Ask them!
Solution-focused organizational development – A brief explanation of how it works

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The best method for finding out how solution focused organizational development works is to ask those people involved. A solution focused interview with these participants is the most direct path to take.

A solution focused interview concerning organizational development consists mainly of four questions and their variations which I would like to present to you here.

1. The first question is: "Supposing the useful and necessary development has already taken place – what is then different? "

While answering the question the interviewed person imagines a detailed picture of the changes which are mainly comprised of three characteristics: The person interviewed formulates an a) concrete image of the desired future, b) the person is enthused by this image and the image is strong enough to make other members of the organization enthusiastic as well, and c) an irresistible longing for the realization of this image is born. Thus, in solution-focused organizational development, from the outset a **general vision of the desired future** is generated that serves as orientation for the whole process of development.

2. The second question is: "Supposing this vision, as described above, is already in place, what are you personally doing in a different way than you are doing today?"

Answering this question the interviewed person gradually develops a detailed image of how his or her personal behavior will be changed once the general vision is in place. The person walks through an ordinary working day in the future organization, tracking personal behavior from the simplest tasks to the most challenging situations such as aggressively conflicting personal situations. The description of changed behavior, together with the general vision of the future, is now experienced as a lively "movie" of the future generating enthusiasm and longing for its realization. Thus the person creates an **individual vision of the desired future** lending orientation for immediate personal behavioral changes that connect with and support the overall organizational change.

3. The third question is: "Supposing, this organization development has taken place and you are already behaving in the manner which you described in your individual vision of the desired future. Can you describe how this change took place and how you personally contributed to it?"

The person interviewed answers this question from the perspective of the "future organization," e.g. after successful completion of the organizational development process. Thus the described process of development already exhibits all characteristics of the changed organization. In the theory of organization development this is called "compatibility of target and process." The person explains the personal vision of successful change processes and single steps involved.

Four key-questions of solution focused organizational development

1. "Supposing the useful and necessary development has already taken place – what is then different? "

2. "Supposing this vision, as described above, is already in place, what are you personally doing in a different way than you are doing today?"

3. "Supposing, this organization development has taken place and you are already behaving in the manner which you described in your individual vision of the desired future. Can you describe how this change took place and how you personally contributed to it?"

4. "Supposing all of the aforementioned has taken place: what was the first small step taken that initiated this process?"

Perhaps certain developmental steps are not explained, as if they had been forgotten or overlooked. Then it is useful when the interviewer contributes suggestions making use of his/her own personal or professional expertise as to how the process might have run in the vision of the person interviewed as an aid to jogging that person's memory. He or she asks, for example, "Could it be that certain persons took over certain tasks or a kind of project organization was created?" Thus, through conversation, a **process vision** is gradually generated. In the imagination of the person interviewed, this vision works within the given parameters of the organization's reality as well as being compatible with both the general and individual vision toward which the person strives.

4. The fourth question is: "Supposing all of the aforementioned has taken place: what was the first small step taken that initiated this process?"

Answering this question the person interviewed here describes a **concrete individual action** that can be carried out immediately and independently of others and that initiates or furthers the process of development.

The Essence:

You see that during the interview that has increasingly become a solution focused dialogue, the person explains how the organizational development functions within his or her personal vision. This is the essence of solution focused organizational development. It is radically oriented on the vision of the person who participates in organizational development and uses the power of the participants' imagination for the design of the process. Typical of solution focused organizational development is the utilization of the concrete visions of the relevant persons at every step of the process. These steps are developed in solution focused individual or group conversations and transfused into concrete actions.

In practice:

Solution focused organizational development projects thus usually begin with the top management and the visions of the desired future of its members. If these are clearly and concretely formulated, the development process unfurls from the upper management level with its own visions into a top-down process. At each successive level, visions of the desired future are calibrated both vertically and horizontally in concrete communicative process steps, goal conflicts are resolved, and the process is readapted to the newly arisen situation. In general, the process vision of top management already contains steps for the bottom-up development process into which persons at all organizational levels with their visions of the desired future are integrated. In the course of this process, solution focused conversations concerning organizational development successively take place with many, if not with all, members of the organization. Thus, in the end, the process and its results are attuned to all members of the organization. In this way, there is a greater chance for all who belong to be together in the same boot, remain there, and continue to want to be there in the future.

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