

The Feedback Games Manual

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Peter Gerrickens

Gower

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Preface

We are all confronted with our own idiosyncrasies in everyday life. You may discover that you are enterprising, sensitive or meticulous. But you may occasionally catch yourself behaving rudely or indifferently to other people.

From time to time we occupy ourselves with questions like: what activities am I best suited to? How can I cope with weaknesses of my own that I hate? What are my hidden talents?

By taking our strengths as a basis, it is possible to find an answer to these questions. Strengths are an important motive for doing the things we do, and for the ways in which we do them.

The guiding principle that runs through this Manual is that people function most effectively and most happily when they can demonstrate their strengths in the most optimal way. As these qualities appear more and more to their full advantage, people feel more useful and happier in life.

For many people it is not easy to make optimal use of their strengths in everyday life. This Manual aims to guide you in the initial exploration of the richness of your strengths.

It is advisable for people to examine their own personality and their own possibilities and limitations, thus understanding their own behaviour and that of other people better and probably accepting it more easily.

The Feedback Game and this Manual have been developed for everyone who is interested in qualities. First, the game, as well as the Manual, are intended for communication trainers, managers,

counsellors, consultants, teachers and others having to do with strengths in their job. They are also for people wanting to gain more insight into themselves on the basis of the theme of qualities. Thus they both focus on people with a diversity of backgrounds, and the examples I describe are also very diverse.

The Manual consists of two parts. Part 1 contains 20 methods of playing The Feedback Game. Which method is chosen depends very much upon the features of the group and the goals set out by the trainer, manager or teacher. Hereafter I shall simply refer to the trainer.

Experience shows that The Feedback Game is a strong and very diverse instrument that can bring significant results. Therefore in using this game, meticulousness and a good sense of timing are required (see Section 1.4).

In Part 2 (Theory and Exercises) I shall discuss the subject of 'strengths' in more depth. The individual is always the starting point in this part of the Manual. Occasionally I shall make detours to discuss the performance of people in groups or organizations.

The area of strengths is very wide and can only be defined with difficulty. This is just as with life: it is not a canal, but a winding river. Most subjects are connected to each other.

The structure is as follows. Chapter 3 discusses what strengths are, how they can be classified, how you can trace them in yourself and how they are expressed in communication between people.

In Chapter 4 the phenomenon of resistance is central. This phenomenon often signifies improper use of strengths. Mechanisms such as the creation of an image and transference (Chapter 5) are the basis of handling strengths wrongly. For example, when someone has a false self-image some strengths get jammed.

Chapter 6 deals with several ways of tracing hidden strengths. In addition, a few obstacles that you may come across when developing these strengths are discussed.

Chapter 7 discusses two ways of handling distorted strengths (weaknesses).

The starting point in the final chapter is that strengths are a tool for giving shape to what animates people. Animation is expressed, for example, by the subjects that people think are important.

To classify people's behaviour I use divisions and working models. These have proved their practical usefulness to me. Not only do they function as a guide to offering more insight into one's own performance, they are also very useful for making objectionable behaviour in people manageable.

A big disadvantage of classifying people's behaviour by using models is that it is a great simplification of reality. People can never (fortunately) be fully classified and categorized. They are always more intricate and more varied than a simple model.

You will profit most from this second part of this Manual if you read it as though it is about yourself and if you actually apply it to yourself. In order to make this easier exercises have been included in each chapter. These exercises have been classified by subject in increasing level of difficulty.

Many people took part in the development of The Feedback Game and this Manual. I particularly want to say thanks to the following.

- My teachers Hans Korteweg and Jaap Voigt. I very much enjoyed the inspiring way they brought their wisdom to bear. In their training, 'functioning in organizations', they drew attention to the connection between qualities and the way in which people function. Furthermore, they introduced me to most of the other subjects discussed in this Manual.

For several years I have worked with these subjects, both in my professional capacity as a communication trainer and coach, and in my private life.

- Martin van Iersel and Nori Verhagen, who tested the game in all sorts of groups during its development stages.
- The many course members and students (particularly of the Den Bosch University of Applied Agriculture), who through their commitment and dedication offered me the chance to deepen the subject of this Manual in a practical way.
- The group of trainers who were very enthusiastic about the game and who themselves thought out new methods of playing (the number in parentheses is the method of play devised by that particular trainer): Léonie Schuijt-Overgoor (2); Carla Schroër (8);

Janny van der Heijden (10); Liesbeth van Loon (12 en 19); Truus Dekkers (13); Marnick Depuydt (14); Arno Vlooswijk (16).

- Last but not least, my wife, Marijke, who because of her feeling for grammar and precision gave her views on the first draft of this Manual.

If you have any questions about this Manual or suggestions to make concerning new methods of playing the game, I would very much like you to contact me:

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I wish you a lot of fun while playing The Feedback Game!

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Part 1

Playing The Feedback Game

Chapter 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.
- The procedure (seen from the participants' point of view).
- Explanatory notes for the trainer (if necessary).
- One or more alternative playing versions.
- Most of the time, one or more continuing exercises to explore the issue further. If there is a reference to particular theory, the trainer, as well as the participants, must study this before attempting the exercise.

Strengths and weaknesses of The Feedback Game

The stronger points of the game are:

- 1 It is a very simple concept.
- 2 It has a wide range of application, reinforced by the large number of methods of playing.
- 3 It makes looking at and discussing one's own way of functioning easier. You do not have to search for words, as the names of the characteristics are already lying on the table. This also makes it easier for the participants to select them.