

The Feedback Games Manual

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2 METHODS OF PLAY

METHOD 1: BECOMING AWARE I

My own strengths and weaknesses

PURPOSES

1. Forming a clear picture of one's own strengths and weaknesses.
2. Getting a clear insight into the connection between strengths and weaknesses.

PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. It is advised to play this method with an interlocutor or coach.
2. Number of participants: 1 (+ coach).
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards.
4. Estimated playing time: 30 – 45 minutes.

PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the 'strengths' cards face up on the table. Select 8 strengths that you're absolutely certain you have, and place these horizontally in front of you. The easiest way to choose the cards is as follows: first make a quick selection by discarding those strengths that you definitely do not have. Secondly discard those strengths that you're uncertain you may have. Continue doing so until 8 cards remain.

Note

People who find it difficult to process too much information at one time might apply the following procedure: place 5 cards at a time on the table and for each iteration ask the player to select only one card that suits them best. This will give you an initial selection of 14 cards, from which the player should then choose just 8.

2. Select 8 personal weaknesses that currently bother you the most, using the same procedure as in step 1. Place these horizontally below the row with the strengths.
3. Discuss the result on the following basis:
 - a. Illustrate for each strength when and how you apply it.
 - b. Illustrate for each weakness in what kind of situation it bothers you the most.
 - c. If there is a connection between one or more specific strengths and

weaknesses, place these alongside each other.

4. List the results or take a picture of it, so that you can have another look at it later on or discuss it with others.

ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

Version A

- a. Firstly, apply the 'strengths' cards, followed by the 'weaknesses' cards.
- b. Pick up 8 cards from the top of the pile and put these face up, in front of you. Then take a new card from the pile. With each new card, decide whether you want to replace one of the 8 cards with the new one, thus choosing each time which strengths fit you the best. Discard the card that you replace.
- c. Continue doing so until the pack is depleted. You then have, lying in front of you, 8 cards with strengths that you think are most typical of you.
- d. Rank the cards in order of importance, with the strength that's most valuable to you on top. If you like, you can differentiate between strengths you put into practice at work and those that you demonstrate in your private life.
- e. Repeat steps a – c for the 'weaknesses' cards.
- f. Rank these in order of importance as well, with the weaknesses that bother you the most on top. If you like, you can differentiate between weaknesses that appear at work and those that turn up in your private life.

Version B

There are two possible ways of extending version A:

- a. Make two series of 8 strengths: one for the strengths you feel confident about, and that you know you have, and one for those strengths that you doubt you have. These may be half-latent strengths. This is an interesting starting point for discussing one's functioning in the case of individual coaching.
- b. Make three rows of 8 strengths: one row consisting of those strengths that you're certain you have, one row consisting of strengths you have doubts about and one row consisting of strengths that you're absolutely certain you do not have. If you're looking for someone to work with who can complement your strengths, then in this last row you will find the

strengths that this person should have.

CONTINUING EXERCISES

1. The two strengths that are on top of your list at step d of version A characterize you the most. They are a sort of business card. For those strengths, answer the following questions:
 - a. In what way do people appeal to you because of these strengths?
 - b. How do you demonstrate these strengths (from the point of view of your personal guiding principle) in those parts of your work that you feel strongly connected to?
2. Consider the weakness that currently bothers you the most at the moment. Analyse this weakness based on the steps described in Sections 5.2 or 5.3. Consider which of the starting points mentioned in those sections, apply to this specific weakness.

METHOD 8: FEEDBACK III

Making insecurity discussable

PURPOSES

1. Becoming more aware of the effect of insecurity on your own strengths and weaknesses.
2. Finding out whether others recognize when you feel insecure.

PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants know each other (reasonably) well.
2. Number of participants: 2–10.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 45–60 mins.

PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Select 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses based on the question 'Which strengths are likely to suffer (and will therefore temporarily disappear) and which weaknesses will resurface when I feel insecure?'.
3. In turn, the players tell which strengths and weaknesses they chose and explain their choices. What effect do these strengths and weaknesses have on your behaviour in private life and at work?
4. The other participants share whether they recognize this behaviour.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. Changes often make people feel insecure. Most people find it a difficult subject to talk about. The above method of play can make it easier to discuss insecurity.
2. If this method is applied to a team, it is very advisable for the leader of the team to also take part.

METHOD 12: TEAMWORK II

Portraying strengths

PURPOSE

Consolidating your own identity, role and position in a team.

PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants know each other reasonably well.
2. Number of participants: 3 - 10.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards.
4. Estimated playing time: 20 - 40 mins.

PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Select the card with a description of a strength that suits you the best.
3. Think of a striking way to portray this strength without using words.
4. In turn, portray your strength. The other participants try to guess which strength was portrayed. Those guessing give their reasons ('I think you're portraying _____ because _____'). If a strength is hard to guess, the remaining participants can ask questions that can be answered by the person who is portraying the strength with a 'yes' or 'no'. At the end, the player who was closest to guessing right, explains his or her choice.

ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

Version A

This method can also be carried out by portraying a specific strength of a fellow player. Each of the participants is assigned another team member by lot. The remaining players have to guess which strength is at the disposal of which team member. The one who is guessing explains his or her choice.

Version B

The participants are asked to portray a strength of the team (or of the organization) as a whole. In this way it soon becomes clear how the individual team members consider the team (or the organization).

Version C

This method can also be applied using the 'weaknesses' cards. In that case the players portray only their own weaknesses.

3 INTRODUCTION TO STRENGTHS

Each individual is a potential specialist in the field of his or her own strengths. However, you do not become a specialist in a single day. To become one you have to be closely involved with a certain subject. This also holds for strengths. When people think about strengths, they often ask themselves all kinds of questions. This chapter is an exploration of the field of strengths on the basis of four questions:

- What are strengths and how are they expressed in a person's activities (Section 3.1)?
- How do I list my strengths (Section 3.2)?
- How does a strength develop and what can go wrong in this process (Section 3.3)?
- Which groups of similar strengths can be distinguished and what effect do they have on cooperation with others and on making decisions (Section 3.4)?

3.1 WHAT ARE STRENGTHS?

Strengths are our most typical characteristics. They are the potential of personal possibilities that we have at our disposal, whether we use them or not. Strengths are personal characteristics that are separate from what we have learned. They are the gift we were provided with at birth for doing what we have to do as well as possible.

We all have our own set of strengths, which is as unique as a fingerprint. These strengths can be developed in the course of life. Examples of strengths are: patience, discernment, creativity, being well organized, humorous, courageous, being persuasive and sympathetic.

The abundance of strengths that people may have can also be visualized as a large palette containing all the different colours. A number of these colours (strengths) suit you, and you use them in situations you run into. This set of strengths is your own personal palette of colours.

Looking at people from the angle of strengths is a positive view: you try to see and discover the best in people. By doing so you can encourage others to do something with their strengths in life. If you use the strengths that suit you and the situation precisely, they will generally affect you and your environment positively. Sometimes you will not even notice this very much, because the way in which you behave is so suitable. Then you are simply yourself. That specific behaviour seems quite normal to you, but others often consider your strengths as special.

Strengths are a vulnerable area as well. It is very painful to be rejected in situations in which you feel most at home. If this happens regularly, you might start doubting your strengths, or even worse, turn them down. In choosing the latter option, you are hurting yourself to prevent others from doing so.

Some of your own strengths may encounter resistance in your environment. In that case you can either choose to cope with the resistance or choose the line of least resistance and keep the strengths concerned hidden. Choosing the latter option will usually result in frustration, for we all have a strong inner urge to express our strengths, and you very much want to be yourself. The frustration is the price you pay for not developing your strengths.¹

Many people have some trouble in being fully open about their strengths; it is considered to be boastful. They are ashamed of the best a person has. For some people it is actually easier to say what they are *not* good at than what they *are* good at.

Several years ago I gave a presentation about training techniques to a group of policemen in a big city. One of the assignments was making a list of their own strengths and writing them on a large sheet of paper. Next the sheets of paper had to be hung on the wall and each participant was to give an explanation of his list. But as it turned out, there was a slight problem: on that very wall were hanging large portraits of the commissioners of police of the past decades. It was decided that the portraits would be removed and replaced by the participant's lists. Laughter all around!

However, at the presentation, a few participants could not bring themselves to mention their own strengths and asked one of their colleagues to elucidate their list. When asked why they had refused, they answered, 'I find it embarrassing'.

Not only do people have strengths, but groups also demonstrate them, whether they are formal groups like associations, or informal groups, like clubs of friends. They can easily be described in a positive way, using strengths. What is it that we are good at? Nations as a whole can be assigned strengths as well, although one should be careful not to stereotype.

Meanwhile it has been proven true that people as well as organizations can develop themselves by investigating their strengths. Focussing on strengths, however, also has its disadvantages. It may for example, distract the focus from a person's weaknesses, and these determine their work results just as much as their strengths do. For instance, a person who is quite lazy, has a fair chance of not going to do much with their strengths. The priority then lies in dealing with the laziness, instead of concentrating on the person's strengths.

Strengths and skills

I am often asked: 'What is the difference between strengths and skills?' Strengths are present in rudimentary form and can be tapped and developed. Skills can be learned, whereas strengths cannot. This becomes apparent when you meet someone new. At first impression, you can guess quite well some of the person's strengths, but it is very difficult to mention any of their skills based on that.

Your strengths and weaknesses determine the ease or difficulty it affords you in learning a specific skill. If you have the strength 'open', it will be easier for you to learn the skill 'making problems discussable' than if you do not have that strength. However, if you are, for example 'suspicious' and you want to learn the skill 'delegating', that is probably going to be quite difficult. But the reverse also applies: if you know what skills you are good at, you can look for the strengths that lie behind them.

Strengths and values

Sometimes, the same descriptions are used in both strengths and values, e.g. 'honest' or 'trustworthy'. This can cause confusion. It therefore makes sense to clarify the difference between strengths and values. Strengths characterize your personality, they form your natural way of being, they set you apart from others. Values, however, come from a different perspective, because they state what you are focused on and what you wish to use as a benchmark for your acting. Values as opposed to strengths, are usually a conscious choice (Gerrickens, Verstege, van Dun, 2003). In applying values you use your personality with its strengths to achieve what you are aiming for. Therefore, strengths can be put to the service of values, for instance when the strength 'courage' is used to live according to the value 'honesty'.

Strengths and talents

Lately the theme of 'talents' has been in the spotlight quite a lot. A talent is the ability to perform a certain task or activity really well; something you excel in by nature, for example analysing problems or telling stories. You often first have to learn certain skills before a talent really can be expressed. Rembrandt was talented, but he still had to learn to apply paint before his talent could blossom. In developing a talent several things that can and cannot be learned come together. That makes talent a difficult phenomenon.

In practice, the concepts 'strengths' and 'values' are used interchangeably. One could consider a talent as some sort of 'superstrength' that is being expressed in a specific activity. I believe that every single person has one or two talents, or a specific area in which he or she excels. Many people are unaware of their talents. They consider their special achievements as common. Nevertheless, it is

important to be aware of your talents, so that you can take them into account when making career choices or any other choice.

Strengths and activities

When you talk to people and ask them what they would like to do, they usually choose those activities for which they can employ or further develop their own strengths. From their strengths people also react to the challenges they meet at work. People perform most effectively and most happily when they are able to employ their strengths in the activities they occupy themselves with.

When looking for a suitable job many people run into a problem. They wonder, 'Which job suits me?'. In other words, 'Which job requires the strengths that I possess and that I would like to make use of in the job?'. Strengths that are important for each function can be specified. Nowadays the strengths desired are mentioned more and more often in employment advertisements. An employer who is looking for a suitable candidate for a certain function has the difficult task of quickly finding out which strengths applicants possess. Applicants in their turn try to get a clear picture of the specific strengths that are required for the function. Moreover, they should wonder whether they possess these strengths to a sufficient degree and whether the company concerned is the most suitable environment for bringing them out well. Apart from strengths, professional knowledge and skills obviously also play an important part in the assessment of whether a job suits an individual.

People who do not succeed sufficiently in expressing their strengths often find it difficult to feel useful and happy in life. This may be seen in people whose strengths do not come out in a work situation. As a result, their confidence in their own strengths usually decreases.

It seems a good idea to me to make a comparison with foodstuffs in this respect – strengths that you do not use move from the dining table to the fridge after some time and may finally end up in the freezer. You will know that you have the foodstuffs in the fridge, but you may forget about the food ending up in the freezer.

Strengths ending up in the fridge or the freezer does not apply to people at work. It often happens when people become unemployed, or in relationships. Strengths that you no longer use in your relationship – for example, out of fear – end up in your own fridge. This often results in a cooling (both metaphorically and literally) of the relationship. In Chapter 4 this will be discussed further.

3.2 LISTING STRENGTHS

Many people are not aware of their strengths. When, for example, a careers adviser helps someone prepare for a job interview, and asks them to mention

4 STRENGTHS IN A FIX

It is very unpleasant when you have the feeling that you do not come into your own in some situations. You wonder what the cause of it is and especially what you can do about it.

It also happens frequently that people do not dare to use their specific strengths, although they would like to do so and may even be necessary in a particular situation.

The reason why people do not perform well is often that they do not make use of certain strengths of their own. Three mechanisms that are connected with this are central to this chapter. Images (Section 4.2) and transference (Section 4.3) are causes of disturbances when employing strengths. Projection (Section 4.4) is a mechanism playing an important part in tracing these disturbances. However, a model is first discussed of the structure of human personality. This model returns in the discussion of the different mechanisms.

4.1 EGO AND SHADOW

By emphasizing some qualities (strengths and distortions) of your own and undervaluing or denying others, your personality can be divided into ego and shadow (Zweig & Abrams, 1993). This division is based on the way you see yourself.

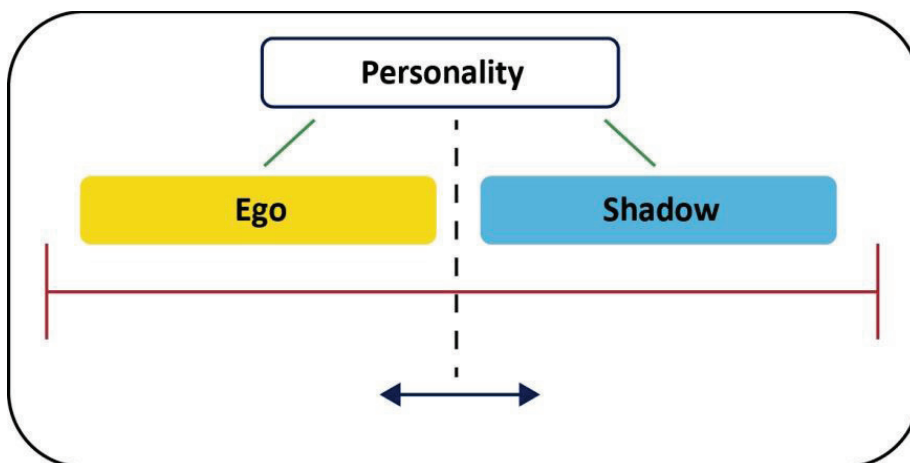


Figure 2 Human personality

The ego ('me') is that part of your personality that you know and want to show to others. So everybody has a number of strengths of which they say: 'That's the way I am'. It is that part of your personality that you are aware of.

The shadow ('not-me') is both that part of your personality that you know but do not consciously want to show to others, and the part that you do not know (any more) (Wilber, 1983). You are not aware of that latter and largest part of your shadow. The concept of the shadow was first used by the psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung.

Suppose you believe yourself to be active and a hard worker, and that you value this positively. Then you count these strengths as part of your ego. You do not want to know yourself as passive and lazy, for you find this negative. Laziness and passivity are then in your shadow. When you say about a strength: 'That's the way I am', this usually means that you automatically exclude something else – namely, the opposite strength.

People feel best when they can be themselves in as many situations as possible and can thus make optimal use of their own strengths. In terms of ego and shadow this means taking care that the ego is as big as possible and that as many qualities as possible of the person concerned are in it. Then the area of the shadow is as small as possible.

The smaller our ego the smaller the number of our strengths that we count as being part of our ego, and the larger our shadow will be. The more strengths we do not make use of, the 'smaller' our base will be and the more insecure we will feel.

An additional disadvantage of a big shadow is that our inner balance will become disturbed. Because of this, strengths ending up in the shadow often evolve into weaknesses. You will find more on this in Chapter 5.

The division between ego and shadow is a variable one. A person develops, so that over the course of time shifts occur. When you develop a latent strength of your own it moves from shadow to ego in due course. Of course, the opposite is also possible: if you have not employed a certain strength for a long time it will land in the shadow.

Apart from that, the division between ego and shadow also depends on the situation. When people experience a situation as safe they usually show other qualities of their ego than when they consider it unsafe. Suppose that you have the strength 'sensitivity' and you work in a macho culture where showing your soft side is 'not done'. You will then think twice before employing that sensitivity at work, whereas at home with your children you use it naturally. The strength 'sensitivity' is then a half-latent strength, that you do not employ when you feel insecure. This situation is reflected in Figure 2 by means of the dotted line between ego and shadow. The horizontal arrow indicates that the boundary can shift.

Ego

I want to discuss further the concepts 'ego' and 'shadow'. In everyday life we usually use the word 'ego' in a negative way. If, for example, we say that a person has a big ego, we mean that someone thinks a bit too highly about him- or herself. But the concept of 'ego' is much more about how a person wants to be seen, an idealised self-image, than about how he or she actually is. Therefore I use the concept 'ego' in a more neutral way.

So the ego consists of qualities that you consider to be 'me'. A part of this ego is made up - to the one person more than to the other - of mask behaviour. In situations that a person experiences as unsafe he or she usually puts on a mask. The mask is that attitude, that facial expression, that voice, those words, by which on the outside you pass yourself off differently from the person you are inside (Korteweg-Frankhuisen, 1993). With mask behaviour you do not show your true colours out of fear. Most people are thoroughly aware when they do so and are therefore able to faultlessly describe several situations in which they behave like that, for example when someone is angry with another person, but behaves in a very friendly way because of a fear of disturbing the relationship with that person. However, the interlocutor does not really feel in touch.

A mask serves as a protection or defence by means of which you want to achieve a certain effect. Imagine that a person in their first job meets their colleagues for the first time. If the person knows that they are expected to be enterprising, he or she may show that behaviour in order to become accepted. The person will in fact pretend to be much more enterprising than they really are. The result of this is that the individual exerts him- or herself their colleagues and at the same time taxes their own self to the utmost.

People who in some respect put on a different front from the way they are run the risk of having to come clean after a while. They cannot keep up their (bloated) enterprising behaviour any longer. Alternatively, the initiatives they take may be of no use, because this is not really one of their strong sides.

Sometimes mask behaviour is useful, for example to save yourself from an awkward situation. However, mask behaviour always has disadvantages, for you feel different from the way you normally behave, and that is unpleasant. One person may show a more frequent and more different dominant mask behaviour for protection in tense situations than another. When people often show mask behaviour, there is a risk that in due course they will think that they really are like that. They will see the mask as an essential part of themselves. That is why they partly lose touch with who they really are. Mask behaviour has then become an automatism taking place unconsciously.

A mask usually has a negative effect, although that is not what one intends. Thus, in an interview a person may initially come across as cool and insensitive when he or she (unconsciously) puts on the mask of being detached. At that

moment the mask covers the other strengths, like a layer. In this way the interviewee does not come into his or her own, however, and does not give him- or herself an honest chance.

Shadow

The shadow contains both the strengths you do know and the strengths you do not know. The strengths from the shadow are those that you know you do not want to show to other people. They involve weaknesses you believe to be 'bad' and therefore do not want to show to the outside world. This kind of condemnation of undesired behaviour by yourself, often stems from a young age, because you have to behave according to the standards of your family. If you are born as a hothead in a family to whom it is not natural to express their emotions, you will have to learn to hide your tantrums (Tros, 2013)

So upbringing and socialization also always involve creating a shadow, no matter what culture or civilization it is! Anything that is considered as not being appropriate, will become part of the shadow of the people who are born and raised within that culture.

The shadow is also about latent strengths that you know about yourself but that you do not dare to employ, perhaps because you are ashamed of them or because you are afraid that others will react negatively to them.

Apart from qualities you do not want to show to other people, the shadow also contains strengths you have 'forgotten', for if you have not used a strength for some time, you will forget that you possess it. Also in the shadow are strengths that you do not know yet: a wealth of undeveloped possibilities. Moreover, distortions that you no longer know that you possess, have been stored in the shadow.

Hidden in the shadow are all the things that, during the course of your life, you did not want to identify yourself with. You might call it the basement, cesspool or underworld of your personality. In that shadow you encounter your own weaknesses, where you are vulnerable. The consequence of repressing your shadow is that you become more one-sided, as you have 'lost' parts of yourself. This may, for example, lead to not being able to cry when you are sad or not being able to enjoy certain moments. Nevertheless, repressing your shadow sides does not make them disappear. It is one of life's most beautiful paradoxes: the more you repress your shadow, the more often and even more poignantly it will draw your attention to it (Wopereis, 2013). Among other things, this is caused by the mechanism of projection (see Section 4.4).