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### How SF influences learning design

The big shift from problem focus to solution focus happened when Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer and the others at the brief family therapy institute in Milwaukee started asking about what was already happening in their clients lives that was already going into the right direction rather than looking at what didn't work and what they wanted different in their life. There is a gap between where clients are and where they want to be -- and Steve and Insoo and the others found out that it is much easier and more respectful to close that gap by focusing on what is already working, thereby strengthening the collaboration with their clients, their confidence and self efficacy.

In instructional design you also usually have a gap. A training course, a training program or a lesson always aim at getting people from one level of knowledge or ability to a higher level of knowledge or ability. If you keep the above shift in mind, solution focused learning design is very simple: "Always meet a person in their resources first", as Insoo Kim Berg used to say. Focusing on what participants already know, carefully designing a program based on already existing abilities strengthens participants confidence and desire to try out what they have learned.

There have been many approaches to define return on investment of learning and development. Most authors in that field and any learning and development officer you might ask will agree that one thing is crucial for a good return on investment of any learning and development measure: you can see participants applying what they learned for the benefit of the company. A solution focused instructional design guarantees just that.

Kirsten Dierolf was asked by Lufthansa Systems Hungaria to provide a train-the-trainer program which would train facilitators of the new internal training academy to deliver all sorts of trainings (from soft skills to programming) in a solution focused way. (You can read more on this in another article in this volume). Walking her talk she designed an impactful train the trainer program which would at the same time teach solution focused instructional design and be delivered using the same principles. As always, the solution focused process is simple, straightforward, respectful and open, guaranteeing immediate feedback. In the following you will find a detailed description of the workshop.

### Goal Setting

The workshop started with a creative way of goal setting. We wanted to know what the participants' idea of a great training was. There are many ideas of what makes a training great. Some people think that the most important thing is that there is respect for the teacher/trainer. Other people focus on a transparent and easy or easily understood structure of the training. Some people just want to have fun and be entertained.

Participants were asked to form groups of three and think about a training they attended, which was very effective (you learned a lot) and that was also fun and inspiring. They were asked to write down 10 short answers for the following questions: What did the trainer do? What was so good about the training?

For the participants in this workshop, a good training had the following characteristics:

There are lots of exercises, the sessions are targeted, the exercises align with participants expertise, there is lots of practice, frequent coffee breaks, relaxed atmosphere participants are committed, performance is evaluated, it is interactive, well organized and has good follow-up materials, the topic is interesting, there is good time management, there is time for participants questions and the trainer chooses the right pace for the participants.

They had observed that a good trainer:

Is an expert, who sets and clarifies goals of the training, keeps focus, knows the regional practice, can create trust between the trainees and the trainer, is self-confident, makes curious, can facilitate, motivate and involve people. Someone who is comfortable both in active and reactive mode, generates emotional connections, can answer all of the questions, has a sense of humor, asks a lot of questions and gives positive feedback frequently.

The answer to these questions confirmed our assumption that the participants had so much experience if not as teachers/trainers then as learners, so many role models of training and learning that they knew what is needed for effective training sessions. No need to start by boring them with the basics of pedagogy and training design: they were already clear on what kind of trainers they wanted to be.

## Resources

The goal was clear - we now had to look for the resources that made the participants confident that they can be the ideal trainers and run the ideal training sessions that they had just described. We asked the participants to take a piece of paper and write down three sentences about what they thought made them a good future trainer (for example: "I really know a lot about my topic", "I know how to energize a group", "I am not afraid to speak in front of people"). This way everybody started in full awareness of what they already knew and what made them confident that they can lead an effective training.

## Scaling

In the next step participants compared where they were at that moment and where they wanted to be as future trainers. They positioned themselves on a scale from 0 to 10: 10 means you already know everything there is to know about the topic (you can actually lead the course yourself) and 0 is the opposite. They summarized what led them to the point on the scale that they were at, what they already were doing well (which had already been discussed under "resources" in the previous step) and what would be a next step for them. This led to a more

personal goal setting for the two days: each participant found things they felt that they wanted to learn, develop or strengthen.

### Training aims

Of course, we also gave the participants an idea of what we thought that this train-the-trainer was useful for. Training aims are a bit like a “menu-card” in a restaurant. You know what’s on offer and you also know that if you want something completely different, you might be in the wrong place (for example if you go to a Chinese restaurant and want them to produce the perfect Pörkölt(stew).)

The training aims that we had anticipated for this training were:

After this module you will:

- Know the five basic questions for trainings
- Be able to activate the learners’ previous knowledge
- Set training goals in connection with your participants
- Know how to sustain a good relationship with your participants
- Have a few ideas on how to create good follow-up

### Agenda

The first day focused on training design and planning, the second day enabled the participants to plan and deliver a part of their training and get feedback on how it worked out, so that when they meet “real life” participants the first time, they already had a head start. Between each of the modules, participants had the opportunity to write down their individual learnings in a learning log.

Here is an overview of the train-the-trainer structure:

Day 1	Day 2
Welcome, Introduction, Goal-Setting	Effective Facilitation
Training Fundamentals	Dealing with difficulties (participants, heterogeneous groups, myself)
Training Design	Design a part of your own training
Training Documentation	Deliver and get feedback
Beginnings and Ends	One small step: ending with the beginning in mind

### Training fundamentals

Of course, when you are talking about training fundamentals, there is a lot that can be taught – we don’t know how many schools of pedagogy exist in the history of teaching. In this case, we did not think it useful or necessary to enter into any of these debates (which both Peter as a psychologist and Kirsten with a degree in pedagogy know too much about anyway). What participants needed was a practical, hands-on way to design and deliver a successful internal training.

We therefore started with 5 basic questions you need to ask yourself in instructional design:

- What do the participants already know about the topic and how can you help them activate that knowledge?
- What do the participants want to be able to do after the training that they were not able to do before the training?
- What kind of activities will get the participants from where they are to where they want to be after the class?
- How can you avoid losing your good relationship with your participants and stay in good contact with them?
- How can you help your participants continue with their learning after the class?

The participants then formed small groups to discuss how to answer these questions when planning a training. We were very happy to see that their answers would all work and that it was really only a matter of structuring one's thoughts and ideas. Again – almost nothing needed to be “taught”.

Here are a few answers that we had prepared – and which also were given by the participants:

What do the participants already know about the topic and how can you help them activate that knowledge?

- Scaling, scaling, scaling
  - On a scale on the floor / Scale with your hand
    - Talk to your neighbor
    - Write down what you already know on post its / flipchart / table cloth
    - Post to the wall
  - Go for a walk and discuss
  - ...
- Sparkling moments / Highlights
- Describe a role model
- Role play of a “good situation” and “bad situation”

What do the participants want to be able to do after the training that they were not able to do before the training?

- Ask them
  - Calls
  - E-mails
  - Zoomerang
  - Rypple
- Good questions:

- Imagine this workshop is really useful for you, how will you notice?
- Who else will notice?
- How will they notice?
- Which kind of situations will be easier for you?
- Which challenges can you tackle more easily?

Note: in technical trainings the content is driven more by an external curriculum – it still pays to ask what the people want to do with the knowledge they gain.

How can you avoid losing your good relationship with your participants and stay in good contact with them?

- You are
  - Expert for the subject matter
  - Expert for creating a good learning environment
- Participants are
  - Willing to collaborate
  - Wanting to learn
  - Helping you with feedback on what is working and what is not working
  - There is no “difficult participant” – it is simply a participant who needs something different from what they are getting and they are helping you by letting you know
- Interpret all behavior as the desire to collaborate!

How can you help your participants continue with their learning after the class?

- Participants write a letter to themselves
- Participants form learning groups (reflecting team)
- Participants create a study-buddy system
- Follow-up sessions
- Newsgroups
- Wikis
- Social media groups
- A test after a few weeks
- Individual coaching sessions after the training

### Steps of training design

We presented a common sense procedure of instructional design:

- Set goals and determine outcomes with the participants
- Cluster goals and outcomes into topics
- Structure goals and outcomes into a logical sequence
- Create a structure of “modules”
- Create a good beginning and end of the whole training

- Then work on each module:
  - Specify learning goals
  - Find a way to activate participants' knowledge
  - Determine good activities to move toward the goal
  - Design a “transfer moment”
- Look out for a good mix of input, group work, plenary activities, exercises, interactive and individual work. Everybody has a preference for different learning activities. Offering a good mix increases your chances of success.

In the train-the-trainer workshop, the participants then took a piece of paper and wrote down the question they would like to ask future participants about their desired outcome of the training. For example in a stress management workshop a trainer might ask: “How would you notice that you are more relaxed and content in your worklife? Who else will notice?” or a trainer in a Java programming might ask: “What would you like to be able to do with Java?” etc.

They then passed around the piece of paper and everybody wrote their answers on each other's paper. That helped the participants get some ideas on what their future participants might want to know. Afterwards there was time for each future trainer to develop a first idea on the “module structure” of their training. For some this was the start of a very successful training series which they ended up delivering in the company (see article by Peter Rendes and Kirsten Dierolf on the LSYH training academy)

### **Training Documentation**

Since we wanted to keep the know-how of the internal trainings in the company it was important that the trainings are well documented so that if necessary, also other trainers can take over a training and the knowledge isn't lost if someone leaves. We gave an overview and best practice example of what good training documentation looks like consisting of: trainer guide, slides for trainers and program sheet, slides, handouts, photos, follow-up material for the participants.

### **Beginnings and Ends**

The end of the first day was the first “real life” exercise for the participants. Each prepared the design for the beginning and end of their training together with a partner. We also provided slides and a general structure for beginnings and ends to make it as easy as possible to start. We then saw a few examples of “beginnings and ends” and gave feedback on what went well – most went really well – and what could be improved.

Our ideas for the end of a training were:

- One small step
- Continue / Stop
- Write a letter
- Form study groups

- Prepare for follow-up
- What do you want me to ask you in the follow up?
- Design a personal scale-board
- Positive paranoia: what will you notice yourself doing differently – what will others notice – when they notice what can you ask them to do?
- A fun test: divide the group in half. Both halves write down questions for the other half about the topic of the seminar (open or in who wants to be a millionaire style) and then you have a quiz

### Effective Facilitation

We presented the most common methods of facilitation and learning activities: presentation, plenary discussion, experiential exercise, programming exercise, case studies, questionnaires, tests, role plays, coaching sessions, best practice sharing and the relevant tools like powerpoint, flipcharts, post- it notes etc. The participants then split up into small groups and collected best practices for the most relevant facilitation techniques, for example:

- How do you facilitate small groups effectively? (e.g. give good briefs and debriefs)
- How do you design a case study?
- What are good ways of giving programming exercises?

### Dealing with difficulties

Having a good plan, a beginning and an end, some good hints for facilitation techniques is quite a step on the way of becoming a great trainer – however: there is still the moment when you meet the participants, and that sometimes creates a bit of anxiety. To help our participants feel comfortable, we also discussed what they were afraid might be difficult and how these difficulties could be overcome. We stated the following solution focused guidelines that help us when we encounter “difficult” participants:

- A “difficult” participant is a participant who is trying to cooperate
- The main thing is to listen for what they really want
- Don’t feel threatened
- “Resistance” does not exist – if you feel you have a “resistant” client, you haven’t listened enough

### Practice

The whole rest of the day was reserved for designing one module the trainings participants were going to give and then delivering it to the others. We recorded the sessions on video and the video was then shared with the participant to view after the training. Each participant received helpful feedback from the others and the others learned a lot. We had topics ranging from “how to raise your dog” to “stress management” and “Java basics”.

## Transfer / Action Planning

Learning to train never stops – so at the end of the training we made sure to offer all the participants continuation of their learning. They were asked to:

- Write a letter to themselves reminding you of the things you want to continue doing after this training. Give this letter to a “study buddy” (another participant who would like to support you in your learning and whom you would like to support). The study buddy will give you this letter in 3 weeks time.
- Make a date with your study buddy to exchange learning progress. Please write an email to the trainer of this course after your meeting and tell him / her:
  - What did you learn in the meantime?
  - Which of the learning were you able to transfer to the workplace?
  - What are some of the remaining questions

## Summary

This article gave you a glimpse of the beginnings of solution focused instructional design. Obviously, this could only provide a short overview. There are many other ways in which a learning event can be facilitated in the solution focused way, thereby guaranteeing optimal return on investment.

If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact Kirsten Dierolf: [www.kirsten-dierolf.de](http://www.kirsten-dierolf.de) – [www.solutionsacademy.com](http://www.solutionsacademy.com) – [Kirsten@kirsten-dierolf.de](mailto:Kirsten@kirsten-dierolf.de). She is always willing to provide ideas or help in setting up solution focused learning events.