

The Feedback Games Manual

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1. GENERAL EXPLANATION OF THE FEEDBACK GAME

1.1 THE BIRTH OF THE GAME

Since 1984 I have been working in groups with the theme of qualities. In my experience, looking at one's personal way of functioning from the point of view of strengths and weaknesses has proved to be both very enjoyable and effective.

The majority of participants have been very enthusiastic about this 'quality point of view'.

The idea of developing this game first came into being on 29 March 1990. The 18 months following this were used to design and develop it. During the development stage the game was played by more than 1000 people, in all sorts of groups. Right from the beginning people reacted very positively, and this was a stimulus for me to continue developing the game.

The game consists of 140 cards: 70 portray human strengths and 70 portray human weaknesses. These 140 words comprise the major part of the spectrum of human possibilities and restrictions, in so far as they can be expressed in words.

In addition to the 140 cards consisting of strengths and weaknesses, there are 4 blank cards in case you wish to add words to the game.

When composing the list of strengths and weaknesses, the following starting points were considered to be important:

- 1 The strengths and weaknesses should have different meanings and different emotional values.
- 2 The choice of words had to be as simple as possible, so that the game could be used by as large a target audience as possible. Sometimes, however, this turned out to be impossible, and in that case a more difficult word was chosen.
- 3 The strengths and weaknesses are, for practical purposes, described as far as possible in the form of adjectives, for people will often use the game in feedback situations or to describe themselves. They will often use expressions like: 'I find myself a ... person'. For some strengths and weaknesses a suitable adjective could not be found, and in those cases I chose another solution.

1.2 SYMBOLISM OF THE CARDS' DESIGN

If you want to, you can pick up a few strengths and weaknesses cards. Have a look at the words and the images printed on them.

On each card portraying strengths, there is an image of a rainbow. The different colours of the rainbow symbolize the spectrum of different human qualities.

The starting point for working with strengths is that they have a positive effect on the person who uses them as well as on their environment. This, however, can only be achieved when the strength is demonstrated at the right moment.

These same colours of the rainbow have also been used in the picture on the weaknesses cards. This is to show that a weakness can distort or hide a positive quality. For example, 'being determined' (a strength) may become 'obstructive' (a weakness), and 'playful' (a strength) may become 'undisciplined' (a weakness). This is an important thing to remember when playing this game.

The design on the back of the cards also has a symbolic meaning. The flowing, parallel running lines of the strengths cards symbolize balance and attunement. The angular intertwined lines of the weaknesses cards symbolize the unbalanced and edgy situations that distortions can lead to.

1.3 WAYS OF APPLYING THE GAME

In my experience, the game is suited to all kinds of situation (educational and private) in which people are dealing with their personal way of functioning.

Depending on the audience and the manner of playing, the game can be applied in teams and educational and training groups, for the purposes of:

- becoming more aware of one's own stronger and weaker aspects
- giving feedback
- introduction and evaluation in groups
- team building and teamwork
- forming one's opinion about a certain function
- discovering one's latent qualities
- warming up in training sessions.

Outside teams and educational and training groups the game can be applied to:

- staff appraisals
- career planning

- individual coaching and supervision
- friends/family circle.

The methods of playing are divided into four groups based on their main purpose:

- 1 becoming conscious of one's own strengths and weaknesses (methods 1–4)
- 2 the giving and receiving of feedback (methods 5–10)
- 3 teamwork (methods 11–14)
- 4 other applications:
 - introduction (15)
 - non-verbal behaviour (16)
 - forming one's opinion of a certain function (17)
 - evaluation (18)
 - warming up in training sessions (19)
 - staff appraisals (20).

The above subdivision makes it easier for you to choose a suitable manner of playing in a particular situation. To get more ideas it is advisable to look at other methods of playing outside the group of your preference, as some methods can be applied in various settings.

Layout of the methods of play

Most of the methods of playing described in Chapter 2 are suited for application in groups.

Experience shows that the users of this game are often very creative in inventing new methods of playing or devising alternative versions. This might also apply to you!

For each method of play I give:

The purpose(s).

The prior conditions: the number of participants, to what extent the participants should be familiar with each other, which of the cards are to be used and an indication of the estimated playing time. The duration of the game depends very much upon the group itself and the number of participants involved. The further the players go into the matter of feedback, the longer the game will take. The trainer can influence this as well.

METHOD 3: BECOMING CONSCIOUS III

The Johari window

Purposes

- 1 Become more aware of the characteristics that you do or don't demonstrate to others.
- 2 Picture strengths and weaknesses of yourself that you were not that aware of.

Prior conditions

- 1 The participants know each other very well.
- 2 Number of participants: 2–4.
- 3 Necessary: the complete set of cards for each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
- 4 Estimated playing time: 75–90 mins.

Procedure

- 1 An explanation is given of the Johari window. This model is a schematic reproduction of one's personality, and it consists of four components (from the viewpoint of strengths and weaknesses):
 - The 'free space': characteristics of yourself that are known to you as well as to others.
 - The 'blind spot': characteristics that are perceptible to others, but of which you yourself are not aware.
 - The 'concealed area': characteristics of yourself that are known to you, but not to others. You do not wish to demonstrate these to others.
 - The 'unknown self': characteristics that neither you nor others would ascribe to you.

Schematically:

	known to yourself	unknown to yourself
known to others	free space	blind spot
unknown to others	concealed area	unknown self

- 2 Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
- 3 Make two lists for yourself: one list containing 5 strengths and 4 weaknesses that you would ascribe to your free space, and another list containing 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses that you would ascribe to your concealed area.
- 4 Also make two lists for your fellow players: one list consisting of 4 strengths and 3 weaknesses that you would ascribe to the free space of the people concerned, and another one with 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses that you would ascribe to the blind spot of those people.
- 5 For each person in turn, make a Johari window that is as complete as possible. During this process, while the different points of view are being shared, the strengths and weaknesses cards should be placed in three of the different squares of the Johari window: the free space, the concealed area and the blind spot.

The cards that don't fit into any of these three areas should be discarded. The players should try to reach consensus about this.

In the event of disagreement, the player whose turn it is decides in which square the relevant card is to be placed.

Alternative version

This method of play can also be combined with Method 5.

At step 3 of Method 5, use the following rules:

- (a) You can place a card for yourself in the free space or the concealed area.
- (b) If you put a card down for someone else, you are permitted to do so in either the free space or the blind spot.

Continuing exercise

Examine the strengths and weaknesses of your 'concealed area' (the shadow parts of yourself). For each characteristic, consider why you do not demonstrate it to others. Do images play a part in this? If so, which images? (See Sections 5.1 and 5.2.)

METHOD 11: TEAMWORK I

Team feedback

Purpose

Give and receive feedback in a team.

Prior conditions

- 1 The participants know each other reasonably well.
- 2 Number of participants: 2–8.
- 3 Necessary: all of the cards containing strengths for each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
- 4 Estimated playing time: 75–90 mins.

Procedure

- 1 Place the cards in a pile, face down.
- 2 Turn over the top card and place it alongside the pile.
- 3 All the players ask themselves 'Does this strength reflect me and/or another player? If another player, what are the reasons?'

Players share their answers and try to reach consensus on whom the strength most accurately reflects. The card is then placed, face up, in front of the chosen player. Discard the card if it does not reflect any of the players.

- 4 Continue the game until the pile of cards is exhausted.
- 5 The cards in front of each player illustrate how others see them.

Explanatory note

It can be quite illuminating if the team manager also takes part in the game (of course, on the condition that all the team members agree to this).

Alternative versions

Version 1

You can also use the strengths cards 1–35 or the weaknesses cards 1–35.

Version 2

If the number of team members is larger than eight, and you want the whole team to play the game at the same time, it is also possible to work with inner and outer circles. The procedure is then as follows:

- (a) The inner circle plays the game. The members of the outer circle just watch, but every now and then (for example, every 10 minutes) they get the opportunity to say what they have noticed.
- (b) After a maximum of 45 minutes, the inner and outer circles exchange places.

Version 3

When working with inner and outer circles, you can also apply the following method of play:

- (a) Put all the strengths cards in a pile. If the inner circle consists of more than four participants, use two sets of strengths cards and mix them with each other.
- (b) Each player receives 3 cards at random.
- (c) At your turn, lay one of those cards face up in front of another player who, in your opinion, has this strength. Give your reasons. Discard the remaining cards.
- (d) After each round the members of the outer circle get the opportunity to say what they noticed.
- (e) Each participant states what he or she does or does not recognize from the given cards.
- (f) The members of the inner and outer circles change places.

Continuing exercise

Team members can learn a lot about the characteristics that they appreciate in one another, but also about the ones that bother them in others. Experiences of sympathy and antipathy can be referred back to oneself by the mechanism called 'projection' (see Sections 5.4 and 6.1). The main purpose of the exercise below is to track down your own (half-) latent strengths. The procedure is as follows:

- (a) Consider which team members demonstrate a weakness that bothers you. List these weaknesses and rank them, beginning with the weakness

that bothers you the most. Fill in a 'strengths and weaknesses quadrant', based on the weakness that is on top of your list. This weakness forms the 'allergy' in the strengths and weaknesses quadrant (see Section 7.2). The 'challenge' expresses which strength, to you, is (half-) latent.

- (b) Consider which team members demonstrate a strength that you value highly. List these strengths and rank them, beginning with the strength that you value the highest. Reflect on whether this strength, to you, is half-latent or latent.
- (c) Share with your team members which (half-) latent strengths or challenges you discovered and how they could be demonstrated in the team by you.
- (d) If you wish, you can repeat the questions (a)–(c) for the strength and weakness that are ranked second.

The above exercise can be combined with the giving of feedback. In that case the team members, in turn, share at step (c) which member (at (a)) they chose for the weakness, and which member (at (b)) they chose for the strength, giving explanations for their choice. When mentioning the weakness, they also need to mention the corresponding strength that is hidden underneath.

It is also important to emphasize that the feedback which is given in this way has at least as much to say about the giver of feedback as about the recipient. After all, the point of this exercise is to have a closer look at one's own projections.

METHOD 15: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Make acquaintance using a few important strengths.

Prior conditions

- 1 Number of participants: 15 at the most.
- 2 Necessary: all the cards containing strengths.
- 3 Estimated playing time: 15–30 mins.

Procedure

- 1 Spread all the cards face up on the table.
- 2 Select two strengths that you find typical of yourself.
- 3 Introduce yourself by describing when you demonstrate the chosen strengths in your job situation and what effect they have.

Alternative versions

Version 1

This method of play can also make use of both strengths and weaknesses. In that case, each player selects 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses.

Version 2

At step 2, the players can also be asked to each select 2 strengths that they would want to have more at their disposal.

At step 3, the players describe the effects that these strengths would have in their jobs if they were to develop these strengths well.

Version 3

- (a) Deal 5 strengths cards to each player.
- (b) In turn, the players each state which of those 5 strengths is best suited to them. Number of participants: no more than 15.

Version 4

Select 2 strengths that you often use in your family circle but rarely in job situations. Explain why you do not demonstrate these strengths in your job. Prior condition: players should know each other reasonably well.

Version 5

Select a strength that reflects what you find very important and feel strongly about in job situations.