Solution-Focused Mediation: The Future with a Difference

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Rather than dwelling on the conflict, solution-focused mediation asks: What would you prefer instead of the conflict? The focus is on the desired outcome: the future with a difference. Clients are considered capable of formulating their own goal and of devising solutions. The expertise of the mediator lies in asking questions that help clients in this respect and that motivate clients to change. This article demonstrates that concept and the methodology differ significantly from other types of mediation. Conversations become increasingly positive and shorter, ensuring that solution-focused mediation is also cost-effective.

> Winning will depend on not wanting the other to lose.
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> R. Wright, Nonzero: History,
> Evolution and Human
> Cooperation

The new millennium brings to light several social evolutions. These changes are visible in several fields. In (mental) health care, for example, there is the evolution from lengthy to shorter forms of treatment, with the emphasis swinging from cure to prevention. Due to the growing emancipation of the client, the "medical model," in which the practitioner is the expert, is increasingly being abandoned. The problem-focused model, where the practitioner first needs to explore and analyze the problem, is increasingly being replaced by a solution-focused model (Bannink, 2005, 2006a, 2006d, 2007a, 2007b). The same shift from problem-focused interviewing to solution-focused interviewing is seen in education (Goei

and Bannink, 2005) and in management and coaching (Cauffman, 2003; Bannink, 2006b).

An evolution is also taking place within the administration of justice; rather than using a judge, who makes a decision for the parties, the evolutionary process leads to involving a mediator, who acts as a facilitator in finding solutions originating from the competence of the clients. Using mediation, conflicts can often be resolved more rapidly, more economically, and at an earlier stage, with a more satisfying outcome for the clients. From the perspective of game theory, mediation revolves around a non-zero-sum game ("win-win"), whereas a judicial procedure revolves around a zero-sum game ("win-lose") (Wright, 2000). Win-win means you either sink or swim together; win-lose means you swim and the other party sinks, and if the other party swims, you sink.

Mediation can help to form or strengthen relationships encouraging trust and respect, or alternatively, to end relationships in as pleasant a manner as possible. The solution-focused approach seems to offer good possibilities in mediation as well, as this article demonstrates. It includes a brief history of solution-focused interviewing, describes solution-focused mediation in practice, and provides a case study as well as indications and contraindications of this form of mediation. Three other models used in mediation are briefly explained (problem-solving, transformative, and narrative mediation), and the similarities with and differences of these models to the solution-focused model are discussed.

Brief History of Solution-Focused Interviewing

The solution-focused model was developed during the 1980s by de Shazer, Berg, and colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They expanded upon the findings of Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fish (1974), who believed that the attempted solution to a problem would sometimes perpetuate the problem and that an understanding of the origins of the problem was not always necessary.

De Shazer (1985) proposed the following tenets:

- *The development of a solution is not necessarily related to the problem (or conflict).* An analysis of the problem itself is not useful in finding solutions, whereas an analysis of exceptions to the problem is.

- *The clients are the experts.* They are the ones who determine the goal and the road to achieving it. De Shazer (1994) assumes that

problems (or conflicts) are like subway tokens: they get the person through the gate (to the table of the mediator) but do not determine which train he or she will take, nor do they determine which stop he or she will use to get off.

- *If it's not broken, don't fix it.* Leave alone what is positive in the perception of the clients.

- *If something works, continue with it.* This proposition holds even though what is working may be completely different from what was expected.

- *If something does not work, do something else.* More of the same leads nowhere.

Looking to the Future

De Bono (1985) distinguished four dimensions in conflict thinking: is the action fight, negotiate, problem solve, or design? In the *fighting* approach words of this idiom are used: tactics, strategy, and weak points. This is the language of the courtroom, where winning is the goal. The word *party,* as used in mediation, also stems from this idiom and could be replaced by the neutral word *client. Negotiating* suggests a compromise, whereby the possibilities are limited to what already exists rather than envisaging something new. *Problem solving* concerns the analysis of the problem along with its causes (the medical model). A disadvantage of problem solving is that when the problem is defined, the type of solution expected is also defined. With these three ways of thinking about conflict one looks backward at what already exists.

The fourth and best way in conflict resolution, the *design approach,* is *solution-focused* and looks forward at what might be created. One possibility in this forward-looking approach is to first determine the end point and then to see what solutions may get us there. Another approach is to simply jump to the end and conceive a "dream solution." Its content can be illogical because it concerns a fantasy. More important, it can suggest circumstances in which the conflict would no longer exist: "Imagine the conflict resolved, what would you then be doing differently?" "If" questions (hypothetical questions) are useful because they refer to alterations in the condition of the conflict. When perceptions and thinking have become locked in, there is a need to introduce some instability in order to unfreeze the thinking. The basic purpose of the mediator is to convert a two-dimensional

fight into a three-dimensional exploration, leading to the design of a desirable outcome. As de Bono (1985) says, "Conflict thinking should not be a fight but a design exercise" (p. 124).

Bonenkamp (2003) states that the focus should be on the future rather than on the past:

> The essential difference between a judicial procedure and the mediation process is that within the judicial procedure the arrows are mainly aimed at facts in the past, at the legal consequences of these facts and at the positions that parties can adopt in relation to them. In the mediation process these facts and points of view do not take centre stage, but rather the underlying intentions and wishes [or] interests of both parties. Thus the organizing of the future is the focus and not a judgment of the past. The crucial question asked of parties is always: How do you see, given your true interests and those of the other party, your own or your combined future? Thus: What can you now agree on or do, to realize this? From this perspective there are many more solutions than problems [p. 131].

Salacuse (1991) mentions a few rules to ensure that parties are "paddling the same canoe in the same direction" (p. 165). Precisely define the goal of the negotiations and investigate new possibilities for creative solutions that serve the interests of both parties. Also considered important are an emphasis on the positive aspects of the goal and of the relationship and stressing those moments when agreements are (already) reached and when progress is (already) being made. Salacuse (2000) also discusses the importance of having a vision of the end result. Michelangelo could already see in a block of marble the magnificence of *David,* and Mozart already heard in his quiet study the overpowering strains of the *Requiem.* What clients seek is not just help, but help with their future. Salacuse (2000) says, "Whether an advisor is a doctor, a lawyer, a financial consultant or a psychotherapist, his or her mission is to help the client make a better future" (p. 44). *Simulation* can be a means to this end: the client imagines how the desired future situation and its consequences will look.

In lessons to be learned from international conflicts, Junne (2004) mentions the fact that opposing parties are often mesmerized by the past. The question of guilt often takes center stage. In international relations the cause and blame are frequently sought in the distant past. In the Balkan War between Serbia and Kosovo, for example, antecedents were found in

the outcome of a battle in 1389. The parties miss an orientation toward the future.

Mnookin and colleagues (2000) note that lawyers and clients are so focused on wanting to be in the right that they tend to overlook solutions possibly lying outside the field of the original conflict. Frequently, these solutions have nothing to do with the formal conflict (compare de Shazer: the development of a solution is not necessarily related to the problem), and the agreement may be of an order that could never be envisaged in a courtroom. Furthermore, they state that lawyers (and clients) all too often despair of there being a possible positive outcome and as a result do nothing.

Although the aforementioned authors all argue that mediation should focus on the future, it is surprising that so much attention and time is still spent on the conflict's past and present. Haynes, Haynes, and Fong (2004) state that a mediator can only mediate in the future tense. They propose that a mediator use future-focused questions to initiate change: "Most clients are highly articulate about what they *do not* want and equally reticent about what they *do* want. However, the mediator is only useful to the clients in helping them to determine what they do want in the future and then helping them decide how they can get what they want. It is difficult for the mediator to help clients not get what they do not want, which is what clients expect if the mediator dwells with them on the past" (p. 7). Table 1 enumerates the differences between problem-focused and solution-focused mediation.

Table 1. Differences Between Problem-Focused and Solution-Focused Mediation

Past	Future
Problem	Solution
Complaints	Goals
Sameness	Difference
Unchangeable	Change
Hopeless	Hopeful
Do not want	Do want
Cannot work	Can work
Stuck	Fluid
Resistance	Openness

Solution-Focused Mediation in Practice

Solution-focused mediation occurs along the following series of steps:

- *The first question.* Following introductions, an explanation of solution-focused mediation, and a presentation of the structure and rules of play, the first question is, "What brings you here?" or "What needs to come out of this mediation?" Clients may react to this query with a (brief) description of the conflict, to which the mediator listens with respect, or they may immediately indicate the goal of the mediation. In solution-focused mediation, it is important both to acknowledge the facts and influences of the conflict and to help clients to change the situation. It may be helpful to give clients one opportunity to say what they feel definitely needs to be said at the start of the mediation. This opportunity reduces the possible continued reverberation of negative emotions.

- *Developing a clearly formulated mutual goal.* In this phase, clients are invited to describe what will be different once the conflict is resolved. Sometimes the "miracle question" is put forward: "Imagine a miracle occurring tonight that would (sufficiently) solve the conflict that brought you here, but you were unaware of this occurring, as you were asleep. How in the morning would you notice that this miracle has taken place? What would be different (between you)?" And, "How would this manifest itself during the day?"(This suggestion is similar to de Bono's dream solution.)

Examples of goals are the following: (restored) good cooperation, a positive relationship, and the ending of a relationship in as good a manner as possible. If no mutual goal can be formulated during mediation, mediation is not indicated. The courtroom may then be a good alternative.

- *Assessing motivation to change.* The mediator assesses the relationship with each client as to whether it concerns a visitor relationship, a complainant relationship, or a customer relationship.

In a visitor relationship, the client is mandated and does not attend of his own volition. He has been referred by others (judge, doctor, organization) and does not personally come forward in search of help. Those referring the client are concerned or have a conflict with him. The mediator will attempt to create a context in which the client may voluntarily ask for help. He or she may, for example, ask what those referring the client would like to see different in the future and to what extent the client is prepared to cooperate in creating this change.

In a complainant relationship, the client does provide information regarding the conflict. He is suffering emotionally but does not (yet) see himself as part of the conflict or the solution. The other party or the world is to blame and needs to change. The mediator will acknowledge the client's suffering and may give suggestions for reflecting upon, analyzing, and observing moments when the conflict is or was there to a lesser extent or moments when (an element of) the miracle or desired outcome is already happening.

In a customer relationship, the client does see himself as part of the conflict or solution and is motivated to change his behavior.

The solution-focused mediator goes beyond the verification of commitment; he or she is trained in relating to the existing motivation and in stimulating change. It often happens that clients will start mediation from a visitor or a complainant relationship. This early assessment of each client's level of motivation is of essential importance for the strategy of the mediator and for the type of homework suggestions.

- *Exploring the exceptions.* Questions are asked regarding the moments in the client's life when the conflict is less serious and who does what to bring these exceptions about. The mediator can also ask about moments that already meet (to a degree) the goal of the client.

- *Using competence questions.* The mediator looks for the clients' competences through questions such as the following: How did you do that? How did you decide to do that? How did you manage to do that? The answers can foster a sense of empowerment and may be of help in revealing whether something that has helped at an earlier stage can be done again.

- *Using scaling questions (10 = very good, 0 = very bad).* Scaling questions will be asked in order for the mediator to assess improvements between the moment when the appointment was made and the end of the first mediation session. These questions also serve to measure and speed up progress in the mediation as well as to measure and stimulate motivation and confidence that the goal can be achieved.

- *Feedback at the end of the session.* At the end of all solution-focused conversations, the mediator formulates feedback for the clients, which contains compliments and usually some homework suggestions. The compliments emphasize what clients are already constructively doing in order to reach their goal and can be seen as a form of positive reinforcement of desired behavior. The suggestions indicate areas requiring attention by the clients or further actions to reach their goal.

• *Evaluating progress.* There is regular evaluation of how far clients have come in achieving their goal. Progress is evaluated on a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 indicating that the goal is achieved and 0 indicating the worst situation the clients can imagine. The conversation continues to explore what is yet to be done before the clients would consider the mutual goal (sufficiently) reached and would deem the mediation process complete (usually finalized with a settlement agreement). Every solution-focused conversation is considered the final one; at the end of every conversation the mediator asks whether another meeting is considered necessary. If the clients deem that it is, they will determine the scheduling of the next meeting.

• The *attitude of the mediator* is one of "not knowing" and "leading from one step behind." In a sense, the mediator stands behind the clients and prods them with appropriate solution-focused questions, inviting them to look at the desired future situation at which they wish to arrive together.

Solution-Focused Case

The following case demonstrates the course a solution-focused mediation might take.

This mediation concerns a father (aged fifty-five, an engineer) and his only child (son, aged twenty-five, a sales manager). Following divorce, the father remarried several years ago. The son lives independently and has no partner. There has been no contact between the father and son for four years due to an argument. The father makes an appointment by telephone: he wants to explore whether mediation will help, and his son has reluctantly agreed. The father hopes that the presence of a mediator will prevent the argument from flaring up again when they speak to each other and also hopes to reestablish long-term contact. Even prior to the argument, there was very little contact following the divorce, which occurred when the son was eleven years old. The mediation took three sessions (a total of four hours) with both clients present.

The First Conversation

The conversation starts with the preliminary introductions and the creation of a positive, informal atmosphere through agreeing to continue on a first-name basis, with the mediator showing an interest in the clients'

working and private lives and giving compliments for the courage in initiating the mediation and the willingness to find a solution together. Then follows an explanation of the solution-focused mediation process, in which the mediator indicates the structure: the conversation will focus on their mutual goal and on how that may be achieved, ending with feedback from the mediator, including (if they wish) a suggestion for homework to be carried out before the next conversation. There is also room for acknowledging and normalizing the frustration by reacting with empathy to the brief history of the conflict. The mediation agreement is formulated with a general description of the conflict: "Conflict regarding the relationship." Father and son decide to divide the costs of the mediation 75–25 percent due to a difference in income.

Goal Formulation Question. Next, the mediator asks the goal formulation question: "What would you like to have achieved at the end of this mediation in order to deem the mediation successful?" Both clients reply, a good relationship, with mutual trust and interest, doing things together and enjoying each other's company. Questions concerning concrete behavior follow: "How could you tell that there would be an increase in trust and interest?" and "What could the other person change in order for you to trust him more?" The mediator asks what they themselves would do differently, assuming that the other's behavior was more in line with the desired direction. The mediator also asks, "What enjoyable things will you be doing together once the relationship has improved?"

Assessing Motivation. With father there is a customer relationship, with son a complainant relationship; at this point son appears not (yet) to view himself as part of the solution and believes that father is to blame and should change.

Exploring the Exceptions. "At what times was the conflict there to a lesser extent and who did what in order to encourage these exceptions?" And "When were there moments that already to some extent resembled the goal you both wish to achieve?" Son recalls moments in the past when he did not feel "forgotten" by father, occurring on occasions when they actively did something together. The way in which they talk about the future during the initial conversation is experienced as a beginning of the goal they wish to achieve.

Using Scaling Questions. "On a scale of 10 to 0, with 10 representing an excellent relationship and 0 representing a very bad relationship, where

would you say you are right now?" Father gives a 4, son a 2.5. "What did you do to reach this mark?" Father: "I have always continued to love him and hope that the relationship can improve, although I am also angry because he has not been in touch for four years." The fact that son has agreed to mediation has made father hopeful. Son explains his mark by saying he loves father too, but feels neglected, due to father leaving after the divorce and rarely keeping in touch. The next questions are: "What would one mark higher look like and what would you then be doing differently? And how might you reach this mark?" At 5, father would do something enjoyable together with son, such as going to a football match; son would reach a 3 or 3.5 if father would show more interest in him, for example, by asking how work is going.

Feedback. The mediator gives compliments for the willingness of both to improve the relationship and the concrete steps they mentioned to reach one mark higher. The mediator gives a suggestion for homework: both are invited to pay attention to the moments when the relationship has already (for a while) reached one mark higher, so that next time this can be discussed. The final question is: "Do you think it is useful to return?" Should the answer be yes, then the clients specify the scheduling of the next appointment.

The Second Conversation

The second conversation takes place seven days later.

The Opening Question. The opening question is: "What is better?" Both say that things are going better; after the last conversation, they went for a drink together on the initiative of father and father showed an interest in the life and work of son. Son has brought a file along containing copies of letters (of an angry nature) written to father in the past. Son suggests discussing the letters in this meeting. The mediator asks: "How would discussing these letters help bring you closer to your goal?" Then, son realizes that actually he wants father's recognition for the lack of interest he has experienced and decides to directly confront father. Father reacts in a positive way, gives his views on the past and apologizes. The mediator asks whether it is still necessary to discuss the letters. The answer of son is in the negative. And neither of them still think it necessary to elaborate further upon the conflict as described in the mediation agreement to achieve the goal (a good relationship). Through these interventions with son, a customer

relationship has evolved: he now sees himself as part of the solution and is motivated to contribute toward the goal.

Using Scaling Questions. The question as to how they score is answered by father with a 6 and by son with a 6.5. They explain how they have reached these marks (for son, father's recognition and apologies have clearly been helpful in improving the situation). The next questions are: "What might one mark higher from now look like? What would you then be doing differently and what could you do to achieve this?" Father would give one mark higher if son would be willing to have more contact with his second wife, but son refuses this. However, there appear to be other ways to reach one mark higher; for example, if son will visit father at home one day while his wife is out.

Feedback. Feedback consists of compliments from the mediator and the following suggestion for homework: "When you see each other in the weeks to come, act as if you are already one mark higher and take notice of any differences to the present situation." The final question is: "Do you think it is useful to return and, if so, when should the next appointment take place?"

The Third Conversation

The opening question in the final meeting, three weeks later, is, "What is better?" Both indicate that it is now going fairly well. Mark from father: 7; from son: 7.5. Son has realized that father has a life of his own with his second wife and that he does not want to be involved in this. Father has realized that the idea of the three of them doing things together seems as yet unfeasible and decides to no longer insist on this. There remain plenty of things to do together. The mutual trust has, to some extent, been restored; as for the future, "Time will tell" say both. They have become more interested in each other and increasingly enjoy each other's company. Included in the settlement agreement is the intention to maintain a good relationship and to stay in touch in the event of an argument. It is also agreed that criticism of each other will be expressed verbally rather than through angry letters. Should, despite their best efforts, a new dispute arise, they will again attempt to find a solution through mediation. In addition, an agreement is made whereby father, as a token of good will, writes off a sum of money that son still owes him for driving lessons and buying a second-hand car. Both deem further agreements unnecessary. To conclude, the mediator compliments both for the achieved result, and father and son decide to celebrate

the improvement in their relationship with a weekend skiing holiday. Following this meeting, the settlement agreement is sent and signed by both. Three months after signing the settlement agreement, a follow-up by telephone finds that both father and son are satisfied with the achieved result.

Mediation Versus Psychotherapy

The case discussed concerns a relationship-focused mediation. It is important that in such mediations the distinction with psychotherapy always remains clear. If the conflict is the sole focus of attention and all involved agree that the process is mediation, it is indeed mediation. However, if the conversations center on other mutual or personal problems, the mediator will be correct in referring clients to a psychotherapist.

Indications and Contraindications for Solution-Focused Mediation

Solution-focused mediation can be successfully applied across a broad range of disputes, but it is not suitable in all cases or with all parties.

Indications

Research has shown that solution-focused conversations have a positive effect in less time and that they satisfy the client's need for autonomy more than problem-focused conversations (Stams Dekovic, Buist, and de Vries, 2006). The solution-focused model has proved to be applicable in all situations where there is the possibility of a conversation between client and professional, in (mental) health care (de Shazer, 1985, 1994; Bannink, 2005, 2006b, 2006c, 2007a, 2007b), in management and coaching (Cauffman, 2007a, 2007b), in education (Goei and Bannink, 2005), in working with developmentally disabled people (Westra and Bannink, 2006a, 2006b), and in mediation (Bannink, 2006b, 2006d). In the Netherlands, solution-focused mediation is used in personal conflicts in many areas: with neighbors, in schools and hospitals, in divorces, between partners or parents and children, between perpetrators and victims (restorative mediation), between people and companies or organizations (insurance-related matters and labor conflicts), within companies or organizations (labor conflicts, conflicts about business succession, team-related conflicts), and within government (labor conflicts and employment-related

absenteeism, objection procedures between citizens and government). It is suitable for a wide variety of clients, but it is of importance that they have a mutual goal (or are able to formulate one during mediation). Although the number of sessions is not fixed in advance, the average is three. However, one session is often sufficient.

Contraindications

A contraindication to solution-focused mediation is the situation in which it is impossible to establish a dialogue with the clients; for example, if a (mandated) client refuses to give answers or is psychotic. In these situations a lengthier form of (problem-focused) mediation, such as problem-solving or transformative mediation, might be indicated. A different contraindication does not concern the clients but the mediator or the institution. If the mediator is not willing to let go of his or her attitude as an expert, solution-focused mediation will not work. The final contraindication relates to mediators or institutions maintaining waiting lists for reasons of financial security. Solution-focused mediation is brief in nature, as a result of which waiting lists can be reduced relatively quickly.

A Brief Comparison of Four Types of Mediation

Building solutions is different from problem solving. According to the cause-and-effect medical model, one should explore and analyze the problem or conflict in order to make a diagnosis before the "remedy" can be administered. This model is useful where it concerns relatively simple problems that can be reduced to uncomplicated and distinct causes, for example, medical or mechanical problems. A disadvantage is that this model is strongly problem-focused. If the problem or conflict and its possible causes are studied, a vicious circle may be created with ever-increasing problems. The atmosphere becomes loaded with problems, bringing with it the danger of losing sight of the solution. As de Bono (1985) has noted, "An analysis turns a focal point into a whole field by looking in detail at what has been focused upon and breaking down into even smaller areas, each of which can become a point of focus. . . . It must be emphasized that analysis is by no means the whole of thinking, and analysis by itself will not solve problems. In the past rather too much attention has been paid to logical analysis as the only required tool of thinking" (p. 171).

Both the problem-solving and the transformative model are variations of this cause-and-effect model. The narrative model stands between the solution and the problem-focused model. These four models differ from one another with regard to the mediator's goal and his or her competences. Behind these differences lie hidden fundamental ideas about human nature, social interaction, and conflict—in short, differences in ideology. Baruch Bush and Folger (2005) state, and I concur, that different models can exist side by side and that they can help clients, as long as there is suf-ficient transparency about the model employed by the mediator so that clients are able to choose.

Problem-Solving Mediation and Solution-Focused Mediation: A Comparison

The problem-solving model has originated from the cause-and-effect medical model (D'Zurilla and Goldfried, 1971) and consists of a number of established phases: the preparation and opening phase, including pre-liminary introductions, an explanation of the mediation process, verifica-tion of commitment, presentation of structure, and rules of play; the exploration phase, including data collection, description by the clients of the conflict, and analysis of the conflict by the mediator; the motion and classification phase, which includes searching for mutual interests; the negotiation phase of generating options and their subsequent implemen-tation; and the rounding-off phase, consisting of evaluation and closure.

The problem-solving model is used in the Harvard Negotiating Project (Fisher and Ury, 1981). This model suggests that mediation is a process of identifiable phases and that the role of the mediator is to manage other people's negotiations. The goal is an agreement negotiated by the clients that satisfies the needs of all involved. Mediation is thus an exercise in problem solving. Deutsch and Coleman (2000) state that mediators need to remain process-focused rather than outcome-focused. They adhere to the problem-solving model. In the solution-focused model, the mediator tends to steer the process; through posing solution-focused questions, he or she encourages the clients to look ahead to their desired future situation and to how they can achieve this outcome. Thus, solution-focused media-tion does not revolve around the outcome that the mediator deems appro-priate, but around the outcome that the clients want to achieve.

Similarities. When in the problem-solving model there arises talk of "interests" and "options," this model becomes more future-oriented.

Looking for the mutual interests in the motion and classification phase may contribute to defining the mutual goal. However, with this method, the goal or the positive outcome has not yet been formulated. Generating options in the negotiation phase can define the means to realizing the mutual goal, but this is not a description of the desired outcome itself. Also, in the problem-solving model, evaluation takes place: did the changes in conduct lead to a positive outcome? However, in this model, it is not until the end of the mediation that changes are being evaluated. In the solution-focused model, each conversation includes an evaluation of what has improved and of how close clients are to their mutual goal.

Differences.   In solution-focused mediation, problem-focused conversations become solution-focused conversations as rapidly as possible, aimed at the desired outcome. Conversations about the clients' positions and a familiarization with the history of the conflict are both deemed not only unneeded but even undesired, due to their negative influence on the atmosphere during the conversation and the unnecessary prolongation of the mediation. Attention is not so much paid to positions and to what clients do not want, but to the desired outcome and to what clients do want: the future with a difference. Solution-focused mediators will ask, "What would you prefer instead of the conflict?" defined in positive, realistic, and concrete terms. "Talking about the past is not mediation since it is either judgment, trying to decide who is right and wrong from the past, or therapy, helping clients understand their past. In mediation, the concern about the past changes as a result of creating a different future, rather than reaching an understanding of the past" (Haynes, Haynes, and Fong, 2004, p. 7). De Bono (1985, p. 115) points out: "Management and problem solving are maintenance functions. They are not sufficient in a changing or a competitive world. Conceptual thinking is needed in addition." The solution-focused mediator is not only trained to assess the motivation of the client directly, but she or he will relate to what the motivation is and stimulate change. The steps considered crucial in problem-focused mediation—from positions via interests to options—are in solution-focused mediation replaced by the steps of formulating a mutual goal and solutions for achieving this goal.

Transformative Mediation and Solution-Focused Mediation: A Comparison

The transformative model of mediation regards conflict as a crisis of interaction and mediation as a process of conflict transformation. The role of

the mediator is supporting the change in "empowerment" (personal growth from weakness to strength) and "recognition" (from self-interest to compassion and openness). As a result, the interaction between clients may change from destructive to constructive (Baruch Bush and Folger, 2005).

Similarities. Control, to a large extent, remains in the hands of the clients, the mediator facilitates. One does not depart from the "deficit model" of the client, but from the competence model: empowerment or autonomy is considered important in both transformative and solution-focused mediation. The importance of language is emphasized in directing the mediation, highlighting what clients are capable of and stressing their central role in the mediation. In the transformative model, the past may be recalled in order to evoke a more positive image of the relationship as it used to be. In both forms of mediation, the question relating to exceptions is asked: "When in the past did you manage to make agreements together? How was this achieved?"

Differences. In solution-focused mediation, recognition is not a necessary ingredient, nor is there need for an explanation of the clients' positions. The focus on empowerment and recognition in the transformative model may be a means to reaching the mutual goal, but it is not the desired outcome itself. In the transformative model, the mediation is considered a success when empowerment and recognition occur. Should the conflict then also be solved, this is seen as a welcome bonus, but it is not a necessity. Solution-focused mediation is directed at the mutual goal of the clients, whatever that may be, and considers empowerment and recognition as a means to reaching that goal and, in that sense, as a welcome bonus. In the transformative model, discussing the conflict and expressing emotions are considered essential. In the solution-focused model, the emotional impact of the conflict is validated, but discussing the conflict and expressing emotions are restricted as much as possible. Solution-focused mediation is not about feelings and emotions, but about behavior—essentially, what clients will be doing differently once they have reached their desired outcome.

Narrative Mediation and Solution-Focused Mediation: A Comparison

The narrative model is based on the narrative therapy model according to White and Epston (1990). Winslade and Monk (2000) state that the emphasis in the narrative model is not so much on solving the conflict as the mediation's goal, but rather on developing an alternative "story" of cooperation, understanding, and mutual respect. Together with the clients,

the story behind the conflict is examined, revealing what negative effects this story has on the clients and on their relationship. The mediator looks for stories in the past that lie outside the conflict story (exceptions, "unique outcomes"). With these elements an alternative story is then constructed that is preferable to the clients. A solution to the conflict is only one option in a long-term cooperation story. Mediation is considered a success when the participants know how they can continue their relationship. The task of the mediator is to give nuance to the stories and to bring the alternative story to light.

Similarities. The focus lies on positive possibilities. There exist no definitive explanations or descriptions of reality: social constructionism is at the base of both narrative and solution-focused mediation. Language is seen as a form of social action and mediation is a place were clients and the mediator talk about the kind of world they are creating. The past is questioned to find the extent of past cooperation and to reveal a positive story. Both models aim at rewriting life stories and changing problem or conflict beliefs into solution-focused ideas. The focus is on what has worked (or is still working) rather than on what has not worked (or is not working). The focus has also changed from thinking or feeling to acting. Both models may use interventions aimed at externalizing the conflict; the conflict is detached, making it something that lies outside the clients and that has a negative influence on them. The conflict is regarded as "the enemy" by both the mediator and the clients, against which they can fight together. Both models use open questions ("what", "when," and "how" questions) instead of closed questions. Problem questions are changed into solution questions. Language is important; it should be as mutual, respectful, and nonthreatening as possible.

Differences. Narrative mediation gives much more room to the history of the conflict. Much time is spent on deconstructing the conflict-saturated story of the clients. They are given the opportunity to cite when the conflict is especially apparent and in what way they then react. Goal formulation is less important and solving the conflict is only one of the options. In narrative mediation, by definition, the focus is on restoring a long-term cooperative relationship between clients. Less attention is paid to assessing and increasing the motivation of clients. With clients who see a solution-focused approach as too positive, who cannot find any exceptions for the conflict, and who cannot envisage a positive future, it may be an option to switch to the narrative model.

If the problem-solving, the transformative, or the narrative model of mediation had been applied in the father and son case previously described, the mediation would have looked very different. The mediator would have dealt with the past and present of the conflict at length. He or she would have taken an interest in exploring and analyzing the conflict, and possibly a joint problem definition or explanatory hypothesis would have been developed. It would have been difficult to give the clients compliments and emphasize their competence if the conversations had focused on conflicts and failures: in problem-solving mediation, earlier successes are not searched for. Only in solution-focused mediation does the desired outcome feature as soon as the beginning of the conversation: where do father and son want to end up and which steps can they take to reach their goal? Exploring and analyzing the conflict's past and present are not considered of importance for this process.

In the three other models, the end goal is not clearly described, nor is it determined by the clients. These models are about conflict settlement or conflict resolution. Solution-focused mediation is about conflict transformation: what do clients want instead of the conflict? Questions concerning exceptions (unique outcomes) are also posed in the narrative model. Scaling questions are not used in the other three models. In the transformative model, the mediator would give plenty of room for the expression of emotions. Son would have been able to read his angry letters to father in order to bring about personal growth of son and mutual understanding between father and son. Experience shows that clients sometimes stop the mediation because they see it as a repetition of the conflict, only this time at the table of the mediator; they lose the hope of a future with a difference. In addition, from the start of mediation there often exists a complainant relationship between the client and the mediator. In the three other models, there is little or no interest in increasing the motivation, which would have resulted in the continuation of a complainant relationship with the son, who would not have been prepared to change his own conduct. An evaluation of the mediation would only have occurred at the end of the conversations and not, as in solution-focused mediation, by asking scaling questions and the question at the beginning of each conversation, "What is better?"

Concluding Remarks

Brief, goal-oriented interventions are in vogue in (mental) health care, education, management, and coaching, as well as in the administration of

justice. Reducing the negative, that is, solving or diminishing the problem or conflict, is still pursued by clients, doctors, and mediators, resulting in a limited frame of reference within which options generated also remain limited. Solution-focused mediation is about the future with a difference: "What would you rather have instead?" The answer, as Aristotle pointed out, will be, "Happiness in a satisfying and productive life." Clients will be able to outline their own definition of happiness with a description of behavior, cognitions, and emotions. With the help of the mediator, clients can explore ways that bring them within reach of their goal. Mediators could be trained to help their clients in designing desired outcomes and solutions and to assist them in the motivation to change. Unlike a judge or lawyer, it is unnecessary for the mediator to be acquainted with the whole conflict and for positions to be repeated. The atmosphere of the conversation can remain positive. Clients can be motivated to work hard to achieve their goal, as a result of which the mediator also has energy to spare at the end of the day. The solution-focused model can help both clients and mediators create their "future with a difference."

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