Solution-focussed Leadership
Presented by the RMIT Counselling Service
Session Outline

PART 1) What do you want from today’s session?

PART 2) What’s leadership all about?
• Personal meanings of leadership
• Transformational and transactional leadership

PART 3) What does it mean to be ‘solution-focussed’?
• The basis of solution focussed theory

PART 4) What does solution-focussed leadership look like?
• The 7 assumptions of Conversational Solution-focussed Leadership

PART 5) How do we practice solution-focussed leadership?
• Techniques to keep in mind.
PART 1)

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM TODAY?
PART 2)

WHAT’S LEADERSHIP ALL ABOUT?
What’s leadership all about?

Leadership is:

• Working towards shared goals
• Getting the best out of people
• Mobilising effort
• More a function rather than a role
  – i.e., do not have to be in a position of power to display leadership.
    ➢ Providing direction
    ➢ Exercising influence
THEORIES ABOUT LEADERSHIP:
Transactional and transformational leadership

- **Transactional**: *(means oriented)*  The business of getting things done in the here and now. Efficient processes.
  - e.g., rewards and incentives for better performance
  - Punishment for not achieving
  - Clear chain of command

- **Transformational**: *(ends oriented)*  Focus is on the fostering mutual needs, aspirations and values that produce positive social change.
  - e.g., corporate/non-profit mission statements.
  - People will follow someone who inspires/energises them
Transformational leadership’s core elements

• Morality – Values drive processes, e.g. cooperation enhances team performance

• Empowerment – Focus on the development of every individuals’ ability, confidence and independence.

• Motivation – Leaders aim to motivate according to people fulfilling their personal potential versus emotion/behaviour.
Let’s have a break for 10 mins…but before you go

- Which leadership type out of transformational and transactional do you see as being more successful?
Answer from research:

• Kind of both – studies have shown that generally transformational leadership styles are more successful.

• However there is increasing evidence that the two approaches are not polar opposites but can be complementary with the right combination

• Therefore it is important to value both process and product, journey and destination, means and ends.
PART 3)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE ‘SOLUTION-FOCUSED’?
The basis of solution focussed theory

Was derived mainly from family therapists Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer who based their ideas on:

- Idea that human systems are always more than the sum of their parts. Change in one part of the system will change all other parts.

- Social constructivism, where knowledge is constructed through social interaction. No objective truth in reality. People change and develop when they interpret and describe their problems differently.
Walking activity

1. What happened to the energy in the room when we changed how we walked?
2. How large/small did the change feel?
3. What happened to the group’s energy when one person changed?
Word activity

Actions Speak Louder than Words…

• How has the meaning changed between the small group and the large group context?
• How have our cultural backgrounds influenced how we interpret the phrase?
Solution focussed assumptions about change

• Change is constant and inevitable
• Small changes result in big changes
• Since you can’t change the past concentrate on the future
• People have the resources necessary to help themselves: they are the experts
• Every human being, relationship and situation is unique
• Everything is interconnected
• Every problem has at least one exception
• You don’t need to know the problem in order to find a solution
PART 4)

WHAT DOES SOLUTION-FOCUSED LEADERSHIP LOOK LIKE?
Now… Solution-focussed Leadership

• Fits into a transformational style of leadership as it focusses on change and visions of future

• But **how** does it play out in transactions between leaders and others?
Solution-focussed conversational leaders

• Leadership/management is all about having conversations with people, whether in person or by email, phone, etc.

• Effective leaders can manage these conversations to help whomever they are speaking with move towards solutions.

• Conversational skills important but **underlying assumptions** that the leader hold are more important in creating solutions.
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

1. Focus on solutions
2. Find exceptions when a problem occurs
3. Identify changes
4. Start small
5. Listen to those involved in the problem
6. Construct meaning
7. Encourage resourcefulness
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

1) FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS

• Steer the conversation towards positives in the future
• Recognise the problems but do not get caught up on them
• E.g., successful athletes form an image of their success prior to events/games
• By talking about solutions we are placing ourselves within the mind frame of imagining the steps we might need to achieve them
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focused Leadership

2) FIND EXCEPTIONS TO WHEN THE PROBLEM OCCURS

• When we are deeply connected to a concern and have been for a long time we become attached to expectations about what the solution should be

• We can become inflexible in our approach, discounting the importance of exceptional times when the problem does not occur

• Identify and build exceptions to the rule and then increase the frequency of exceptions occurring
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

3) IDENTIFY CHANGES

• Recognise change is happening all the time for all people.

• Help others to see changes and ways of becoming that they like and want to see more of.

• Do not get caught up in evaluations/assessments of group members e.g., Bob is supportive (this is a fixed quality and limits potential for growth and change) vs Bob’s assistance with XX allowed us to create XX.

• Be specific – what the person does and the outcome of that
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

4) START SMALL

- Small changes lead to larger changes
- Begin by generating a solution that addresses some aspects of the problem
  - Look for exceptions to build on
  - What is the first thing you would change about this?
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

5) LISTEN TO THOSE INVOLVED IN THE PROBLEM

• All information is valuable in determining how change will take place

• When you feel someone is resistant to change and really just complaining they are giving you valuable information about how they think change takes place

• Continue to work from the assumption that the ‘complainer’ is seeking solutions
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

6) CONSTRUCT MEANING

- The meaning of our experience is not determined by outside sources

- We create meaning for ourselves, and also create meaning with interactions with each other. Leaders need to realise that any action towards another carries the meaning that the ‘other’ gives it.

- Meaning of experience is contextual. E.g., Raising a hand.
Seven assumptions applied to Solution-focussed Leadership

7) ENCOURAGE RESOURCEFULNESS

• People are resourceful and can solve their own problems

• Most critical assumption (the apple core of all other assumptions)

• We can all get what we want through interactions which are focussed on creating solutions.
Break time! But before you go...

- In your 10 minutes of relaxing, chatting, breathing ponder:
  - A problem that you have had with a leader (boss, lecturer, friend, supervisor)
  - Something that you feel comfortable sharing with another person
PART 5)

HOW DO WE PRACTICE SOLUTION-FOCUSED LEADERSHIP?
How do we practice solution focussed leadership?

1. A CLEAR VISION
2. MIRACLE QUESTION
3. EXCEPTION TO THE RULE
4. DETERMINE A YARDSTICK OF SUCCESS
5. COMPLIMENT ON STRENGTH AND RESOURCES
Time to reflect....