit my explorations on the boarders or even beyond...and for sure not on the basis of believing ...I'm so distant to follow idea WE BELIEVE THAT... I do choose idea OBSERVE, THINK, CO-CREATE MEANINGS... and please continue your way in developing you useful SF style …I hope to hear more about your experiences! Sincerely yours! Tomasz"

Tips around practice

I hope to stick to the idea of writing shortly in a sufficiently brief way, so below just some conclusions what I do explore in my practices which may not be seen as a typical SF strategy, technique or whatever we name it.

Some of explored changes on the level of names, words when I describe my approach:

| Instead of retired names | I use working names |
| --- | --- |
| ~~problem~~ | sth unwanted or less wanted |
| ~~solution~~ | sth wanted or more wanted |
| ~~simplicity~~ | sufficient complexity |
| ~~solution~~ focused | situations focused |
| preferred ~~future~~ | preferred situation |
| ~~exceptions~~ | data situations |
| ~~helping, therapy~~ | assisting |
| client as ~~the expert~~ | client as the owner of her/his life |
| ~~solution~~ | wanted change |
| ~~session structures known before session~~ | session structures known after session |
| ~~defining~~ approach | describing approach |
| ~~not knowing~~ | useful knowing |
| ~~SF is about asking questions~~ | SF is about useful experiences, meanings |
| ~~clients know better~~ | clients make choices |

Some of explored changes on the level of everyday practice:

| |
|---|
| 1. Asking clients at the beginning of our conversations: <br><br> Do you choose to achieve preferred change <br> only on the basis of yours ideas or every required source of inspiration? <br> And <br> Do you choose to achieve your preferred change in a "pleasant" way during sessions or may it be somehow "difficult" in experiencing? |
| 2. When needed inviting clients to mode of asking questions and switching myself into mode of answering to the client's questions |
| 3. When needed introducing my own perceptions and considering with clients how to utilize them (after getting authorization from the clients) |
| 4. Complimenting beyond evaluation persons, beyond static language (you're…) in more dynamic way, with dynamic language (it shows that… you can … you know …you have …important for you is) |
| 5. When needed utilizing external sources of inspiration (read below) |
| 6. When needed introducing instead of the words different ways of describing like: movement, symbols, music, pictures, cards (Dixit, metaphorical) … |
| 7. When needed instead of talking to the client doing something to create hopefully useful experience (eg. like throwing with cakes/paper balls into the client, or softly kicking leg, or falling down on the floor while client is talking to me)   (all of that connected with clients body after getting authorization) |
| 8. Co-creating with clients picture descriptions of preferred situation by proposing "items" which could be part of the change |
| 9. Talking about so called deficits in order to think in terms of planning progress. |
| 10. Delivering feedback from outside how things might be experienced by others |
| 11. Co-creating with clients picture descriptions of preferred situation by talking range of stories about possible changes to let clients choose what sounds interesting for them |
| 12. Performing sessions without any single question from the consultant to explore idea that SF is about creating meanings, experiences no matter in what way. |

<u>Sources of inspiration</u>

You may be wondering how to assist clients in transition from „less wanted" toward „more wanted" on the basis of every required source of inspiration while you apply into practice useful purposefulness assumption within Situations Model of SFBT. This short description will outline it somehow for you.

Let's start again a little bit earlier! I mean since SFBT started to be developed in Milwaukee (BFTC), Bruges (Korzybski Institute) and later "all around the world" the very obvious and valuable strategy was giving attention to utilize client's experiences (George, E., Iveson, C., & Ratner, H. 1999) . They called it – exceptions technique and it was rooted in the works of Milton Ericson and his thinking. Tendency to stay focused on utilizing client's experiences was reinforced by many other SF assumptions, ideas like: work within client's perception, client is the expert, client have everything she/he needs to obtain desired change, your role is just to listen to and ask questions, follow not knowing stance (Pichot, T., Dolan, Y. 2003, O'Hanlon, B., Weiner-Devis, M., 2003)! In practice therapist was very entitled to ask questions like:

When it was better? How was that? What was different than? or What do you know about others in similar situations and how can we utilize it?

It worked pretty well, especially in cases where client's experiences with themselves or client's knowledge about others in similar situations appeared to be sufficient to obtain desired change. However it was not always a case. That was one of my practical dilemma during work with clients, that referring to their "exceptions", means experiences, not always was sufficiently useful. I was trying to find out ways how to respond better to client's needs in such situations. During years I developed "data situations" technique, which inherently incorporates exceptions technique taken from SFBT, but is broaden by other strategies on the quest to find useful ideas for the client how to make a shift from "less wanted" toward "more wanted". In case we look for definition we can define **data situation as the information based on the past or**

**presence, which potentially could be useful for a client in the context of present situation and preferred situation** (Switek, T., 2014).

Theoretically each conversation about exceptions is undertaken to meet at least one or two goals. First of them is "inspirational" one, second "operating" one. Inspirational goal means that by talking about exceptions we mainly focus our attention on building pictures of clients "better" functioning. We're mainly interested in the description of how it was, what was different, what was going on. Operating goal directly focused on the aspects of know how. So, we want to figure out possible connections, supportive coexistence, positive influences, useful strategies which allow us to achieve preferred situation. There're a few kinds of the data situations, and only some of them refers to client's experience. Still referring to client's experience seems to be obviously and naturally first source of searching in typical situations of using SFBT.

**You can see structure of data situations technique described into the particular steps.**

1st step – referring to client's personal experience- within SFBT tradition obvious source of searching for useful experiences.

What is your experience with this? when it was like that? how was that? What was useful?

*if sufficient – stop here - if not sufficient go to the some of the next steps*

2nd step – referring to client's knowledge about others - it's about client's experience and knowledge based on observing others or just taken / received from others

What do you know about other people experience with this? How was that? What was useful for them? How can you/we utilize it?

*if sufficient – stop here - if not sufficient go to the some of the steps*

3rd step – encouraging client to find out more about other experiences - by using this source of exceptions we offer to client's possibility to meet with people who personally

share similar situations, difficulties, goals, preferred situations like our client and are ready to talk to each other and exchange with personal know how with others. Another option is reading, watching, listening to via very different media sources about other's experiences.

Would like to meet with people with such experience? Go and find out about their experience! Meet with them personally or read about that! How was that? What was useful for them? Go, find out, come back, share with me! How can you/we utilize it?

*if sufficient – stop here - if not sufficient go to the some of the steps*

4th step – referring to therapist's knowledge about others experiences - in some cases it may be clear for both sides - client and therapist - that knowledge and experience collected by therapist from her/clients during years of practice could possibly become useful source of ideas how to cope with life, or how to achieve preferred situation. Important issue is getting clients authorization to speak about therapist "know how" collected from previous clients in somehow similar situations.

Would you like to listen to my knowledge about other people and their experience with this? If yes, I can share with you! So, it was like that....  How can you/we utilize it?

*if sufficient - stop - if not sufficient go to the some of the steps*

5th step  - referring to therapist general knowledge - sometimes for many reasons some of the mentioned above sources of exceptions are not sufficiently useful for our clients. Still probably we as, a professionals have some kind of theoretical knowledge, which at least light in the darkness with the minimal hope, that can be helpful for a client, as long as, client is interested in considering such data.

Would you like to listen to some "books" knowledge I have about this?  if yes, I can share with you! So, it's like that...  How can you/we utilize it?

*if sufficient – stop here - if not sufficient go to the some of the steps*

6th step – reffering to the idea of co-creating prototypes - basically concept of exceptions is rooted in the past, is based on the past experiences. Prototype exceptions tends to be focused on near future, like the concept of small change at the scaling technique. Prototype exception implies that client and therapist try to put their effort to create new strategy, which contains possibility of being useful for a client following one of the sf rules "do something different".

So, what we can do now is to co-create prototype! Are you interested in this? if yes let's do brainstorming and develop prototype! Than, you'll check it out!

*if sufficient – stop here - if not sufficient go to the some of the steps*

<u>Just ending</u>

Thank you for being here, by the end of this article. Any ideas to go on with? I do hope so! Nothing described here is not right (maybe also not wrong). It's just based on my practice, and in so many cases I've been receiving feedback that it helped people a lot. Also our trainees at our SFA Center Poland training institute have been coming back with the smile of usefulness for them, for the clients. Maybe you can make use of it at your contexts. Who knows!

Many persons helped me in creating my thinking! The basic lesson was - there're plenty of understandings within this approach - thus it's not about sharp definitions - what is and what is not SF- but more, that it's about usefulness for the clients (Nelson, T., Thomas, F. 2007). So additionally nowadays I find a great company with many persons and I refer mentally to all of you to reinforce idea that in order to go forward we need to validate our past and that in the new contexts we can still look for redefinitions and adopting our past and current thinking and practice.

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