

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EBTA

Luc Isebaert, June 2011



FOUNDATION AND THE FIRST YEARS

In 1993, the theme of the yearly Conference organized by the Louisiana Association for Marriage and Family Therapy was to honour John Weakland on the occasion of his 80th birthday. Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg called a meeting of all brief therapists who were present (both the Solution Focused and MRI models) and the International Brief Therapy Association or IBTA was founded. The Europeans who were present decided to meet for breakfast on the next day and to start the European Brief Therapy Association, EBTA.

The founding members were: Manfred Vogt and Wolfgang Eberling of the N.I.K. in Bremen, Anders Claesson of the FKC in Stockholm, and Luc Isebaert and Marie-Christine Cabié of the Korzybski Institute in Bruges and Paris.

It was decided that the EBTA's legal structure would be that of a charity (non-profit organization) incorporated in France: Wolfgang Eberling, president; Anders Claesson, vice-president; Luc Isebaert, secretary, and Marie-Christine Cabié, treasurer. Steve and Insoo were honorary members.



At a meeting in Paris a few months later, with Evan George of BRIEF (London) also present, this structure was formalized and the charity set up. In the spring of 1994, the first EBTA Conference was held in Bruges.

Steve had proposed a somewhat peculiar format. No individuals could participate, only teams (or their representatives). There was no keynote address, only several 60 or 90 minute workshops with no presenter, only conversations: nobody could speak for more than 10 minutes at a time. About fifty people attended, ten or twelve of them were model brief therapists (MRI).

Although Steve's formula was stimulating, it proved impractical. In particular, the exclusion of individuals was hard to enforce, and it proved very hard to keep people to the ten-minute limit. In the first four years, two Conferences were held every year. By 1995, during the Bremen Conference, the number of attendants had risen to 250. Since then, it has oscillated between that 250 and 350. By then, the MRI-model therapists, who were a minority at the outset, had stopped coming. As the IBTA never got off the ground until 2002, when the SFBTA was founded, European and American Solution Focused therapists met at the EBTA conferences. At one point, Steve and Insoo even proposed to make the EBTA a global association. The Europeans, however, preferred to remain on their own.

MEMBERSHIP AND THE BOARD

Membership, per Steve and Insoo's wishes, was defined as "all those who had attended the last conference". This definition, although impractical in many aspects, has held and is now

under discussion. Perhaps it has held so long because of the (very Shazerian) simplicity of it: you're a member of a group if you're there; you aren't, if you're not. Time and again, other, more mainstream membership criteria were discussed, but were rejected, partly out of deference to Steve, who felt rather strongly on this point, and partly because other formulas also had drawbacks.

One problem with this strategy, of course, was that, with such a fleeting membership, it is hard to see how a democratic organisation could be structured. Steve's view was that the board should be composed as if it were an editorial board of a scientific journal, which is co-opted by existing members and seeks to represent the scientific community it serves.

So over the years, the board has strived to include prominent members of the Solution Focused community from the European countries where SFBT has flourished. It has included members from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Spain, Bulgaria, and Poland.

At the meeting in the spring of 2011, the board decided to define itself as a think-tank with the aim to serve the European SFBT community. In the coming years, the board will work to build an organisational structure that can support this work in an even better way than before.

AIMS, MEANS, AND REALIZATIONS

EBTA aims to promote Solution Focused Brief Therapy. This is realized in the following ways:

- Supporting the annual Conferences; and
- Awarding grants for research in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.

Until Spring 2012 board member Alasdair Macdonald, has taken on the enormous task of compiling and keeping a [list of publications](#) up-to-date about Solution Focused Brief Therapy. In 2012, Alasdair passed this responsibility to Mark Beyebach.

Another channel could have been a scientific journal dedicated to SFBT. This was discussed several times over the years, and the issue has not been settled.

On behalf of EBTA, Mark Beyebach constructed a [research manual for solution-focused therapy](#) studies in 2000. This has been used in some projects and was used in the construction of the SFBTA research manual. EBTA designed a standard research protocol using this manual and standard instruments. However, funding of projects now requires more rigorous study designs. The Board has discussed the complexities of international certification on a number of occasions and will continue to do so.

EBTA CONTACTS

In 1995, the SFT-L e-mailing list was set up by Harry Korman and since then it has served as a very useful means of exchange between Solution Focused therapists and interested parties from all over the world. Because of the language barrier, the e-mail communication is in English. The creation of the SFBTA in 2002 had, for us Europeans, the sad result that now only very few Americans come to the EBTA Conferences. Likewise, few Europeans attend the SFBTA Conferences, thus greatly reducing the opportunities for contact between therapists on both sides of the Atlantic. But the Malmö Conference in 2010 was billed as a joint EBTA- SFBTA Conference; another joint Conference is planned in America in 2015. There have been talks with the SFBTA about a joint journal, research lists, and the creation of an international archive of psychotherapy videotapes, which might include the SFBTC archives that the SFBTA is now in charge of, along with other documents. No progress has been made as yet (Spring 2012) on these topics.

