

# The Feedback Games Manual

Peter Gerrickens

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## PREFACE

The subject of 'strengths' is almost always an important part of training sessions and courses. By applying this theme, one can contribute to personal development in a fun and useful way. The guiding principle on the theme of strengths is that if people are able to use their strengths to their full extent, they will be happier and more productive.

For many of us it is not easy to make optimal use of our strengths in everyday life. The Feedback Game and this Manual aim to guide you in the initial exploration of the richness of your strengths. They have been developed for anyone who is interested in this theme. Above all, they are intended for communication trainers, managers, counsellors, consultants, teachers and others who work with the theme 'strengths' in their job. The Game and the Manual are also meant for people who want to gain more insight into themselves by applying this theme. Thus, they both focus on people with a diversity of backgrounds; the examples described are also very varied.

The Manual consists of two parts. Part 1 contains 20 methods for applying 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.

More than 25 years of experience shows that The Feedback Game is a strong and very diverse instrument that can bring significant results. This requires meticulousness and a good sense of timing (see Section 1.4).

In Part 2 (Theory and Exercises) the theme 'strengths' is discussed 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 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.

Chapter 4 discusses mechanisms such as the creation of an image and transference, which are the basis of handling strengths wrongly. For example, when someone has a false self-image, some strengths get jammed.

Chapter 5 discusses two ways of handling distorted strengths (weaknesses).

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.

To classify people's behaviour I use several schemes. 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 schemes is that it is a simplification of reality. People can (fortunately) never be fully classified and categorized. They are always more intricate and more varied than a simple scheme!

You will profit most from the second part of this Manual if you read it as though it is about yourself and actually apply it to yourself. In order to make this easier, exercises have been included at the end of 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 people.

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

Martin van Iersel, 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. Last but not least, my wife, Marijke, regarding her feedback on grammar as well as content.

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

Email: [info@kwaliteitenspel.nl](mailto:info@kwaliteitenspel.nl)

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

December 2017, Peter Gerrickens, 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands

# **Part 1: Playing The Feedback Game**

# 1 GENERAL EXPLANATION OF THE FEEDBACK GAME

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since 1984 I have been working in groups on the theme of 'strengths'. 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 approach.

The idea of developing this game first originated on 29 March, 1990. The following 18 months were used for design and development. During this stage, the game was played by more than 1,000 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.

### Structure of 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.

In 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. For practical purposes the strengths and weaknesses should be 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.



If you wish to use a limited set of cards, choose numbers 1-40. This applies to both the strengths and weaknesses. The descriptions within these sets represent a good selection of the total spectrum and contain words that are easy to understand. You may also choose to make a selection according to your own preference.

## **1.2 SYMBOLISM OF THE DESIGN OF THE CARDS**

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

The starting point for working with strengths is that they have a positive effect on both the person who applies them and 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 for the image on the weaknesses cards. This is to show that a weakness can distort or hide a positive strength. For example, the strength that underlies the weakness 'obstructive', might be: 'being determined', and 'undisciplined' (a weakness) might be too much of the strength 'playful'. This is an important thing to remember when applying 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 situations (both educational and private) in which people are dealing with their personal way of functioning.

Depending on the audience and the method of playing, the game can be applied to 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
- teambuilding and teamwork
- forming an opinion on a specific function
- discovering one's latent strengths
- an icebreaker in training sessions.

Apart from teams and educational and training groups the game can be applied

to:

- staff appraisals
- career planning
- individual coaching and supervision
- private life

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

1. Becoming conscious of one's own strengths and weaknesses (methods 1 – 4).
2. Giving and receiving of feedback (methods 5–10).
3. Teamwork (methods 11–14).
4. Other applications:
  - getting acquainted (15)
  - strengths and weaknesses of an organization (16)
  - forming an opinion about a specific function (17)
  - evaluation (18)
  - icebreaker in training sessions (19)
  - staff appraisals (20).

Using Appendix II (Overview of methods of play') you can select a method that is best suited for the intended situation. To get more ideas it is advisable to look at methods of play 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 play described in Chapter 2 are suited for application in groups. Some can only be applied to one-on-one situations, e.g. coaching.

HAVE A THOROUGH LOOK AT YOUR INTENDED METHOD OF PLAY. YOU WILL OFTEN HAVE TO (SOMEWHAT) ADJUST IT TO MAKE IT PERFECTLY SUITED FOR THE TARGET AUDIENCE AND SITUATION YOU WANT TO APPLY IT TO.

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

For each method of play we give:

- *The purpose(s)*. It is very important that the intended method suits the participants.
- *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 deeper the players go into the matter of giving 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 required).
- One or more *alternative versions* of the method (most of the time).

Most of the time, one or more *continuing exercises* to explore the issue further. If there is a reference to a particular theory, the trainer as well as the participants, should study this before attempting the exercise.

## 1.4 DIRECTIONS FOR APPLYING THE FEEDBACK GAME

Experience shows that The Feedback Game is a powerful and many-sided tool that can bring about significant results for the players of the game. Therefore care and good timing are required, especially when the 'weaknesses' cards are being used. It is essential that, after playing the game, there is enough time to pay attention to anything it may have evoked. To be able to lead the game, the following conditions should be fulfilled:

- a. You yourself must have been a participant in the game, so that you have experienced what effects the game can evoke.
- b. You must be able to estimate which method of play is best suited to a specific situation.
- c. You must be able to lead the game in the right way. The difficulty involved in conducting the game varies according to the method of play and the situation to which the game is applied.
- d. You must have (some) theoretical background, so that you can answer the questions that participants might have about dealing with strengths.

## 1.5 SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE APPLICATION OF THE FEEDBACK GAME

1. Try to make playing with the 'weaknesses' cards fun and lighthearted – for example, by having participants find out which strength underlies a certain weakness. For most people it is an eye-opener to find out that

there is a connection between their strengths and weaknesses.

In method 10, the pleasure that people can experience from their weaknesses comes to the fore. It can also help to realize that these weaknesses are really a kind of naughtiness and that it can be good fun to be naughty every now and then!

2. In some methods of play it is not useful to use all of the cards, so a selection needs to be made. This of course also depends on the features of the group and the intended purpose.
3. For many methods of play, it is possible to alter the number of cards with which the players start to play, or that they select. That can be done according to one's own point of view. This especially applies to methods 1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 17 and 20.
4. When applying this game to semi-skilled people, it may be helpful to first discuss the meaning of the descriptions on the cards.
5. Instruct the participants that the descriptions on the 'strengths' cards are to be interpreted as positive and those on the 'weaknesses' cards as negative. Some of the weaknesses can have rather extreme interpretations, and this can discourage the participants. Therefore you should emphasize at the introduction of the game that the players should explain, for example, if a weakness is being demonstrated sometimes or regularly, and in what kind of situation.
6. For most methods of play, it is important that the participants give an explanation of the chosen words, as people often attach different meanings to the same words. Especially when giving feedback, it is important to know the interpretation of a description.
7. When the game is being used as a tool to give feedback you should emphasize that the characteristics only refer to the specific behaviour of a person and that they do not have to relate to how a person really is. That, one can only state for oneself. So the players should not say: 'You are...', but: 'To me you appear to be a ... person because ... (clarify this on the basis of specific examples)'. Make sure that the participants stick to these feedback rules.
8. In some methods of play there is a chance that one or more of the participants will be assigned none or just a few cards from their fellow players. If this is not what you want, you can find how to deal with this in the explanatory notes for method 6.
9. Self-chosen words for strengths and weaknesses are preferable. However, many people find it difficult to find words to express characteristics. The

descriptions on the cards can be an aid. Sometimes they reflect exactly what one means, sometimes they don't. In all methods of play, participants may choose a description different from the one printed on the card, if that can more precisely reflect what they mean.

10. If the atmosphere in a group or team is unpleasant or unsafe, you should only use the 'strengths' cards.

## 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 2: BECOMING AWARE II

### Developing stages of strengths

#### PURPOSES

1. Becoming more aware of one's own strengths and to what extent these strengths are being demonstrated.
2. Giving and receiving feedback.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants are already familiar with The Feedback Game.
2. The participants know each other well.
3. Number of participants: no more than 12, to be split up into subgroups of 2–4 people.
4. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
5. Estimated playing time: 50–70 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. An explanation is given of the four possible stages of development of a strength (manifest, half-latent, latent or distorted; see Section 3.1).
2. Place the 'strengths' and the 'weaknesses' cards separate from each other, face up on the table. Select for yourself:
  - Two manifest strengths.
  - Two distorted strengths (weaknesses).
  - One latent strength that you would want to develop further.
  - One half-latent strength that you would want to pay more attention to.

List the chosen strengths and weaknesses.

3. Select (from the complete set of cards) for the neighbour sitting on your right-hand side: a manifest strength, a half-latent strength, a latent strength and a distorted strength.
4. In turn, each player, shares the selection and explains his or her choices. All players in the subgroup can react to each other, explaining, for example:
  - Why they don't agree with someone else's choice.
  - Why they do not recognize a certain strength that has been ascribed to them, why they do not wish to develop that specific strength or in what situation that specific strength becomes a distortion.

5. Steps 3 and 4 may also be repeated for the neighbour on your left-hand side.

#### CONTINUING EXERCISE

Answer the following questions for the half-latent strengths found at step 2:

- a. What keeps you from demonstrating these strengths more often?
- b. What would be the effect on both you and your environment if you were to demonstrate that strength more?

## METHOD 3: BECOMING AWARE III

### The Johari window

#### PURPOSES

1. Becoming more aware of the characteristics that you do or don't demonstrate to others.
2. Getting an overview of your strengths and weaknesses that up till now, you were not that aware of.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants know each other very well.
2. Number of participants: 2–4.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' 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 starting point 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: one list containing 5 strengths and 4 weaknesses that you would assign to your free space, and another list containing 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses that you would assign 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 assign to their free space, and another one with 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses that you would assign to their blind spot.
5. For each person in turn, design a Johari window that is as complete as possible. During this process, while the different points of view are being shared, both 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 players should try to come to an agreement on this as much as possible. In case of disagreement, the player whose turn it is, decides in which square that specific card is to be placed. The cards that don't suit any of these three areas should be discarded.

#### ALTERNATIVE VERSION

This method of play can also be combined with method 5. At step 3 of method 5, apply the following rules:

- a. You may place a card for yourself in the free space or the concealed area.
- b. If you place a card for someone else, you are permitted to do so only in

the free space or the blind spot.

#### CONTINUING EXERCISE

Examine the strengths and weaknesses of your 'concealed area' (the shady parts of yourself). For each characteristic, consider why you do not demonstrate it to others. Do any obstructive thoughts play a part in this? If so, what thoughts? (see Sections 4.1 and 4.2).

## METHOD 4: BECOMING AWARE IV

### Tracking down latent strengths

#### PURPOSE

Tracking down any strengths that as yet you not use optimally.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. This method is played individually or with an interlocutor or coach.
2. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards.
3. Estimated playing time: 30 - 40 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Form two horizontal rows:
  - A row containing max. 5 strengths that you demonstrate at work, but hardly or not at all in your private life.
  - A row containing max. 5 strengths that you demonstrate in your private life, but hardly or not at all at work.
2. Both rows are likely to contain half-latent strengths. You can check that by asking yourself at every strength of the first row: 'Could I possibly demonstrate that strength more?' If so, then you have found a half-latent strength. Apply the same procedure for the second row, but then asking yourself: 'Could I possibly demonstrate this strength more at work?'
3. For every found half-latent strength, consider:
  - In what specific situation you could demonstrate this strength more.
  - What obstructive thought might play a part in this situation
  - How it would influence your work or private life if you were to demonstrate this strength more often. Consider whether you would want that to happen. Why (not)?

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. At step 2 you may also ask yourself:
  - Which strengths do I demonstrate only when I feel (very) safe and secure?
  - Which strengths do I not demonstrate in a situation that makes me feel anxious?
2. You can also play this method together with someone you know well. In that case, you play this method in turn and may give each other feedback.

## METHOD 5: BECOMING AWARE V

### Desired strengths

#### PURPOSES

1. Gaining an insight into the strengths one wishes to develop.
2. Giving and receiving feedback regarding strengths that are to be developed.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants know each other well.
2. Number of participants: 2 - 8. If there are more participants split them into subgroups.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 20 - 40 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Reflect on: 'Which two strengths would you like to have at your disposal?' and: 'What would be the effect of that on both you and your environment?'.
3. Reflect on: 'What strength would you wish for each of the other individual players?'. Select a strength that you (hardly) notice at the moment, but that you would like to see demonstrated more by that specific person. What would be the effect if that strength were to be demonstrated more by this person?
4. In turn, share your answers to steps 2 and 3. You should also try to find out what might help the person in question to develop the desired strength (more).
5. You may also ask each other the following question: 'What strength that you find exciting, would you like to have at your disposal?'.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES

Step 2 can also be applied when people are getting acquainted. Step 3 can also be applied in evaluating a course or a training session.

#### CONTINUING EXERCISE

It happens quite often that at step 2 some strengths are mentioned that the person involved used to demonstrate (as a child), but that have in some sense

got lost along the way. The strengths involved have become latent. Consider whether this is also the case in your situation. It can be quite illuminating to have a talk about this with friends or relatives who have known you for a long time.



## METHOD 6: FEEDBACK I

### Comparing your self-image with the way others see you

#### PURPOSES

1. Becoming more aware of your own strengths.
2. Giving and receiving feedback; comparing your self-image with the way others consider you.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The players know each other quite well.
2. Number of participants: 2 - 6.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 40 – 60 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Deal five cards to each player. Place the rest of the cards in a pile, face down.
2. Pick the top card from the pile. From your six cards, select one strength which is most uncharacteristic of yourself. You now have two options:
  - a. Pass this card on to another player who you think can demonstrate this strength, explaining the reason for your choice or describing a specific situation in which you saw this strength being demonstrated by this person. This card is placed face up in front of the selected player.
  - b. Discard the card if it does not reflect any of the players. However, option a. is preferred!
3. The next player takes a turn, and this process continues until the pile of cards is depleted. Gradually, the 5 cards that you hold will suit you better.
4. Finally, you place your 5 cards, face up, in front of you, and compare them to the cards you received (comparing your self-image with the way others are considering you). Discuss the similarities and differences that strike you. Which strength that you were assigned to, do you appreciate the most?
5. On the basis of the strengths that you yourself chose, the strengths that were assigned to you, and the remaining cards, list 8 strengths that are most characteristic of you.

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. You may also choose to reverse the procedure at step 2: The participant then first gives an explanation without mentioning the specific strength, and shows the card afterwards. Thus, the person who gives feedback is invited to give a precise explanation and the one who receives feedback, is likely to pay even more attention. This application is due to Martin Pragt, who came up with it while working with homeless teenagers.
2. In this method it is important to make sure that the number of cards that each player receives, is about the same. As it might give rise to a quite unpleasant atmosphere, if one of the players receives none or just one card, while all of the other players have received five or six cards. There are two ways to prevent this from happening:
  - By asking the players during the course of the game to focus on the participant who still has no or few cards.
  - Establishing the rule that every participant should at least or at most receive a certain number of cards.
3. This method can also be applied to people have not yet met each other before. In that case, feedback is given on the basis of first impressions. That may lead to quite some insights!
4. At step 3 it is also possible to establish as a rule that the card that is being discarded can be passed on by another player.

## ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

### Version A

At step 1, each player may also start with just one card and, during the game, increase the number of cards held, to a maximum of five.

### Version B

This method may be extended by playing with the 'weaknesses' cards as well as the 'strengths' cards. In that case the players need to know each other well and should be able to deal with criticism. The procedure is as follows:

- a. Deal 5 'strengths' cards and 3 cards 'weaknesses' cards to each player. Place the rest of the cards in two piles, face down (strengths and weaknesses separately). Alternatively, each player can start with two cards (one strength and one weakness) and, during the game, increase the number of cards held to a maximum of 8 (5 strengths and 3 weaknesses).
- b. In turn, a round with strengths and a round with weaknesses is played.

- c. In turn, each player picks an extra card from the pile that is currently being used. Apply steps 2, 3 and 4.
- d. On the basis of the strengths and weaknesses that you yourself have chosen, the strengths and weaknesses that were passed on to you, and the remaining cards, list your most important 8 strengths and 6 weaknesses. Consider whether there is connection between these strengths and weaknesses.

### **Version C**

You may also choose to have the participants select their own strengths and weaknesses beforehand. The procedure is as follows:

- a. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
- b. Select 8 strengths and 6 weaknesses that you find typical of yourself and list them. Make sure your fellow players cannot see what you select.
- c. Place the cards in two piles, face down: one with the 'strengths' cards and one with the 'weaknesses' cards.
- d. In turn, play one round with the 'strengths' cards and one with 'weaknesses' cards.
- e. In turn, take a card from the 'strengths' pile and give it to the player who you think fits this strength the most. Explain your choice. The player who receives the card puts it in front of him or her, face up, on the table and can ask for clarification; however, discussion is not allowed! If you find that the strength that you pick up, isn't suited to anyone, say so and discard it.
- f. Apply step (e) to the 'weaknesses' cards.
- g. Continue until the two piles are exhausted.
- h. Compare the characteristics that you had listed for yourself with the ones that you received. What are the differences and similarities? Discuss the striking things with others. Draw your own conclusions.

### **Version D**

People often find it difficult to pass on cards with descriptions of weaknesses on them. This version may make it more accessible:

- a. Spread all of the 'weaknesses' cards face up on the table.

- b. Select 6 weaknesses that you find typical of yourself and list them.
- c. For each of your fellow players, write down which two weaknesses you notice most in them. Reflect on: 'What strength underlies each of these weaknesses?' and: 'Do you recognize these strengths in him or her in different situations?'.
- d. In turn, each player explains each weakness he chose for himself. Then, the other participants who also selected this specific weakness (or one that comes close to it) for you, also explain their choice, while also answering the questions at step c.
- e. When you have finished, the other players explain which other weaknesses they might also have chosen for you, again while also answering the questions at step c. If required, fellow players help to investigate what strength underlies a specific weakness.

If the participants find the giving of feedback too discouraging, steps (c) and (e) can be left out. At step (d), the participants then only explain their own choices. The other players can, however still help in finding the strengths underlying the weaknesses.

#### CONTINUING EXERCISE

List those strengths (and weaknesses if you also played with those) that, according to your self-image, do not correspond with the way others consider you. For each strength, examine the possible cause for this. You might want to discuss this further with people who know you well. Is there anything you feel you might need to adjust about your self-image? If so, what?

## **METHOD 7: FEEDBACK II**

### **Estimating someone else's strengths**

#### **PURPOSES**

1. Becoming more aware of your own strengths.
2. Finding out how well you can estimate someone else's strengths.

#### **PRIOR CONDITIONS**

1. The participants know each other reasonably well.
2. Number of participants: 2 - 6.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 40 - 70 mins.

#### **PROCEDURE**

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. List 8 strengths that are most characteristic of yourself. Do not show the other players. Write your name on the list and hand it to the trainer.
3. The trainer selects all of the cards that are written on the lists, shuffles them and places them in a pile, face down. The remaining cards are discarded. Everyone receives their own list.
4. The trainer picks up a card from the pile and shows it to the players. All of the players guess who listed this specific strength (it can apply to more players at the same time) and explain their choice. Ten points are awarded for each correct guess.
5. This process continues until the pile of cards is depleted. The player with the highest score is the most competent at recognizing strengths in others and is the 'winner'.
6. Discuss each other's lists. Reflect on: 'Does the image that a certain person has of him- or herself correspond to the way in which that person is considered by others?'.

#### **EXPLANATORY NOTE**

If the number of participants exceeds 8, at step 2 the number of cards to be chosen can be reduced. This prevents the game going on for too long.

## ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

### Version A

This method can also be applied using both the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. In that case the participants should know each other well. The procedure is as follows:

- a. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
- b. At step 2, as well as 8 strengths, also select 6 weaknesses.
- c. At step 4, first work through the 'strengths' cards, then continue with the 'weaknesses' cards.

### Version B

A shortened form of version 1 can be played by using just the 'strengths' cards 1 – 40 and the 'weaknesses' cards 1 – 40. You then select only 5 strengths and 4 weaknesses.

### Version C

- a. Spread all of the 'strengths' cards face up on the table.
- b. Select a card that, according to you, you demonstrate the most in this group. Each player puts this card face down on the pile. The remaining cards are discarded.
- c. The pile of cards is now shuffled. Each of the players randomly receives a card, guesses who chose it, and explains his or her choice.

You may also apply the following procedure: place each card face up. The whole group at the same time reflects on who might have chosen a specific card.

- d. Apply steps a - c to the 'weaknesses' cards.

## **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 9: FEEDBACK IV

### First impressions

#### PURPOSE

Giving feedback on someone else's strengths, based on first impressions.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants have not met before.
2. Number of participants: 4 - 15. A larger group can be split into subgroups.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 40 - 80 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Write down, for any of the other players, what, according to you, is their most striking strength, based on your first impression. If you do happen to know some of the other players, you pass over them.
3. Each participant shares his or her chosen strengths. For the benefit of the overview, the strengths involved can be listed on a whiteboard or flip chart.
4. If wished for, each of the participants may share what they do and do not recognize about this feedback.

#### ALTERNATIVE VERSION

This method can also be applied using both the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. In that case, the participants should be open to negative feedback given by people who are unknown to them. At step 2 you then write down, for any of the other players, what, according to you, is their most striking weakness, based on first impressions.

#### CONTINUING EXERCISE

Answer the following questions: To what extent is there a difference between the first impression people have of you and the way they consider you when they get to know you better? What strength(s) are added? What weakness(es) are added or disappear?



## METHOD 10: FEEDBACK V

### Latent strengths

#### PURPOSES

1. Becoming more aware of those strengths that you demonstrate too often.
2. Becoming more aware of your latent strengths.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants know each other well and can handle criticism.
2. The participants are already familiar with another method of The Feedback Game.
3. Number of participants: 3–5.
4. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
5. Estimated playing time: 40 - 60 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Select 2 of the 'strengths' cards that you have at your disposal, but that you might want to get rid of, or at least apply less often. Explain your choices.
3. Select 2 of the 'weaknesses' cards that you currently do not demonstrate, but that might be useful to you, or that you might want to demonstrate more often. Explain your choices.
4. Select 1 card describing a strength and another one describing a weakness for any of your fellow players, and then follow steps 2 and 3.
5. For each participant, discuss the answers to steps 2 - 4. Investigate the strength that underlies the weakness that the player concerned would like to show more often. This (latent) strength represents a challenge for him or her, and can be developed further.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. At step 3 the starting point is that weaknesses you would like to demonstrate more, are usually part of the shady side of your personality. The scheme that complements this theme is called the 'Secret Pleasure Quadrant®'. You can read more about that in Section 6.2.

2. Experience shows that many people really enjoy revealing the weaknesses that they would like to indulge in more.

## CONTINUING EXERCISES

1. The starting point for step 2 is that the demonstration of a strength is sometimes a form of mask behaviour. You prefer to apply this strength instead of demonstrating another that you are not that familiar with, although you would really want to apply the latter in the situation concerned (see Section 5.3). Thus you actually demonstrate that 'mask strength' too often, and would therefore like to use it less. To gain more insight into this mechanism, you could reflect on the following questions concerning the strengths chosen at step 2:
  - a. In what kind of situation would you like to demonstrate this strength less often? Reflect on your thoughts in that situation, what you really wanted and how you felt in earlier similar situations.
  - b. What would you have liked to say or do in the above situation? What strength would have been appropriate to that situation? Applying the following sentences can be of help: 'I would rather \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the mask strength) than \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the desired strength)' or: 'It (obviously) costs me less of an effort to .....(fill in the mask strength), than to .....(fill in the desired strength).
2. Concerning the strengths selected at step 5, reflect on:
  - a. What keeps you from demonstrating this strength more often? Do obstructive thoughts play a part in this? If so, what thoughts? (see Sections 4.2 and 6.3).
  - b. What would be the effect on both yourself and your environment if you were to develop and demonstrate these strengths?

## METHOD 11: TEAMWORK I

### Team feedback

#### PURPOSE

Giving and receiving positive feedback in a team.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants know each other reasonably well.
2. Number of participants: 4 - 8.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards.
4. Estimated playing time: 40 - 60 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Place all of the cards in a pile, face down.
2. All players pick a card from the pile and reflect on: 'Which of the other players suits this strength best?'.
3. In turn, you place your card in front of the selected player and explain your choice. If the description on the card does not entirely reflect what you mean, you nonetheless place the card in front of the selected player and share the correct description. The person receiving the card can ask for clarification. Discard the card if it does not reflect any of the players.
4. The game continues until the pile of cards is exhausted.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. You might want to pay attention to the fact that it is desirable for that the number of cards that each player receives, is about the same.
2. It can be quite illuminating, if the team manager also takes part in the game (on the condition that all the team members agree to this).
3. This method can also be applied to people who are not familiar with each other. The assignment of cards is then based on first impressions.
4. Method 6 is also well suited for giving feedback in a team.

## ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

### Version A

This method can be extended by using the 'weaknesses' cards. In that case the players should know each other well and be able to deal with criticism. The procedure is as follows:

- a. The set of 'strengths' cards and the set of 'weaknesses' cards are placed separately in a pile.
- b. In turn, a round is played with the strengths and the weaknesses.
- c. Follow steps 2,3 and 4. At step 4, reflect on whether there is a connection between the strengths and weaknesses each player has received.

### Version B

If the number of team members is larger than 8, and you want the whole team to play the Feedback Game at the same time, you can also work with an inner and outer circle. The procedure is then as follows:

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

### Version C

While working with an inner and outer circle, you can also apply the following method of play:

- a. Put all of the 'strengths' cards in a pile. If the inner circle consists of more than eight participants, use two sets of 'strengths' cards and mix them with each other.
- b. Each player randomly receives 3 cards.
- c. At your turn, place one of those cards face up in front of the player who, in your opinion, has this strength at his or her disposal. Explain your choice. Discard the remaining 2 cards.
- d. After each round the members of the outer circle get the opportunity to share what they noticed.

- e. Each participant shares what he or she does or does not recognize from the assigned cards.
- f. The game continues until the pile is depleted.
- g. The members of the inner and outer circles change places.

## CONTINUING EXERCISES

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 4.4 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, placing the weakness that bothers you the most on top. 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 5.2). 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, placing the strength that you value the highest on top. 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 tracked down and how you could demonstrate them in the team.
- d. If you wish, repeat steps a - c for the strength and weakness that you ranked second.

The above exercise can be combined with giving feedback. In that case the team members, in turn, share at step c which member (at a) they chose for their selected weakness, and which member (at b) they chose for their selected strength, explaining their choices. When discussing the weaknesses, the underlying strength should also be mentioned.

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

## 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.

## **METHOD 13: TEAMWORK III**

### **Investigating the balance in a team**

#### **PURPOSE**

Evaluating and/or optimizing the cooperation in a group or team.

#### **PRIOR CONDITIONS**

1. The participants work together as a group or team.
2. Number of participants: 3 - 10.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 40 - 80 mins.

#### **PROCEDURE**

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. List which 3 strengths you demonstrate most in this group. Also state the effect of this on the functioning of the whole group.
3. Repeat steps 1 - 2 for 3 of your weaknesses.
4. In turn, explain your choices. One of the team members writes down which strengths and weaknesses are being mentioned and how often they have been selected. In this way an overall image of the whole group emerges.
5. Discuss the group result. Questions to consider might be, for example:
  - Which strengths are overrepresented? What effect causes this?
  - Which necessary strengths are underrepresented or missing? What effect causes this?
  - What are the effects of the most common weaknesses on the functioning of the group as a whole?
6. Discuss the question: How can this group function even better? To be considered for example, are:
  - The most interfering distortions. Try to think of a solution to this.
  - Are there any strengths among the team members that are not being demonstrated at the moment but that would be of great benefit? Why are they not being demonstrated? What would be the effect, in terms of job satisfaction, if these strengths were to be demonstrated?



## EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. This method can also be applied at the start of a joint action – for example, when forming a team. You can then take just strengths as a starting point.
2. This method can also be combined with any of the other methods in which the players are giving each other feedback.

## ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

### **Version A**

For an extended and more intense version of the above method, the procedure is as follows:

- a. At steps 2 and 3 also write down the 3 most important strengths and weaknesses (from your point of view) for each of the other players.
- b. Discuss the results from step a in pairs. Try to reach consensus on the 3 most important strengths and weaknesses of each of the other players.
- c. At step 4 all the pairs share with the other team members their list of strengths and weaknesses. In this way, a comparison can be made between the ways in which individual team members regard themselves and how others consider them.

### **Version B**

Each player selects 4 strengths and 3 weaknesses that (from his or her point of view) typify the working relationship or the process of cooperation. The outcomes are shared and discussed.

A department of a business can be discussed in a similar way. The question to be reflected on would then be: Which are the strengths and weaknesses of this department?

## CONTINUING EXERCISE

Decide with the whole team what is currently causing a problem. Together, try to find a solution to this problem. The only rule for playing is that the input that each team member supplies must come from the 2 or 3 strengths that are currently the most important to that person.

## METHOD 14: TEAMWORK IV

### Team standards

#### PURPOSE

Improving the working climate.

#### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. A group or team with an unpleasant working climate. Each of the team members acknowledges this and is willing to improve it.
2. Number of participants: 4 - 25.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 60 - 75 mins.

#### PROCEDURE

1. Further clarification of the purpose of this method: The goal is to formulate a profile of the desired behaviour for getting on with each other, so as to improve the working climate. This method is very useful when forming a new team.
2. The players are split up into subgroups of 4 - 5 players.
3. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
4. Individually, list 6 strengths, based on the question 'How, from your point of view, would team members have to behave to create a pleasant atmosphere?'.  
atmosphere?'
5. Each member shares and explains his or her choices. Discard the cards that were not selected. The group tries to reach consensus on the profile of the desired behaviour. As the discussion continues, some strengths are eliminated and put aside. Finally, 6 strengths remain.
6. Each subgroup presents its choice to the rest of the group. Discuss the similarities and differences. Try to reach consensus with the whole group. The selected strengths form the 'code of conduct' for the group. Check whether each individual team member will follow this code and will address those who might deviate from the desired behaviour.
7. Each member shares and explains which strength he or she chose, to contribute to the realization of the desired profile.

## METHOD 15: GETTING ACQUAINTED

### PURPOSE

Getting acquainted using some important strengths.

### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. Number of participants: 4 - 15.
2. Requirements: all the 'strengths' cards.
3. Estimated playing time: 15 - 30 mins.

### PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Select two strengths that you find typical of yourself. Introduce yourself by describing when you demonstrate the chosen strengths at your work and what effect they cause.

### ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

#### Version A

For this method you can also use both the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. In that case, each player selects 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses.

#### Version B

At step 2, you may also select 2 strengths that you would like to have more at your disposal. At step 3, each player describes the effects that these strengths would have on their work, if they had developed these strengths well.

#### Version C

Randomly deal 5 of the 'strengths' cards to each player. In turn, each player shares and explains which of those 5 strengths suits him or her best (number of participants per set of cards:14).

#### Version D

- a. Select 2 strengths that you often demonstrate in your private life but (almost) never at work. Explain why this is the case.
- b. Select a strength that reflects what you find important at work.

## Version E

If you want people to get acquainted in a dynamic way, follow this procedure:

- a. Form two rows, standing opposite to each other. Randomly deal 7 cards to each player. Firstly, each player takes a look at his or her own cards and then at those of the person standing opposite.
- b. Consider whether you would want to have any of the cards of the person standing opposite to you. The strength described on that card should suit you better than any of the strengths on the cards you hold. Explain why you would like to have that card and how you demonstrate that strength at work. However, the other person is allowed to refuse to give you that card! If he or she does so, he or she needs to give an explanation. If no exchange can be made, share which card you would have wanted to exchange and why.
- c. After 4 minutes, one row shifts to the next person so you have another person standing opposite you. Repeat step b. The trainer signals each time the 4 minutes have passed.
- d. Continue until the total playing time is over (4 or 5 rounds). Gradually, the cards that you hold, better reflects the way you regard yourself while you get acquainted with some of the other players.

Note: if the number of participants is between 11 and 20, use two sets of cards.

## **METHOD 16: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF AN ORGANIZATION**

### **PURPOSE**

Discussing in a playful way how the organization one works for is considered.

### **PRIOR CONDITIONS**

1. The players work for the same organization.
2. Number of participants: 3 – 12.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards.
4. Estimated playing time: 30 – 60 minutes.

### **PROCEDURE**

1. Put all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards face up on the table, separately from each other.
2. Choose 1 or 2 of the 'strengths' cards and 1 or 2 of the 'weaknesses' cards that you find typical of the organization you work for. If you work for a large organization, just focus on the department you work for.
3. In turn, explain your choice, using the following questions to guide you:
  - a. In what areas do you see the strength(s) and weakness(es) of your organization being demonstrated? What effect does this have on you?
  - b. Is there a connection between the strength(s) and the weakness(es)? If so, which connection?
  - c. What strength underlies each weakness?
4. What conclusions can you draw?

### **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

1. You may want to make a pre-selection, e.g. by discarding all of the cards that do not apply to an organization.
2. If the players all work for the same organization, this method can act as an icebreaker by enabling them to talk about this theme. If there is (a lot of) discontent about the organization, this method will bring that out in the open. Therefore, you may want to think about how you are going to handle the outcome of this method.
3. You can also apply this method to discuss how things work out in a team.

## METHOD 17: FORMING AN OPINION ON A SPECIFIC FUNCTION

### PURPOSE

Forming an opinion on the strengths that are the most relevant to a specific function.

### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The participants all have the same function or are preparing for that.
2. Number of participants: 2 – 25
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards. For each player, a pen and a sheet of paper.
4. Estimated playing time: 40 - 70 mins.

### PROCEDURE

1. The participants are split into subgroups of 2–5 people.
2. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
3. List 6 strengths that you consider essential to the function concerned.
4. In turn, each player shares and explains his choices. The strengths that were selected are put together; those that nobody selected are discarded.
5. The subgroup tries to reach consensus on the ideal profile for the function concerned. During the discussion the 'strengths' cards that are not selected are discarded, until finally 6 strengths remain.
6. Each subgroup presents its final choice to the whole group. Discuss the similarities and differences.

### EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. The trainer may make a selection of the strengths by discarding those strengths that are clearly not relevant for the function concerned.
2. This method of play is suitable for various situations e.g.:
  - a. Groups that consist of members who practise the same profession (e.g.: managers, commercial employees or chairmen).
  - b. Groups in which the members are preparing for the same specific function (e.g.: students in vocational education).
  - c. Discussing the image of an organization.

3. This method can also be applied to bring a group of people working for the same organization and practising the same profession, more in line with each other.

## ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

### **Version A**

You may also use the 'weaknesses' cards. In that case the players should reflect on: 'What pitfall do you think is the most important to this specific function?'. The procedure to be followed is the same as detailed above.

### **Version B**

When used as a form of getting acquainted in an educational setting, the procedure is as follows:

- a. At step 3, students list 6 strengths, based on the question 'What to you is the profile of the ideal teacher?'.  
b. Follow steps 4 - 6.
- c. The teacher describes which 6 strengths are most typical of him or her, and these are compared to the strengths of the desired profile, chosen by the students.

## METHOD 18: EVALUATION

### PURPOSE

Evaluating a course or training session.

### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. Number of participants: 5 - 20.
2. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards.
3. Estimated playing time: 10 - 30 mins.

### PROCEDURE

1. Spread all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards, separately from each other, face up on the table.
2. Select a strength and a weakness that, to you, are typical, of the course or training session.
3. In turn, each player explains their choices.

### ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS

#### **Version A**

Select a strength that you have become more aware of during this training session. Share how you intend to demonstrate this strength, in the most practical way, at work.

#### **Version B**

Select a weakness that you've become more aware of during this training session. Share how you want to deal with this weakness in future.



## **METHOD 19: ICEBREAKER IN TRAINING SESSIONS**

### **PURPOSE**

Making a group more animated.

### **PRIOR CONDITIONS**

1. The participants need to be familiar with each other for at least half a day.
2. Number of participants: 5 - 15.
3. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' cards.
4. Estimated playing time: 15 - 45 mins.

### **PROCEDURE**

1. Spread all of the cards face up on the table.
2. Reflect on the person on your right-hand side in a positive way.
3. Select a card that depicts which positive characteristic you noticed about that person.
4. Pass this card on to the person in question and explain your choice.
5. You may repeat steps 2 – 4 for the person sitting on your left-hand side.

## METHOD 20: STAFF APPRAISAL

### PURPOSES

1. Making a personal strengths/weaknesses analysis related to the function practised.
2. Giving feedback.

### PRIOR CONDITIONS

1. The employee and supervisor know each other (reasonably) well.
2. Requirements: all of the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards. If wished for, the supervisor can limit the number of cards by using numbers 1 – 40 of both sets. Pen and paper for both the employee and the supervisor.
3. Estimated playing time: 45–60 mins.

### PROCEDURE

1. Place the 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' cards separately from each other on the table. The employee lists 5 strengths and 4 weaknesses that he or she demonstrates most at work. The supervisor also lists those for the employee. They both also rank them, placing the strengths and weaknesses that are considered to be the most striking on top.
2. Share the lists and discuss each characteristic. Thus the supervisor can give direct feedback to the employee. The procedure is as follows: the cards that were selected by both are placed in the middle, the ones that the employee has chosen to the left of them, and the ones that the supervisor has chosen to the right.
3. Steps 1 and 2 can be repeated, discussing the supervisor's strengths/weaknesses analysis.

### CONTINUING EXERCISES

1. The supervisor shares which strengths he or she would like to see being demonstrated more by the employee. If the employee agrees with this, they discuss the possible obstacles to developing these strengths (see Section 6.3).
2. The employee shares which weakness bothers him or her the most. The employee and the supervisor together analyse this weakness according to the steps in Section 5.2 en 5.3. They also try to figure out a way of dealing more effectively with this weakness.

## Part 2: Theory and exercises

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

their most important strengths, the answer is usually a deep sigh followed by a short silence. One of those advisers once told me that when a client was asked about his strengths he said, 'I don't know. I believe people think I'm not a bad guy'.

The first time people are asked to make a list of strengths they often find it quite hard. However, once the foundation has been laid, additions or differentiations are then made much more easily. It is very important to choose your own words for your strengths. Choose a word that expresses a strength for you as precisely as possible. When you have found the right description for a strength, you will feel the contact with that strength yourself. You are, as it were, connected to it. If you can also clarify that strength, you can quite easily convince another person that you really have it.

If you do not succeed in listing the important strengths you have, there are different ways in which you can trace them. Three ways are discussed here. One way is to examine what you enjoy. In these activities too you make use of strengths. Hobbies are a good example of this, for a hobby is something you do wholly for yourself and not, for example, because it brings in money. On the contrary, many hobbies cost money. Tracing the strengths in hobbies is not always very easy. A few examples of hobbies and the possible strengths of the hobbyist hidden in them, are: for doing crosswords you need patience, for mountaineering courage is indispensable, and you have to be adventurous for travelling.

When you choose a sport that suits you, you can put many of your strengths into it. For walking long distances you need perseverance. If you are a key player in a team sport then communication skills are desirable.

A second way of getting an idea of your strengths is to consider which questions or problems other people come to you for. When they have found out what you are good at, there is a chance that they will ask you for help with it. If you are creative others will perhaps come to you when they sorely need ideas. If you are meticulous they will come to you to have you check the draft version of a text.

A third aid you can use when examining your strengths is other people's reactions. You can ask people who know you well (relatives, friends), or with whom you cooperate a lot, which strengths are most typical of you. This calls for a comment: what other people say about you is often coloured by the characteristics of their own personality. Feedback you receive at work might be distorted by the prevailing culture.

Receiving feedback can also take place in a playful way through The Feedback Game that I have developed (Gerrickens, 1991). In most cases people enjoy receiving feedback, and thus getting their strengths acknowledged. It may, however, also evoke fierce reactions.



A couple of years ago a client rang and asked to send her a new version of the Feedback Game. She worked in psychiatrics and had enjoyed applying the game quite regularly in that setting. But lately there was a player in a group who was assigned a lot of strengths. He could not handle all that positive feedback and had for that reason torn up all the cards he had received. The abundance of positive feedback obviously didn't fit his negative self-image.

When you start visualizing your own strengths in the above ways, you will undoubtedly run into a problem: which strengths are most typical of you? It can be quite hard to differentiate between a strength that you acquired through learning or upbringing (and actually being behaviour that you have been taught), or one that is just part of you, that you received as a gift of birth. The one you learned might feel rather like a duty instead of something that really gives you a feeling of fulfilment. You usually demonstrate strengths that really suit you effortlessly and naturally.

Suppose you are allowed to keep eight strengths at most; what will the list look like then? You may even go one step further by indicating an order within those eight strengths. A question that may help in this is: 'Which strengths are most dear to me and so are the ones that I would rather not do without?'. If these strengths were 'removed' you would not know the person that you became in that way anymore. Often most emphasis is on two or three strengths and the other strengths are in their service. If you are especially adventurous, creativity, courage and self-assurance may be supporting strengths in this.

When making a list of strengths some people observe that they possess strengths of a very diverse nature – for example, they may be both dynamic and patient. These people will wonder whether this is possible. It certainly is, for they do not use the strengths concerned simultaneously.

A balanced selection of your strengths cannot be made quickly in a single evening. When you have been working on it consciously and honestly for some time, the image will crystallize automatically. The list of strengths usually changes in the course of time. New strengths develop and others fade into the background. So such a list is in a way just a snapshot.

### **3.3 DEVELOPING STRENGTHS**

A strength can only be deployed optimally in everyday life when it has been fully developed. In the development of a strength four stages can be indicated, ranging from undeveloped to overdeveloped: latent, half-latent, manifest and distorted (Korteweg & Voigt, 1985).

## Latent strengths

Strengths that are already there in the bud and may develop within you (again) are latent strengths. Such a latent strength is comparable to a bulb that is in the ground and may start to grow when conditions are favourable. Usually you cannot see it yourself. A practised outsider sometimes can. Via the mechanism of projection it is possible to trace latent strengths. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Another possibility is deciding to hide away a strength because it evokes negative reactions or because you are startled by it. Often you are not aware of this. You could say that this colour has disappeared from your palette of colours.

Latent strengths offer important opportunities for personal development. Situations that people view as a challenge often offer the opportunity to further develop certain latent strengths.

## Half-latent strengths

Strengths that you employ selectively – that is, only in a situation familiar to you – are half-latent. They have been partially developed. When a situation is not safe you do not employ such a strength, even when it is desirable. The strength ‘sensitivity’ is an example of a strength that is half-latent with some people. They only dare to react in an instinctive way when the situation is safe and they do not run the risk of being refused or hurt. Another example is that a person will show humour with relatives and friends, but does not use (or hardly ever uses) this strength when with colleagues at work. However, a joke to cheer things up can be very functional there as well.

With half-latent strengths it may seem that a certain strength is not there. It is possible, however, that it remains hidden in situations in which it is desirable or suitable. In terms of the palette of colours, half-latent strengths are colours that you use at one time and do not use at another for making your ‘work of art’. In those situations you do not use the colour you really want, and you may occasionally choose another colour. So, for example, some people do not dare to employ the strength ‘vigorousness’ and instead apply the strength ‘care’. They would, for example, rather serve coffee than cut the knot in a difficult decision.

If you want to start developing strengths, individually or with a team, half-latent strengths are best suited. That is because you already know you have them, although you do not employ them in all the situations in which they could be used and are desired. That is opposed to latent strengths, which you usually don’t feel a connection with and are therefore harder to develop.

## Manifest strengths

Manifest strengths are strengths that you can handle well and that you are familiar with. They have been developed optimally. You have easy access to them and use them in situations in which this is necessary. When they are not suitable you do not come forward with them. Manifest strengths are often those strengths people talk about when talking about other people positively. They may then say of a particular person that he is meticulous, or of another that humour is one of her very characteristic strengths.

Manifest strengths are sometimes better seen in you by other people than by you yourself. They may be so familiar to you that you no longer notice them. Employing manifest strengths is often easy for you, for then you are yourself. You experience yourself being alive, and that gives a feeling of satisfaction. Generally it costs more energy to make yourself out to be better than you are.

## Distorted strengths

Distorted strengths are originally good qualities that have been exaggerated or overdeveloped, thereby often having a negative effect on the environment. They have literally gone 'far from their original form'. They are too much of a good thing. In popular speech distorted strengths are called 'bad qualities'. Examples of distortions and the accompanying strengths are: fussiness and meticulousness; obtrusiveness and persuasiveness; interference and caring; wiliness and being tactful. When looking for the strength that is hidden behind a specific weakness, there may be various outcomes. For example, 'being stubborn' may to one person underlie the strength 'tenacious' while for the other it may underlie 'goal-oriented' or 'enthusiastic'. In every case, look for the precise description you can connect with.

When you see bad qualities as distorted strengths these take on a different aspect and become easier to look at. You do not overestimate the negative aspect of the bad quality, but you are going to look for the strength that is hidden behind your own annoying behaviour. You do not deny the negative in it, but you know that there is more to it than that. If you're really annoyed by a specific weakness, it might be hard to imagine that a strength may be hidden behind it.

In this way people can start to experience their bad qualities differently, and be stimulated to focus more on the strength and less on the distortion. You will find more about this in Chapter 5. The annoying thing about distorted strengths is that they often evoke a distortion in the other person as well. Thus one person being pushy may lead to passivity in another.

### 3.4 THE STRENGTHS CIRCLE

Apart from investigating to what extent a strength has been developed, it is also useful to look at additional strengths when people perform a task together. You will often find that there are different types of people, all having their own set of strengths. Groups of similar strengths can also be found in the strengths circle. This division of strengths is based on the four natural elements: earth, fire, air and water. They are concerned with many different facets of life. The element fire acts as a starter, the origin of an idea. Water is the element that makes you connect with that idea, evoking a desire to get started with it. Air is the element that helps you to think about how to develop it more, read about it or discuss it with others. Finally, earth is the element that enables you to put the idea into form.

In the strengths circle the four natural elements represent the qualities of people. In this sense they were first described by Empedocles (van der Loo, 1995) They also correspond to Carl Gustav Jung's descriptions of the basic functions of human awareness: thinking (air), feeling (water), observing (earth) and intuition (fire).

By using the strengths circle it is possible to get a global picture of one's own strengths and the style of working connected with it. It is also an aid in analysing cooperative processes and in taking decisions. However, one should realize that looking at one's own strengths by using the strengths circle is a variable indication, for a person's list of strengths often changes through the years.

#### Earth qualities

The symbolic meaning of the element of earth is the ground under our feet, a foundation to build on. The earth provides stability. It provides a basis for water, air and fire. Putting things on the earth means making them tangible and visible. Earth qualities are involved, for example, when someone is practical, sensible, meticulous, consistent, patient, honest, determined, trustworthy or persevering. People having relatively strong earth qualities need structure: what are the arrangements and rules? Who is responsible for what? It should be possible to check everything. They are focused on concrete results. They are realistic people. When hearing something new they wonder, 'Can I use it or not?'.

When earth qualities distort and acquire negative aspects they may leave little room for new things. They result in inflexibility, compulsiveness, bluntness, taciturnity and an expectant or pessimistic attitude. In difficult situations people having strong earth qualities will tend to refer to arrangements and regulations. When these are missing they will want to make them.

### **Fire qualities**

The element of fire symbolizes giving warmth, light and energy. Fire is powerful, spreads quickly and provides tension and movement. It may also bring danger: someone is playing with fire. Fire qualities are involved, for example, when a person is enthusiastic, enterprising, dynamic, idealistic, impulsive, creative, energetic, versatile or courageous. People predominantly having fire qualities often have a lot of ideas and are focused on new opportunities, but the practical realization often leaves a lot to be desired.

Distortions are expressed, for example, in being impatient, reckless, naïve, restless, bossy, unpredictable, overanxious or impractical, and in listening badly. Harping-on and skipping from one subject to another are also distortions of fire qualities. People predominantly having fire qualities can burst out so unrestrainedly in confrontations that sparks may fly, so to speak.

### **Air qualities**

The symbolic meaning of the element of air is: oxygen, space and freedom. Air is the bearer of sound, through which we communicate with each other. Air qualities are, for example, talking easily, analysing critically, making connections, having an overview, reasoning logically, being objective, being tactful and being a good planner. People with strong air qualities act theoretically, systematically and comparatively.

Distortions of air qualities may lead to endless talk or overlooking details, and being sly, distant or woolly. In difficult situations people with strong air qualities try to keep an overview: what is happening exactly and why just like that? They try to classify events and do not want to lose sight of the broad outline. They also try to act rationally and strategically, assess the other person and react tactically.

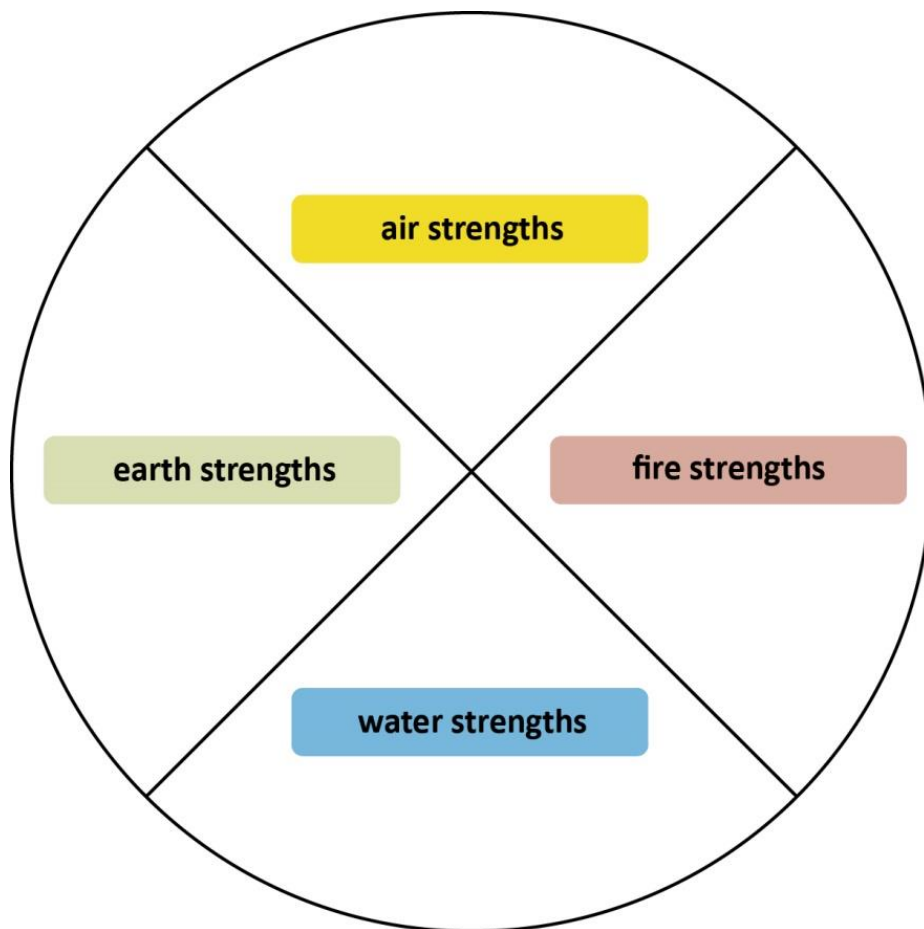
### **Water qualities**

Finally, the element of water symbolizes life, refreshment and flow. Water adapts quite easily. Water qualities include, for example, being sensitive, sympathetic, flexible, mild, caring and respectful. People having strong water qualities are often led by their emotions and are focused on contact with and relations between people. Without emotional contact it is difficult for them to cooperate with people. They are also helpers, paying attention to the needs of people and supporting them. They have an eye for the communal and they are team-oriented.

Possible distortions are oversensitivity, non-assertiveness, passivity, submissiveness and wiliness. In confrontations people having predominantly

water qualities feel obstructed. They become confused and would rather hide away.

The four groups of strengths form two pairs with opposite complementary strengths: earth qualities oppose fire qualities and air qualities oppose water qualities (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1 Strengths circle*

People having strong fire qualities are better at thinking up new ideas than people with earth qualities, but the latter in their turn are better at their practical realization. If an employee does not perform well in an organization, a manager having strong air qualities will first of all look at this objectively and in a businesslike fashion. If the manager concerned mainly has water qualities, she will first of all occupy herself with the human side of the problem. Should both water and air qualities be strongly represented in the manager, then these two groups of strengths may assert themselves by means of an inner debate. One moment she is considering dismissing the employee; the next she will tend to give him extra supervision.

With many people one or two groups of strengths are represented most strongly.

Most strengths belonging to these groups are strongly present, giving you self-confidence, and you can also employ them in difficult situations. Most of the time the strengths of the opposite group are less strongly present and you are unlikely able to employ them well. This causes you to feel insecure about these strengths. If, for example, air strengths are strongly present in you, water strengths are most likely not. Usually, however, you can handle the strengths of the other two groups (fire strengths and earth strengths) reasonably well.

### **Cooperating**

Cooperative situations are very suitable for being approached from the strengths circle. These may be work situations, but also situations in private life.

A teacher says: Some time ago I wanted to clear up the attic together with my son. As soon as we were in the attic, my son started to push all kinds of things about. 'Come on, wait a minute', I cried. He is very impulsive, but I want to think for a bit first before I start a job like that. I asked my son to go and do something else first, so that I could figure out quietly what the most practical division of the stuff was. When I had done so, we set to work together.

On the basis of their strengths people have their own way of operating, and of cooperating as well. Thus people having many earth qualities will work quietly and steadily and prefer to busy themselves with concrete tasks. People having many fire qualities will have a faster pace of work, but will usually be unable to keep it up for as long.

In the above example it was rather easy to find a solution for the differences in strengths between the two people. But it is not always like that. In particular, when working with a person in whom the strengths of the opposite group are strongly represented, conflicts may arise. This can be prevented by recognizing the mutual differences soon enough, respecting each other in this and looking for creative solutions. You could, for example, divide tasks on the basis of the strengths present and work out how you can complement each other.

A problem that occurs frequently with cooperation in groups of two or three people is that the members of the group have a number of strengths that are the same, for when you can choose your cooperative partners yourself you often choose people who resemble you. This has advantages and disadvantages. Although the cooperation itself often goes rather smoothly, the final product may become unbalanced. Suppose two people with dominant earth qualities have to solve a problem. Then there is a risk that they will execute the first solution that occurs to them instead of looking for alternatives first.



## Taking decisions

When making choices and taking decisions, too, the four groups of strengths may play an important part. People having strong air qualities will also show the accompanying behaviour when taking decisions. This carries a risk that the problem about which a decision has to be taken may be approached too one-sidedly. Then rational considerations may get the upper hand over the instinctive side of the matter. If you know which tendency to one-sidedness you have, you can allow for it – for example, by going to talk with someone having quite different strengths who can therefore help you take a more balanced decision.

## Exercises

1. List several situations in which you were very successful. Work out in each situation to which of your strengths the success was particularly due.
2. What are your hobbies? Alternatively, with which activities are you most in your element? Which of your strengths can you employ then?
3. Make a list of your eight most important strengths. Also indicate an order of importance, beginning with the strength most dear to you. If you want, you can also make a distinction between the strengths you employ in your job and in your private life. For this exercise you can make use of the list of strengths in Appendix 1.
4. Answer the following questions: 'Which of your own strengths do you put in the fridge first in situations that are difficult for you?'. 'What strength do you no longer employ when things get (too) difficult for you?'. For this task you can use the list of strengths in Appendix 1.
5. Make a list of the six most important distorted strengths you have. List them in the order in which you suffer most from the weaknesses. Work out why these weaknesses are connected with strengths. For this exercise you can use the list of weaknesses in Appendix 1.
6. Answer the following questions: 'Do you have a weakness that you justify for yourself? If so, which? When do you justify it and why?'. For this task you can use the list of weaknesses in Appendix 1.
7. What are the most important strengths and weaknesses of the organization you work for? What are the effects of these strengths and weaknesses on the people working there?
8. What (possibly latent) strengths do you lack that would make you feel more complete?



9. List in order the degree to which the different groups of strengths from the strengths circle are present in you. How far do you recognize the weaknesses connected with this? What does this tell you about the way you (usually) cooperate?
10. What do you think is characteristic of the way in which you make decisions? Think of an advantage and a disadvantage of this. Work out whether there is a connection between the answer to this question and the order of the previous exercise.

## 4 STRENGTHS IN A FIX

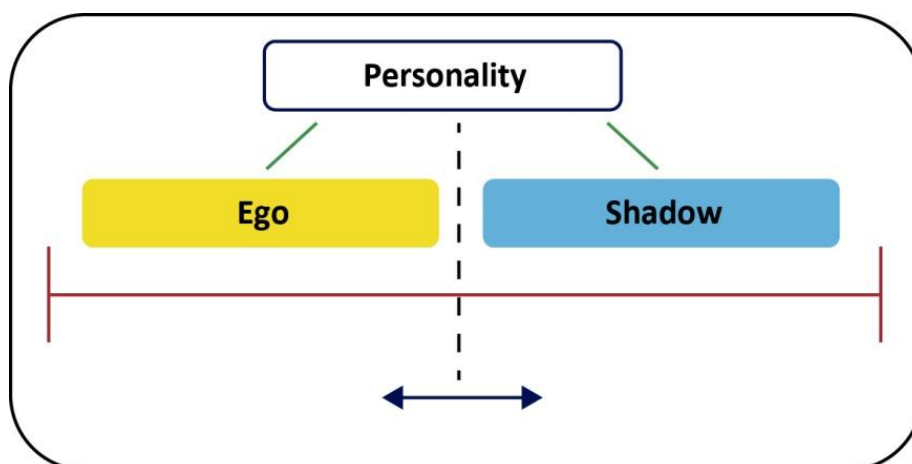
It is very unpleasant when you have the feeling that you do not come into your own in some situations. You wonder what the cause of it is and especially what you can do about it.

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 caused by the mechanism of projection (see Section 4.4).

## Encountering your shadow

Now, when in everyday life does our personal shady side come to the fore? First of all, in situations in which we show impulsive and uncontrolled behaviour (Freudian mistakes) or in behaviour and desires that come to the fore when you completely let go of yourself (Zweig & Abrams, 1993). Strengths of your own that you would like to keep secret often pop out at an unguarded moment. To some people this happens after having used alcohol or other drugs. For example, a decent civil servant may change into a party animal, explaining the next day: 'I don't think I was quite myself yesterday'. You may in fact very well ask yourself if, at such a moment, you were actually being more yourself than in 'normal' life.

In stressful or problematic situations qualities from our shady side may also come to the fore. A very orderly person might all of a sudden become very chaotic. And when an emergency situation requires the most of us, we often lose control over ourselves. Also, in moments of crisis (for example while sitting at someone's deathbed) people who tend to be quite rigid can all of a sudden become very vulnerable.

We are also confronted with our shadow in situations that we are ashamed of. Then we show behaviour that is not accepted by our ego, and which therefore belongs to the shadow.

Another category of situations saying something about our shadow occurs when we react in an exaggerated way with regard to the behaviour of others – for example, when we say, 'I do not understand why he says things so bluntly. It's not done, is it?'. As soon as others show behaviour that lies within our shady side, we usually react extravagantly to it. This will be discussed further in Section 4.4.

Aspects of yourself that you do not wish to be confronted with may occur regularly in your dreams, because then you have no control over yourself. People who display the most exemplary behaviour may have the most horrible dreams. In everyday life they may aim to live up to 'high' standards. Their shady side may then appear in their dreams. So dreams can also be an entrance to getting to know your shadow better.

Another area in which you can trace down some of your shady side is the area of your body and its (recurring) complaints. You may fool yourself and others with your mind, but your body never lies. Body language is often confronting, but at the same time, if you are willing to listen to it, can be of great help.

You may also encounter your own shadow when you start admiring other people or are falling in love. When this happens you often see that they develop strengths that have been in the shadow until then. Often these strengths become part of one's ego in due course.

You may recognize your own shadow when observing the behaviour of people in your close environment. Examples of children living in the shadow of their parents are plentiful. In a vicar's family, where the vicar shows the outer world a mask of kindness and religiousness at any price, a child may very well start expressing their dark side by at best showing difficult behaviour, and at worst becoming a good-for-nothing. The media regularly report on the children of successful people who suck at life, or who cannot handle money. It might also be the case that the wife of a husband who very one-sidedly identifies with his job and a good image, starts to suffer from depression, or that the husband of a strong, overcompensating wife starts drinking. In none of these cases does this happen on purpose; the main cause of the behaviour of the people involved is being unaware of their shadow.

### **The shadow as a teacher**

The shadow can teach us to get a better insight into ourselves. 'Know thyself' in this respect also means 'know your shadow'. Or, in the words of Jung: 'Confronting someone with his shadow, means showing him his own light'. Getting in touch with it, being anxious and curious about its contents, is essential in this. Time and time again you can explore unknown sides to yourself, to which you can say: 'Yes, that is also part of me'. In that way you can integrate parts of your shadow and bring into the light what was in the shadow.

One's shadow is a beautiful, but at the same time a difficult phenomenon. Exploring it is often confrontational: you have to consider both the lowest and the highest sides of yourself: your fear, envy or aggression, but also your tenderness, love or courage. Dealing with your shadow usually gives you more freedom and zest for life. In some fairy tales the hidden strengths of the shadow come to the fore in a nice way. For me, a clear example of this is the fairy tale about the wild man. (Rebo Productions, 1988) Below you will find an abridged version of it.

Once upon a time there was a king in whose kingdom there was a big forest. The forest was dangerous, for each time hunters went into it, they never returned. The king decided to send a group of soldiers into the forest to find out what was going on there. These soldiers did not return either. One day a famous hunter visited the king and offered to find out what the secret of the dangerous woods was. Eventually the king agreed. The hunter went into the woods together with his hound. At a certain moment the dog was on the border of a pond and barked. Suddenly a bare muscled arm appeared from the water, grasped the dog and pulled it under.

The hunter went back to the king, and after insisting for a long time was allowed to take a few men with him to empty the pond. After draining it

for some days they discovered, at the bottom, a dark brown brute, the wild man. Only with great difficulty did they succeed in taking the wild man prisoner. He was locked up in a steel cage and placed on the square in front of the king's palace. The wild man attracted a great deal of attention.

One day the young crown prince was playing near the wild man's cage with his golden ball, although his parents had forbidden him to do so. Suddenly, the ball rolled into the cage. The prince asked the wild man to return the ball, but the wild man answered that he would do so only if the prince would open the cage. The wild man told the prince that he could find the key of the cage in the queen's night stand.

After some time the prince decided to open the cage. He asked the wild man not to run away, because he would be punished. Then the prince decided to go with the wild man into the wood. Later it became clear that the wild man actually was a very wise man. For many years to come he advised the prince on decisions to be made.

The moral of this fairy tale is that in the shadow (represented by the wild man) there are strengths. When the shadow is locked in (that is, being denied), those strengths are not available and may even become distortions. When the shadow is freed and examined, it may become an important teacher. Thus the pearl may be fished from the mud, as it were.

### **The shadow in groups**

In groups too, the separation between ego and shadow is to be found. Just as a person has a shady side, so a group or organization has one as well. This is the collective shadow. When a member of the group begins to show the undesirable shadow behaviour there is a danger that the person concerned will be made into a scapegoat. He will then be seen by the other members of the group as a problematical case (Brinkman, 1995).

A woman says: In my previous job I worked in a team of six people, one of whom was the coordinator. Throughout the whole organization people gossiped terribly. At first I did not know what was happening to me. Each month we had a progress meeting together with another team. This meeting was chaired by the executive of both teams, who would do most of the talking. It was not a matter of 'consultation'. Nobody criticized him; people agreed to everything. However, only outside the progress meeting did people say what they really thought of things. The team coordinator took part in this too. The management was criticized a lot.

I am a very open and direct person. After two progress meetings I decided to speak up if it happened again. In the next progress meeting the boss of the two teams made a proposal to which the others nodded in assent. I got up to speak and said that most people had told me before the



progress meeting that they thought the proposal mentioned was bad. No one reacted to my words and the boss concluded that I was probably mistaken. After the progress meeting my coordinator told me that this was the most stupid thing I had ever said. At the end of the year my temporary contract was not renewed. A clear reason for it was never given. I believe they thought I was too direct and therefore a threat.

In the above example the strengths of openness and straightforwardness are part of the group's shadow. When someone behaves in this way the group feels threatened, and the person concerned will quickly become a scapegoat. The group will often try to sideline him or her, or chuck the person out, instead of learning lessons from their behaviour. The odds are that, after some time, another person will become a scapegoat. Every organizational culture tends to create scapegoats this way.

Thus one acts in the same way as the Israelites in the Old Testament, who symbolically tied their sins to a goat and sent it into the desert. The intention was to remove the mistakes of the people in a ritual way, in the hope that this would make evil disappear.

Scapegoats are an interesting object of study if you want to gain more insight into a group or organization. Being open to the message of the scapegoat is a forceful tool for adjusting a group. In families the scapegoat is to be found in the form of the 'black sheep'. When one of the members of a respectable and conservative family regularly gets drunk and consorts with all kinds of dubious characters, he or she will soon be seen as a black sheep. The rest of the family will be ashamed of this individual and will judge the behaviour in polite words. However, they would be better advised to expend their energy on investigating the family shadow and the liberation of the strengths enclosed in it. The black sheep displays these strengths in an exaggerated form. Drunkenness may be seen as an exaggerated way of enjoying life. People who consort with characters from the underworld have a lot of nerve, for they run the risk of being caught sooner or later. The black sheep's message to the rest of the family in this case is: have more fun and show more guts.

The tighter the straitjacket that a family places itself in, the more likely it is that there are relatives experiencing this as too oppressive and opting out (of the family).

## **4.2 IMAGES AS OBSTACLES**

A person's strength often lands in the shadow as a result of negative experiences. Suppose that you are in a situation that demands the strength of spontaneity. You realize this, but at the very moment you want to start saying things spontaneously a voice inside you says, 'Take care, don't do this!'. It is a kind of internal police officer warning you. In this case the police officer is saying, 'If you are spontaneous you make pronouncements you will regret later'.

When you have this kind of experience regularly, you will be able to use the strength of spontaneity much less frequently. It will then land in the shadow.

In the above situation there are two things you can do: either listen or not listen to the voice of the police officer. When you react spontaneously and you later regret that you said what you did, then the inner police officer will say, 'See? I was right!'.

In this example the police officer is the voice of your images. An image is an inaccurate picture about the way reality is organized – about what you can expect in a certain situation. It is a creation that is not tested by the situation of the moment. You may also refer to an image as an irrational thought, an obstructive thought or, in brief, obstruction.

A few examples of images are:

- If I assert myself too much, other people will not like me anymore.
- If you want something to be done well, you will always have to do it yourself.
- If you ask for something you just will not get it. People who ask will be passed over.

Images contain general truths and say that something has always been like this or that. It will be clear that this is not reality. When an image is involved, the opportunity for a personal (and thereby free) choice attuned to the situation is always lacking. Images work as filters, through which your perception of the world differs from reality. When you are caught in an image you land in a dream reality. You believe, however, that the dream is reality.

Images usually consist of two components: a mental component in the form of a thought, and an emotional one in the form of a certain feeling. When people have an image of their ideas not being practicable, this is often accompanied by a feeling of despondency. One person is more troubled by a thought, another more by a feeling.

Sometimes a third component plays a role, namely a physical one, for example, when a person quite literally can barely get out what he or she really wants to say.

### **Kinds of images**

People's images can be subdivided into four categories. First of all there are the images a person has of him- or herself. Sometimes it involves the image a person has of their strengths ('I am not very persuasive'). At other times an image refers to dealing with specific situations ('If I take the initiative in cooperating with others, I will be too busy').

The second category comprises the images of another person. An example of this is: 'My boss cannot listen.' The third category comprises images of groups. Examples of this are: 'Accountants are boring', 'Civil servants are slow' and 'Sales assistants are pushy'. The last category contains images of life – for example, 'Life is a valley of tears and we will always have to keep on plodding' – or images dealing with vital themes, such as money, power and love.

Not all these images are equally strong (or rooted). Some images are easy to remove, but others are wayside shrines to people that no one is allowed to challenge. For the people concerned these are truths that are not up for discussion. To many people a familiar example of a situation in which they are troubled by images is when they have to present something or have to address a group. Examples of images that may then be present are:

- 'I am not able to keep a group riveted'.
- 'The listeners are sure to ask questions that I do not have an answer to, and that will be humiliating'.
- 'I am sure to miss out something important'.

### Recognizing images

How do you recognize that images are involved in a certain situation? For becoming aware of your images is the first step on the road to eliminating them. Suppose an employee has the following image of him- or herself: 'In groups I have nothing interesting to say.' When this employee participates in a progress meeting the following may take place. Each time the employee concerned wants to say something the voice of his image intervenes, and an internal discussion develops that is very quickly won by the voice of the image. This results in the employee not saying anything.

Such a progress meeting is not pleasant for the employee: he or she is much self-occupied, gets confused, is not creative and may feel guilty afterwards because he or she has not said what they really wanted to say. The person's colleagues may begin to think 'That person does not say anything, so they will have nothing interesting to say'.

Should the employee decide to speak up in the next progress meeting though, they then run the risk of the rest of the group not taking them seriously, for he or she stumbles over words so much and formulates them so badly that indeed nothing meaningful seems to emerge. The person's self-image is reinforced, and thus the individual ends up in a vicious circle.

The problem with images is that most of the time you are unaware of them. So awareness is an important first step. How can you recognize that in a certain situation, one or more images are involved? With reference to the above example, from the category of 'images of yourself' we can list three characteristics of images. In the first place, confusion arises with the person concerned because two (or more) different internal voices are telling the

individual what they have to do. Sometimes the person no longer even hears the voice of what he or she really wanted to say.

A second characteristic of images is that the possibilities in a specific situation are restricted. You are like a painter who has only one or two colours left for making a painting. You exclude a number of possibilities. You are no longer free and creative. The reason for this is that images put you under pressure, because they are often formulated using the words 'have to' ('You have to adjust'). Most of the time they also contain the words 'always' ('If you ask, you always get passed over') or 'never' ('I never achieve anything good enough').

It is also characteristic of images that thoughts keep recurring, keeping you continuously occupied. You are worrying. You have become caught up in repetitive thoughts and the emotions connected with them. This does not gain you anything.

Images are often very damaging to people. A nice example from the category of images of groups is shown in the following oriental story (Korteweg & van Loon, 1992).

Two Buddhist monks, walking on a muddy road in the pouring rain, arrived at a river that was overflowing. There a ravishingly beautiful girl was crying. One of the monks went up to her and asked what was wrong. She sobbed out that she had to be on the other side, but was not able to get there anymore. The monk put his arms around her and carried her to the other side. The other monk followed. As they continued on their way he said nothing. Only when they arrived at a temple late at night was he unable to check himself, and said: 'We monks have made a vow, haven't we, that we will never touch a woman, let alone such a young and beautiful one? It is terribly dangerous to expose yourself to such a temptation. Why did you do so?'. The other monk replied: 'I left the girl there, but you are still carrying her'.

### **Images and strengths**

Under the influence of images and the feelings connected with them some strengths are (partly) blocked or distorted. In this respect there are three possibilities. Half-latent strengths are stopped by images in some situations, but not in others. Occasionally, when such a quality wants to get out, your inner police officer changes the traffic light to green; at other times the light changes to red.

Latent strengths are almost always stopped by images. The inner police officer will always say 'stop', when the person wants to employ such a strength. The traffic light will be changed to red. The person concerned may react in two ways. She may withdraw, and so not use any other strength, or she may employ a strength other than that which is actually necessary or desired.

A third example of the negative effect of images on strengths is that images promote the origin of distorted strengths. Suppose someone has the image that they are only really caring if they arrange everything for other people. Under the influence of this image the strength of caring may easily turn into being patronizing. This will be discussed further in Section 5.1.

### **The origin of images**

The images that people have of themselves may come into being in four ways. In the description below, the emphasis is on the formation of images in youth. In this period the most important images arise. However, in later life, images will always continue to build up and change.

Images are created in the first place as a result of painful experiences from the past. Such a situation may occur with a small child needing love and attention. Suppose its parents are busy and have or make little time for the child. The child keeps asking for love and attention – for example, by crying. It is very painful for the child to notice that the need it is open about is not fulfilled.

In due course the child (unconsciously) sets out to find a solution to this painful situation. The solution lies in the child forming an image as a result of which it is going to react differently, thereby being able to avoid the pain in future. In this case the image is 'When you ask for love and attention, you are passed over'. So the child gets it into its head that it is not clever to ask for attention. This image may also be extended to the general view of life that there is always too little of what you want, and that life actually is poverty.

As a result of that image the child is going to avoid the painful situation. At the same time, the child is going to see this picture as a general truth and will very probably continue to do so during the rest of its life. When the child has grown into an adult, the image is activated each time he or she feels the need for love, attention or affection. The adult, under the influence of that image, will react in a way similar to that earlier childhood situation. Asking for love becomes out of bounds, marked out by the old image just like an electric fence does to a cow wanting to graze in the adjoining meadow (Korteweg & Voigt, 1985).

The second way in which a child forms an incorrect self- image is when its parents want to see the child in a certain way and always confirm or reward a certain side of the child, as a result of which that side gets the upper hand. This process actually begins at the very beginning of life. When you are born, you are a complete stranger to your family. However, you are born into a family that is already fixed: with a father and a mother and maybe brothers and sisters already having a certain relationship with each other. So you enter as a person already having strengths of your own, but with an individuality that is still unknown to the environment. Such an environment may have a tendency to fill in what is unknown in the child as early as possible. As soon as the family sees the child's

behaviour going in the direction of their own wishes, they think that the child is like that. Suppose the child is very curious and talks early and that the father is a journalist. He may think, 'My child shows the characteristics of a journalist. How nice, maybe he will later choose the same profession that I have'. As a result of this the child's curiosity and talking are rewarded and thereby encouraged.

Another opportunity to fill in the unknown qualities of the child as soon as possible occurs when one believes one recognizes the traits of another relative in the child. Then one believes the child to resemble the person concerned.

The above situations are probably very familiar and quite normal. However, the risk is that, through this, certain strengths of a child are brought too much to the fore and that the child itself will in due course identify only with those strengths. They will form a part of the child's ego. This may lead to people forming an incorrect image of themselves that does not agree with their real personality. Ultimately they may even choose a job that does not suit them.

A third way in which you can get an incorrect image of yourself is by imitating certain aspects of the behaviour of (one of) your parents and then thinking that the strength concerned is characteristic of yourself. In many cases this will be the behaviour of the same-sex parent, because it is easiest for you to identify with that parent.

A final way in which people sometimes form an incorrect image of themselves is under the influence of standards of their environment. In our society there are, for example, clear standards for how men and women should behave. Thus men should be businesslike and act sensibly and self-assuredly, and women should be flexible, caring and sympathetic. Men and women with a tendency to adjust to the current standards bring the accompanying strengths to the fore. Then other strengths drop out of view. There is a risk that people will in due course think that they are really like that. They form an incorrect image of themselves and in a sense allow certain parts of themselves to be cut away. The following excerpt from a Greek myth about the hero Theseus illustrates this process (Korteweg, 1990).

Theseus is on a journey and frequently has to deal with malevolent people. At a certain point he arrives at a king, Procrustes. The latter welcomes him and invites him in. Procrustes is overfriendly and Theseus does not quite trust him. Procrustes gives him dinner. Then in the evening it is time for bed. The king leads him upstairs to a bedroom in the palace. In the corridor on the way he begins to chuckle a little. Theseus feels that things are going wrong and puts his hand on his sword. Then it turns out that the bed Procrustes has in the bedroom is the so-called Procrustean bed. He puts each guest visiting him on the bed. Next he has the strange habit of saying 'You have to fit into the bed', not 'The bed should fit you'. So when a guest is too small he stretches him just enough to fit into the bed. If, on the other hand, a guest is too tall, he cuts away some of his

flesh top and bottom until he fits into the bed. What does the hero Theseus do with Procrustes? He puts his host on the bed. Procrustes does not fit, so Theseus cuts off his head and feet and then continues on his journey.

This myth is also a symbol of what often happens in families. On the basis of the standards in a family one kind of behaviour is rewarded and another is rejected. Moreover, these standards determine the degree to which you are accepted by your family and are allowed to belong – you learn that *this* is done, and *that* is not. With some strengths you can score in your family; other strengths you had better not show. On pain of exclusion you are often kindly but urgently requested to place yourself in this straitjacket (Procrustean bed).

### Handling images

As soon as it is clear to you how a specific image formed in yourself, you can try to change it. An aid in handling the images that people have of themselves is Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Therapy. He makes a distinction between an event or situation, the thoughts and fantasies about this situation, and the emotive reaction. The starting point in this is that a situation may give rise to a certain irrational thought, an image, and that the image evokes a certain feeling. So the thought of a certain situation (the image) evokes the unpleasant feeling and not the situation itself. When applied to fear of speaking this means that it is not the roomful of listeners that evokes the fear, but the thoughts and fantasies about failure of the speaker and all that may go wrong. By realizing that the image is irrational and turning it into a rational thought people may be able to form a different opinion of the situation and experience the situation differently. The thought 'It is a disaster when I make a mistake during my presentation' is an irrational one. An example of a rational thought for this situation is: 'Making a mistake is a nuisance, but no disaster'.

This rational thinking technique is a useful aid when relatively superficial images are involved. With deep-seated images, in which strong emotions play a part, this technique is usually not sufficient. It may then take years before you have found a way to deal with it. In these cases the so-called transference mechanism often plays a part. This will be discussed further in the next section.

It is also important when handling images, to take into consideration the possibility that there might be a connection between several obstructive thoughts a person holds. The one image can evoke others. For example, 'I do not want to be dependent' may evoke 'I do not want to ask for help'. In that case there are often different layers: 'I do not want to be dependent' underlies 'I do not want to ask for help'.

It is then helpful to focus your attention especially on the underlying image that causes the more superficial image. If you succeed in changing the underlying unrealistic image, the superficial image usually changes automatically as well. Another example of layers in images that are often held is: 'I am not allowed to



make any mistakes' as a result of the underlying image: 'I have to keep everything under control'.

It is also of importance to know how you can react to the images of others. In this three steps can be distinguished. First of all you have to recognize that it is a matter of an image with the other person. This may not always be that simple. The second step is to examine this image. You simply want to know exactly how the other person thinks and what conclusions they attach to it. The third step is to bring out the mistakes in the image and find out whether the other person is prepared to set them right and thus to depart from or change their image. Often it takes some time before people reach that point.

### 4.3 TRANSFERENCE

Images can strongly influence people's behaviour. This holds especially for the transference mechanism, which can considerably upset communication between people. Transference in a general sense means that the experience you gained in the past automatically transfers to present situations (Kivits, 1991). As a result you react to your present situation as you did in the past. You repeat the earlier event, as it were. The previous experience is usually a situation from one's youth, but it may also derive from a later age.

Transferring the old experience to the present situation usually takes place automatically, without you being aware of it. That makes it difficult to recognize the transference and change something in it.

A student says: 'During my work placement I cooperated with four other girls on an assignment. Owing to domestic circumstances our supervisor was not often at the office. He had little time for us. When he was there the four other girls were queuing to ask him all kinds of questions. I myself had a number of questions too, but I withdrew and tried to find the answers myself. During the evaluation of the work placement the supervisor said that I had made too little use of his expertise, and that he regretted this. I agreed with him.

A little later, when I was becoming familiar with the mechanism of transference, I realized that my behaviour towards my supervisor was such a reaction. I reacted in the same way towards my supervisor as I did towards my parents. The situation during the work placement was comparable to my home situation. For as long as I can remember, my parents have had an accountancy office at home. They were always at home, but they were not available. I was not allowed to bother them over trifles and I had to fend for myself. When it was busy this atmosphere was very dominant at home. Now that I know where the tendency to fend too much for myself comes from I try to work at it. But I am disappointed.



My old behaviour is so deeply ingrained that it is difficult to get out of it in one go. Being aware is a first important step’.

In most cases the behaviour with regard to transference is the same as in the old situation, but sometimes a quite different or opposite reaction may occur. This is a reaction to lack of freedom as well.

A man says: ‘When listing discussion situations that are difficult for me I took as an example a situation in which another person orders me about. I cannot stand that. When someone tells me ‘You have to do this or that’, I do not do it, simply because the other person says I have to do it. It even reaches the stage where I do not do it even if what the other person orders me to do is the same as what I intended to do! Meanwhile I have discovered that my behaviour is the result of the way in which I used to react to my father. He always ordered me about. As a child I obeyed him, but now that I have grown up I react in exactly the opposite way.

### **Transference and authority**

Transference mechanisms often come into being with regard to key figures in youth. Often these are your parents, but they may also be uncles or aunts, grannies or grandads, older brothers or sisters, or teachers. Transference usually takes place in a situation in which you experience a person as an authority. So when you place the other person higher than yourself or when the other is in reality (and from a hierarchical point of view) above you, the reason for this is that in your childhood you were also the inferior of, for example, your father or mother. Thus, when you encounter a situation in which you want to have something done by another person, you may unconsciously adopt an attitude as if you are the inferior one again. You tend to go and repeat the old relation to the authorities you had as a child.

Also, when you fall in love with someone, you are in a hierarchical situation, for in a certain way you look up to the other person. You want the other person to fall in love with you too. If you learnt as a child to work yourself to the bone for your parents in order to get their approval in that way, then you will probably have a tendency to do so in this situation too. You adopt a very dependent attitude and with everything you do you wonder whether the other person would like it. If you focus too much on this you pass over yourself. You may feel oppressed. Moreover the person you are in love with may see you as a show-off, resulting in your adored one not fancying you at all!

Work situations too may lend themselves to repeating childish behaviour or copying parental behaviour. Of course this holds for most hierarchical working relations. Employees consider their managers to be their mums and dads, who in turn, consider their employees to be children.

## Characteristics of transference

Many people find it difficult to recognize the phenomenon of transference in themselves, particularly because it is an unconscious reaction. To make recognition easier a number of possible characteristics of transference are described below. The characteristics below hold usually, but not always. They are often connected with one another or follow naturally from one another. The characteristics below usually apply, but not always. They often correspond with each other or are in line with each other. The more the characteristics below occur in a communication situation, the more likely it is that transference is actually involved. A few important characteristics of transference are:

- 1     *Feeling unfree instead of free.* You behave and feel unfree. Your behaviour is determined by your images and because of that it has been determined already before that situation. As a student once said, 'When another person is being firm I will always oppose him'. With transference you feel blocked in a certain way. This means that there is also an unpleasant tension in the contact. You would not expect this tension on the basis of the content of the contact at that moment. In some situations there is tension in the contact because it is about tense things. Then transference is not necessarily involved.
- 2     *Reactive instead of active behaviour.* When reacting actively you really react from yourself, and then you also consider the situation. 'Reacting actively' means that you take yourself as the starting point and that you take the things you want to say very seriously. You adopt an independent attitude. If you are reactive you let your behaviour be determined by the other person, so you take a very dependent attitude towards the other. That is what happens with transference. You adapt more than you actually want, because you want to achieve something with the other person. There are two forms of reactive behaviour. The first form implies that you wait until the other person has said something and you adapt to this. The other possibility is that you do not wait, but that you react on the basis of what you think the other person is going to do or what the other person expects from you. You adapt by trying to be one step ahead of the other person. Then the motto is 'Attack is the best form of defence'.
- 3     *Behaviour does not match the situation.* When people do not react from transference, they react in a way that matches the situation. With transference the reaction is usually either restrained (or cool) or exaggerated (or overheated).

A woman says: 'In my first job I participated in market research. After some time it became clear to me that I was quite critical of the way in

which the research had been set up. I decided to present my comments to the project manager. He reacted in an arrogant way. I got the feeling that he did not really listen to what I said. I started to cry and walked away. Afterwards I wondered why I had reacted so way out of proportion. After some time I realized that the project manager reacted in the same way that my father used to do. In my adolescence my father often criticized me and wrongly blamed me for something. I usually did not agree with it and I regularly tried to explain my position. However, whatever I said, it was never right. My opinion never counted at all. In order to make my father notice what I thought of his behaviour I used to start to cry and walk away.

The next day I went up to the project manager and explained my reaction to him. He told me he had been startled by my crying fit and that he was glad I had given him this explanation´.

- 4 *Negative child reactions.* When transference is involved, you usually react to the situation in the way that a child who does not feel free reacts. You do so because you have usually developed the transference in relation to your parents or others who had an important influence on you during your childhood. Two kinds of reaction are possible: you react either as a rebellious or an adapted (good) child (Kouwenhoven, 1983). When you react as a rebellious child you see the other as negative and you have feelings of antipathy, distrust or hate. You assume that the other person will treat you badly and will not cooperate with you. You therefore adopt an attitude in agreement with the negative reaction you expect from the other person. This form of transference is called negative transference.

When you react as an adapted child, you will experience the other person as positive, and there will be feelings of sympathy, admiration or affection. This is called positive transference. You put the other person on a pedestal and expect him or her to help you always. You have the childlike expectation that the other person will sense what you want, without you saying so. You will then become angry if this does not happen.

The definition of positive transference sounds more positive than negative transference. But it is a reaction that is unfree just the same, and so is actually just as negative as negative transference. Moreover, behaviour that is too sweet and kind is often a mask that screens the anger, hiding in the shadow. Both positive and negative transference may occur simultaneously or merge into one another during contact with someone.

- 5 *Reacting indirectly instead of directly.* In transference indirect communication can play a part when you deliberately do not say what you really want to say. In that case transference may also be recognized by signals of indirect communication.

- 6 *Blocked strengths.* When you are yourself you use the strength that is necessary at that moment. When you are caught in the transference mechanism you do not do so, or you do it in an unjust way. With transference you normally let yourself be guided by images instead of by strengths. The opposite usually does not hold: the transference mechanism is involved with only a part of the obstructive thoughts a person has. Since emotions are often linked to images, it may be that you are unaware of the image belonging to the transference situation concerned, but know only that you have a feeling that is blocking you.

Sometimes only one strength gets blocked by transference, but often there are more. In many cases you can identify for each strength that is blocked which image plays a part in it. The image says something directly about a certain strength – for example: ‘When you are direct, people do not like you’.

### Countertransference

When another person reacts from transference in his contact with you, it is very tempting to join the game and react from counter- transference. Then the person reacting from countertransference becomes dependent too, and also feels unfree. They react on the basis of their own past. Their behaviour is often a copy of the behaviour of their parents in the situation in which they were a child.

Transference and countertransference are concepts that were thought up by Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939). In psychoanalysis transference has to do with passing on old feelings (of a child) of the client on to the therapist, and countertransference the passing on of old feelings (of a child) from the therapist on to the client (van Delft, 2015).

With countertransference you go along with the demands made by the other person reacting from transference. Thus a woman who has experienced in the past that men are not faithful will regularly ask her husband ‘Will you stay with me forever?’. Suppose the man has negative experiences with conflict and wants to avoid them at all costs. Then he in his turn will react from countertransference by saying ‘Don’t be afraid, I will stay with you forever’, whereas he might actually want to say ‘I don’t know; we’ll just wait and see how things go’.

When you react from countertransference you are not yourself at that moment. Usually you react too harshly or too kindly, you show too much or too little appreciation, you do not confront the other, or you do so excessively.

A former student says: ‘During the last year of my studies I became infatuated with a lecturer. I did not dare tell him, but I did try to attract his attention in all kinds of ways. After the lesson I regularly stayed and hung

about him, using a question about the subject matter as a pretext. I also tried to find out all kinds of things about his private life. Gradually he became more and more unfriendly to me. He frequently made me look a fool in class and was very critical when I asked a question or made a remark. This annoyed me. Other classmates noticed the lecturer's unfriendly behaviour too and they wondered what the matter was.

After a few months my infatuation was over. During the graduation party after the presentation of the diplomas I went up to the lecturer and I asked him why he had been so annoying to me. He told me that he had noticed that I found him very sympathetic and that the feeling was mutual, but that he had been totally unable to handle the situation. That was why he behaved so annoyingly '.

In the above example the student, in my opinion, reacted from transference and the lecturer from countertransference. A question that may arise with regard to this example is: how do you decide in a conversation between two people who reacts from transference and who does from countertransference? The starting point in this is that the person who starts reacts from transference.

Countertransference is then a reaction to transference. In many cases the person who starts the interaction reacts as a child wanting to get something from another person. In one way or another he or she looks up to the other person, as a child may do towards its parents.

The person reacting from countertransference will then quite easily adopt the attitude of the parent. They tend to look down on the other person, like a parent may do towards a child. This parental role may take two forms: one of a reproving parent and the other of a loving parent. When people react as a reproving father or mother, they become annoyed out of all proportion at the behaviour of the person reacting from transference. It is difficult then for people to express real criticism constructively. When people start playing the loving parent they act as if they mean well by another person. Then they will find it difficult to set limits or to confront them, because they are afraid of losing the other person's sympathy. It may also occur that the person who starts it, reacts from countertransference. For example, a manager may as a rule treat employees as a child, in that way evoking transference by them. He or she may, for example, put too much pressure on them, causing them to act in an unruly manner (Wopereis, 2013).

### **Liberation from transference**

If you have found out that in a certain situation you react from transference you usually do not stop this behaviour at once as a matter of course. Sometimes you will need (professional) help with it. This is especially so because strong feelings play a part in transference, and these feelings make it difficult to look at yourself objectively. Rationally, you will be able to refute the images playing a part in the transference situation relatively easily, but it is often much more difficult to cope

with the (negative) feelings. Sometimes people are caught in a certain transference mechanism throughout their life. One person may suffer from this, whereas another does not because they avoid the situations concerned.

The first step in escaping from transference is to become aware of it. Often that is quite a relief. You do at least understand why you react in the way that you do in a certain situation. In freeing yourself from the transference reaction two steps can usually be distinguished. The first step is becoming substantially free, meaning that you are going to say what you really want to say. In this you will often still be troubled by the small voices of your images, of your inner police officer. However, you choose not to let yourself be stopped by them. Sometimes this presents difficult situations. It may, for example, mean that you have to go back on something you have promised because the promise was a reaction from transference.

The second step is to become emotionally free. Even though you have the courage to say what you want to say, this does not mean that you feel free too. Usually it takes quite some time before you get that far. Until then you instinctively still react from transference, while substantially you react freely already.

In order to free yourself from the transference it often helps to know the situation in which the transference arose and actively set to work on it. You can try to experience the feelings again, digesting them piecemeal and then letting them go. Often, however, the cause of a transference mechanism remains hidden, because the situation in which the transference arose cannot be traced anymore, or because the less pleasant qualities of the parents, especially if they are now dead, remain hidden.

Talking with relatives about how life used to be makes it easier to get an image of the situation in which the transference arose. The question of guilt is not relevant in this, for parents have acted to the best of their ability. Clarity about former events is needed to disconnect the present situation, in which the transference occurs, from the former situation, in which the transference arose.

A woman says: 'Since I have had a paid job, for about 10 years now, I have always had problems with my boss to a greater or lesser degree. Some time ago I found out what these problems were connected with. I was walking in a harbour and saw boats sailing. An image of the past came back in which we as a family went sailing too, for weeks on end sometimes, because my father wanted it. I realized how often I was bored with being confined in the small space of such a boat for weeks on end. Gradually I realized that my father was actually a very authoritarian man. Everything had to be done the way he wanted it. There was no room for opinions and initiatives from our side. That hurt quite a lot.'

‘A few years ago my father died, after having been ill for years. During his periods of illness he became softer and more accessible. That is why I forgot how he used to be. In the week before the above discovery I felt very sad at work. Each initiative on my part was torpedoed by my boss. Therefore I no longer employed strengths like spontaneity and discernment in my contacts with him. My colleagues said ‘Don’t take it to heart, that’s the way he is’, but I could not do so. Now I realize that my present boss reacts just as my father used to do. The pain I feel now is, for the greater part, ‘old’ pain.

‘The next question was: how do I handle this situation? A friend advised me to write down everything I could remember about how things were in my parental home, and dwell on the emotions this would arouse in me – feeling the pain. In addition, I talked about it with my sister several times. Gradually I could distinguish better between the behaviour of my father in the past and that of my boss now. I could also see that I was no longer the dependent child I used to be. Gradually I succeeded in being more myself towards my boss and simply employing my strengths again’.

Conflicts in power structures (for example, between executives and employees) often originate in the mechanism of transference and countertransference. Insight into this mechanism can help solve these conflicts. A question regularly asked by students is ‘What can you do the moment you think you have discovered that another person reacts to you from transference?’. The answer is that it depends on the situation. When the other person is your partner or a person close to you, then it is usually wise to discuss the other person’s behaviour. In a learning situation this may be very useful as well. In work situations the contact with other people is not often of such a nature that transference is able to be discussed.

## 4.4 PROJECTION

*‘Projection turns the world into the unknown face of yourself’(C.G. Jung).*

The mechanism that plays an important role in tracing strengths that you do not use optimally, is called projection. I find it one of the most fascinating and far-reaching psychological mechanisms that I know, and one of the most important entry points for getting to know ourselves better. Through our projections, we gain entrance to our shadow, our subconscious. Our shadow directs the projection mechanism in a powerful way. In Section 3.1 we learned that people tend to hide their shadow away, both for themselves and their environment. They try to ‘forget’ their unwanted qualities and hope that those characteristics are going to disappear automatically, but this is a big mistake. You will project the qualities of your own that you do not want or do not know (any more) on to others.



Projection means that you unconsciously ascribe qualities, expectations, feelings or ideas of your own to others (Brinkman, 1995). This can be compared with projecting a slide: you see an image on the wall (the environment), but the image is in the projector (you). Your image is projected on to the other person, but they do not necessarily possess what you ascribe to them. So you meet your own inside world in the outside world. Suppose you yourself are very fussy and you hate it. You try to suppress this weakness in yourself. Moreover, you will project your own dissatisfaction with that weakness on to others too: you think fussy people are uncongenial.

The concept of 'projection' was thought up by Freud. He considered it a mechanism that only occurs in people with neurotic aspects. The Swiss psychiatrist Jung dealt intensely with the mechanism of projection. He concluded something else, namely that it concerns a natural and common human process, that has nothing to do with some sort of illness. He assumed that one projects one's own psychic contents, one's inner reality, on to an 'external object'. This may be a human, an object, a case or a situation, in short, anything that exists outside ourselves. In practice, subconscious contents are projected most often on to actual persons.

### Ways of projection

An important distinction in the concept of projection is between *positive and negative projection*. Our shadow consists of lighter and darker parts. The lighter parts express themselves by admiring others. These are projections with positive emotions or *positive projections*. The other person represents something positive or attractive that you yourself have, but have not as yet discovered. Usually it is about a latent strength of yourself, that you subconsciously ascribe to someone else. You feel sympathy for a person who has developed that specific strength well. In socializing with the other person you have the opportunity to further develop that latent strength in yourself. That is the reason why you find the other person so sympathetic and why you enjoy being with them. The waking up and encouragement of that latent strength, makes you enjoy the contact.

When you have traced a latent strength in this way, it is a challenge for you to take care that that strength develops further. This means that you should also start to use that strength in situations in which that sympathetic person is not present. This person has kindled a fire in you as it were and now the trick is to keep that fire burning yourself.

Negative projection is about the darker parts of your shadow. The negative emotions involved can express themselves by disliking people who have your own undesirable distortions. It is about qualities that you consider to be negative of yourself and that you hid. You will fight these qualities in other people who also have them. For example, you yourself are blunt and you hate blunt people. Or you resent people who are not themselves, whereas you are often not yourself either.



Placing the undesired qualities with others prevents critical self-examination. For some people, being confronted with their own undesirable qualities in others evokes so much aversion, that they try to avoid the people concerned.

With both positive and negative projections it is about projecting shady sides of yourself on to others. You can however, also project ego-aspects or your obstructing thoughts on to others. You then think that other people see you the way you see yourself. This is mainly done subconsciously and has implications for the way you behave. When you see yourself as someone who is always cheerful, you will also think that others see you like this and expect this behaviour from you. You will tend always to behave cheerfully. Sometimes you would like to behave otherwise, but do not do so because of the images you have projected on to others; your behaviour is usually a mask. You feel different from the way you behave.

A student says: `In our family we have always talked a great deal. We do not know what silence is. Until recently I thought that I was a person who would always like to have a chat when another person was near. When I was in the kitchen and co-tenants of the student flat were there, that was what I did. Moreover, I believed that other people expected me to chat. Like: she is a person who is always chattering away merrily. I started talking to comply with that image.

`Lately I found out that I also like to keep my mouth shut occasionally. When I began to try this out I felt a little uncomfortable about it. One of the co-tenants asked me at one point 'How quiet you are. Are you ill, or is something the matter?', for I showed different behaviour from what people knew of me. I explained how it worked and that I sometimes put on a different front to the way I felt. The other person sympathized. From then on it was easier for me to talk only when I felt the need to do so. So I feel much more free`.

Apart from projecting qualities and images of your own on to others you can also do so with (negative) experiences or opinions. If you hate washing up you will often think this holds for other people as well. You may subconsciously project your own fears on to others as well. Then you will, for example, say to another person 'You would not dare to...'. You do so because you are afraid yourself. You shirk the responsibility for your own feelings and shift it on to the other person. The above examples of projection cause much confusion in communication with others. In the remainder of this section the focus will be on projecting one's shady sides. That is because this form of projection is the most interesting from the perspective of personal development.

What is the connection between projection and transference, the mechanism discussed in the previous paragraph? Transference can be seen as a 'projection' through time: earlier experiences with authorities are being projected now on to people you interact with. When as a result of this, certain qualities of our own land in the shadow, we have then gone and projected these qualities on to others. In that way transference can lead to projections. Apart from this you can state that observing our projections is a way of tracing transference patterns, as the phenomenon of transference usually progresses subconsciously, making it hard to get to grips with it.

### Recognizing projections

How can you recognize that you project in a specific situation? For if you do not recognize a certain projection, you cannot learn from it either. Typically, you react with a stronger emotion in a specific situation, than one might expect. The way you react is not in proportion to what is happening. Exaggeration or inflation take place and are often accompanied by a lack of subtlety and humour.

The above-mentioned characteristics of projection hold for most people, but not always for people who hold strong emotions concerning a specific situation. If you are such a person, the fact that you hate someone does not necessarily mean that this is due to projection. Suppose that you very much need to be left in peace in contact with others. However, someone else happens to feel the need to express their dominance through being chatty. It may then occur that you do not like to be around that person. From an objective point of view there is talk of different requirements. Because of your strong emotions you may experience these different requirements as 'hating' the other person.

The emotions arising from projection can be both positive or negative. The stronger the emotion, the greater the projection and the stronger something within you asks to be addressed. This situation focuses your attention on that. The strong emotion that you hold also distorts the way you perceive that specific situation and increases the risk of tensions, conflicts and irritations in contact with others.

It may therefore be very illuminating to pay attention to your inner responses to the outside world. Be alert to what strikes you in others. Some questions that might be helpful in tracing your projections are:

- What gets you upset?
- Who or what moves you?
- Who or what do you think about a lot?
- Who or what fascinates you?
- What is your favourite fantasy?
- What person can't you just stand?
- What situations would you rather avoid?

If you get started on these questions, you may find that your shady part is much larger than you thought! One consolation is that you are not the only one: it applies to most other people.

### **First impressions and projection**

We may come across the phenomenon of projection in all kinds of ways in everyday life. One of them is contact with strangers. A stranger will always get a first impression of you, whether you like it or not. This first impression may be very neutral, but it is definitely a first impression. Others will react to you in a certain way via that first impression. Are you aware which first impression other people have of you? How does it affect the way others approach you? Sometimes you can take measures to remedy the negative effects of the first impression.

A student says: ‘Some time ago I found out that the first impression that strangers have of me is that they can easily walk over me. That is very annoying, especially in business situations. Once I knew this I could take measures. What I do now is take the lead in the conversation rather soon and assert myself. In that way the other person gets less chance to walk over me. Moreover, the negative quality from the first impression is then quickly rectified’.

What holds for the first impression you create in another person obviously also holds the other way round: your behaviour is often influenced by the first impression you get of another person. As long as you are not going to adapt too much, that is no problem for you.

Three important risks accompany first impressions. The first is that they may turn out to be very incomplete and that a person’s most important strengths and weaknesses come to the fore only later. Then someone is quite different from what the first impression led one to suspect. Some people show dominant mask behaviour in the first contact – for example, friendliness or standoffishness. These mask qualities may make the other strengths and weaknesses totally invisible. So a stand-offish person will initially come across as more uncongenial than they actually are, while a friendly person may appear just the other way around.

The second risk carried by first impressions is that projection is involved. What will often strike you first in a stranger are your own stronger and less strong (shady) aspects. Projection on to strangers takes place quite easily, because the other person is still a blank to you. You cannot see the other person from the right angle, because by judging you cannot see who the other person truly is. Your own projections make a first impression unreliable unless you know yourself quite well and you can differentiate between reality and your own interpretations (Tros, 2013).

A third risk is that you may think 'He or she looks like a person I know', and then you approach the stranger in the same way that you approach the person you do know. Moreover, you subsequently tend to ascribe to this stranger the strengths and weaknesses of the person you do know.

### **Projection and feedback**

Projection gets in the way of effective communication, for your prejudices and judgements have little to do with the people you refer them to. Quite a few job interviews and opportunities in the relationship market are spoilt by this. Situations in which people want to learn from the feedback of others get obscured too.

Feedback can be projection to a greater or lesser extent. When feedback is projection, the feedback often tells us more about the person giving feedback than about the person for whom the feedback is intended. When I first realized that projection can play a part in feedback, I began to look more critically at feedback. Feedback without projection I call clean (objective) feedback. Feedback with projection I call polluted (subjective) feedback. It frequently happens that people feel hurt by polluted feedback. Being familiar with the mechanism of projection makes it easier to put this kind of feedback into perspective.

Insight into the phenomenon of projection helps you increase your own objectivity, as you learn to distinguish better what has to do with you and what with the other person. This distinction makes it possible for you on the one hand to stop burdening people with things that concern only you, while on the other hand allowing you to distance yourself more easily from what another person projects on to you.

An important question is: how is it possible to distinguish between clean and polluted feedback? Points that might help you in this are:

- Is the feedback presented with obvious emotion (annoyance, defence or vehemence)? If so, then projection is usually involved. You will also notice that this kind of feedback evokes resistance in the receiver. The result of this is that the content of the feedback no longer comes across.
- Self-knowledge. When you know yourself quite well, you can assess whether or not the feedback is right i.e. clean.
- Knowledge of the other person. The better you know the other person, the better you can estimate to what extent the feedback the other person gives is projection.
- Openness in the relationship. Then the feedback can be discussed, so that it is easier to distinguish whether clean or polluted feedback is involved.

Examine the feedback you receive for accuracy. Although feedback sometimes seems to have more to do with the giver than with the receiver, the possibility that feedback might be projection should not be used as an excuse for not examining it. That would be throwing the baby out with the bath water. It is also advisable to examine the feedback you give. When it is emotionally loaded you can learn something about your own projections.

### **Taking back projections**

Projection can be seen as a signal of a (temporarily) upset balance in ourselves. (Dethlefsen & Dahlke, 1983). It is a beautiful mechanism, because it shows that people intrinsically strive for wholeness, for integration of shady sides and hidden possibilities. Your projections give you the chance to restore the upset balance in yourself. They represent a mirror, in which it is not being the person you think you are being reflected, but the person you really are. Discovering and integrating your shadow can be seen as the highway to personal growth.

You do not project consciously or on purpose, and it is therefore nonsense to think that you can unlearn or overcome it. But you can learn to take your projections back, and then you will find that the person you projected on to turns out to be quite different from what you thought, because at first you did not see him or her, but yourself (Brouwers, 2012). Taking back your projections involves integrating the quality that you projected in your self-image (ego) and also taking responsibility for it. That quality is then no longer part of your shadow, you have 'freed' it. A requirement for this is to really accept that specific strength or weakness as part of yourself. Then you will most likely not project that aspect of yourself on to others in the future.

Taking back your projections is not always that simple: often there are good reasons why a quality landed in your shadow. All sorts of feelings and obstructive thoughts may have caused this. Facing them is essential for you to be able to take your projection back. If you have hidden one of your qualities very far away and you see it in your environment, it evokes strong feelings of resentment. The projection of a quality that you have hidden less far away is much easier to take back.

For many people it is annoying at first to be confronted with the mechanism of projection. The phrase from their childhood 'you are what you say' seems to be quite evocative. Looking for your teachers in those who annoy you most may not seem an obvious solution. Realizing that in people you are having problems with a shady aspect of yourself is usually present as a 'gift' is difficult to accept for many people. A student expressed his annoyance about this as follows: 'It is too ridiculous for words that you should be the one to change when you are being bothered by someone else!'. And indeed you do not have to. The choice is yours.

De-masking projections and taking them back requires facing yourself honestly. You cannot and should not play hide and seek, as projections are the result of doing just that with specific aspects of your shadow. What might help you is considering:

- To look at yourself in a mild and non-judgmental way - take an inquisitive approach. You now get the chance to learn something new about yourself .
- To avoid feelings of guilt when you find out specific ways in which you used to do things and on which you now have a different outlook.
- To take your time! Once you have understood how things work, try not to immediately start 'controlling everything', not allowing yourself 'to make mistakes any more'. It often takes more time to find out how the mechanism of projection really works for you, and for that it is necessary for you to experience the mechanism of projection and its related emotions a little longer.
- To investigate whether different projections are linked to one another.

Taking your projections back and integrating your shadow helps you to consciously choose what behaviour you want to show and what you want to say or do, knowing what the consequences will be. Precisely that clearness and that awareness prevent you from stepping over the line and make you solve hard situations much more quickly and smoothly. By recognizing your projections you have the tools to understand yourself and your interactions with others better. Therefore, to many people a whole new world opens up when they get to know the mechanism of projection and apply this to themselves.

Integrating your shadow not only makes you more complete but also stronger and more free, for the smaller your shadow gets, the more realistic the image you hold of yourself. Your basis broadens and your self-confidence grows. The reverse also holds: the larger your shadow, the more one-sided your self-image will be. Apart from that, uncertainty may increase because more subconscious processes that you don't have grip on may play a role that influences. The larger your shadow, the more your life will be directed by it, and the more you will encounter problems in the outside world, as you will meet your darker side there.

### Exercises

1. Describe for yourself as much as possible which qualities (strengths and weaknesses) are in your ego and which are in your shadow.
2. Which strengths of your own do you not employ at work, but use in your free time? How come? What would be the effect if you were to employ those strengths at work?

3. What do the ego and the shadow of the organization you work for look like? How do they affect the way in which people associate with each other?
4. In which specific situations do you usually put on a mask? How do you behave then? For each situation, work out what would happen if you were to show your real face.
5. Work out which images other people have of you. How do they affect the way in which they behave towards you?
6. Which strengths and weaknesses of your own do you easily place to the fore? Which strengths and weaknesses of your own do you not show very easily to others? Can you relate this to behaviour that was more or less appreciated in you in your childhood?
7. Which are your (half-)latent strengths? For each strength, determine which situations you do not dare to employ them in. Try to find out which image obstructs the use of each strength.
8. Write down a few conversational situations in which you feel insecure or afraid. For each situation, decide whether one or more images are involved. Auxiliary phrases in this are: I am under obligation to myself or others to \_\_\_\_; I (do not) want to \_\_\_\_; I am (not) allowed to \_\_\_\_.
9. Have you recently done something new in a conversational situation, employing a strength that you do not usually use in that situation? Which image did you have to put aside for this?
10. Are there situations you feel guilty about or in which you afterwards hated your own behaviour? Answer the following questions for each situation:
  - (a) What did you say or do then?
  - (b) What would you have wanted to say or do?
  - (c) Which image prevented you from doing so?
  - (d) Was it a matter of a certain strength that you did not employ? If so, which one?
11. Make a drawing representing life for you. Which images about life can you derive from this? How does it affect your behaviour?
12. Are there any people you do not feel free with? How do you react to those people? Work out whether transference is involved. If so, which strength of your own do you have to employ to feel free again?

13. What first impression do you think a stranger will get from you in the first 30 seconds of contact? Mention two strengths and two weaknesses. How do they affect the interlocutor?
14. To what extent does the first impression someone has of you differ from the impression one gets when they get to know you better? Which strength(s) are added? Which distortion(s) are added or disappear?
15. Think of two examples of images of your own that you project onto others. How do they affect your behaviour?



## 5 COPING WITH WEAKNESSES

People may have to work for years before they can cope with an annoying quality they have. One often wonders, then, how it is possible for a good strength to degenerate into what is often called, in daily usage, a 'bad' quality. There is a tendency to cut off, as it were, and throw away this quality – this undesirable part of one's personality. In terms of the palette of colours described in Chapter 3, people want to throw away a certain colour from their colour range because they scratch with that colour pencil and pierce the paper with it. However, it is not a matter of throwing away the colour, but of stopping the scratching! That is one way of looking at weaknesses.

It can also happen that you finally reach the conclusion that nothing can be done about a certain weakness and that you will have to live with it. Meanwhile, however, you continually reproach yourself about possessing that quality.

For people wanting to work on their weaknesses it is often quite an art to do so in a congenial way. People tend to see it as a tough job. What can help then is the realization that opportunities for growth are implied in our least pleasant qualities. Thus working on weaknesses will be like fishing a pearl from the mud.

### 5.1 LOOKING FOR WEAKNESSES

If you want to set to work on certain weaknesses of your own, the first step is to determine that it actually involves a weakness. That is not always very simple. Sometimes the environment considers a certain strength to be a weakness, and you do not agree with this. You believe you are careful, whereas some other people think you are fussy. Who is right then? Of course, the opposite may be possible: you may believe that you are fussy, but your environment does not experience this as such.

The first and most important criterion in the determination of a weakness is whether you suffer from it yourself. In addition, you may look at how greatly your environment suffers from it. This requires the power of being able to look 'objectively' at the environment. In a working environment situations may occur that people experience as negative. This makes it difficult for many people to look objectively at their own strengths and weaknesses. Two possibilities can be distinguished here. The first is that a person experiences a weakness of him- or herself as a strength. A psychiatric nurse said that she considered the quality of being mistrustful as a strength. Her explanation was: 'In my job you always have to be alert to tricks that patients want to play on you'.

The second possibility in a situation that a person experiences as negative is that they see a strength as a weakness. A student classified his strength of directness as a weakness. In his organization the standard was that you should

not contradict your boss. It was absolutely forbidden to give your opinion simply and honestly.

It also happens that people see a weakness of themselves in some situations as positive and in other situations as negative. The same can hold for a strength. A teacher teaching uninterested pupils told me that in his job he considered the quality of bluntness to be a strength, but in his private life it was a weakness. Blunt behaviour helped him survive. Which was no fun at all....

If you experience a situation as negative or if another person reacts towards you from a weakness it is up to you to decide how to deal with it. Do you also react from a weakness? For, often, weaknesses evoke each other.

Your environment may draw your attention to a specific weakness and in that way expose you to a certain extent of 'tunnel vision' concerning the way you behave. However, a weakness is not always noticed by your environment. A dream might draw your attention to it.

I dreamt that my father was on holiday and I was in charge of the farm. It was summer and the time had come to harvest the wheat. The crop that had ripened first was the winter barley. When I took a look at that specific plot, I noticed to my dismay that about 5 % was far from having ripened. In the days that followed I regularly walked along the plot, not knowing what to do. I decided to wait until the unripe ears had ripened as well. This took a long time, so long that the ripe ears became overripe and fell to the floor, and were lost for the harvest.

This dream drew my attention to the weakness 'perfectionism'. The harvest had to be perfect, but because of that it was mostly lost. I recognized my weakness to that extent: that I set high standards for myself. I also tended to occupy myself too much with what I disapproved of myself (the unripe ears). That obstructed me and caused me to have much less fun in what I did, just like in that dream. I realised that this weakness had many more negative outcomes than I had thought.

From this dream I learned two things. Firstly that I should be satisfied with a 95% result. Secondly, that I should let myself be determined more by things that I approve of in myself than by what I disapprove of. Usually the 'unripe wheat' will develop itself all the same. An interesting detail is that in the practice of harvesting the wheat it also works that way: if 95% of the grains have ripened, the remaining 5% also ripens after having been stored for a while. The excess of fluid in the unripened grains soaks into the ripened grains. In that way nothing gets wasted!

It often requires quite careful thought to find out where you stand with regard to a certain weakness. The first step is to fully distinguish and recognize a certain weakness.

The next two sections give an insight into the backgrounds of weaknesses from two angles. In the first case, two opposite strengths become unbalanced, thereby distorting one and making another (partly) latent. The second way in which you can look at a weakness is to see it as mask behaviour. Then a weakness is used instead of a strength because you find it difficult to employ the strength.

Thus you can convert a considerable number of your weaknesses to their corresponding strengths. Sometimes it is initially not simple to determine which angle is applicable to a certain weakness. This usually becomes clear automatically in a further analysis – possibly with the help of others.

## **5.2 UNBALANCED STRENGTHS**

One way of looking at distorted strengths is from the point of view of an upset balance. Then a weakness is a signal of an imbalance in yourself, resulting in a quality tilting towards its distortion. This may be compared with scales loaded too heavily on one side or just too little on the other side, thereby making it tilt. Then you may examine what is on both sides of the scales – which strengths and weaknesses are involved. A surplus of one strength is often the result of a deficit of the opposite strength. In the previous paragraph we learned that obstructive thoughts can play an important role in that.

In order to trace in yourself the imbalance giving rise to the development of a weakness it is important to look for the strength behind the weakness. Many people do not succeed in this because they cannot imagine that there is something positive behind a bad quality they hate. An aid in this is the 'Core Quadrant' (Figure 3) described by Ofman (1992). The 'Core Quadrant' consists of two opposite, complementary strengths and their distortions. By means of such a 'Core Quadrant' it is possible to see a certain weakness in conjunction with the other strengths and weaknesses that have a direct influence on them.

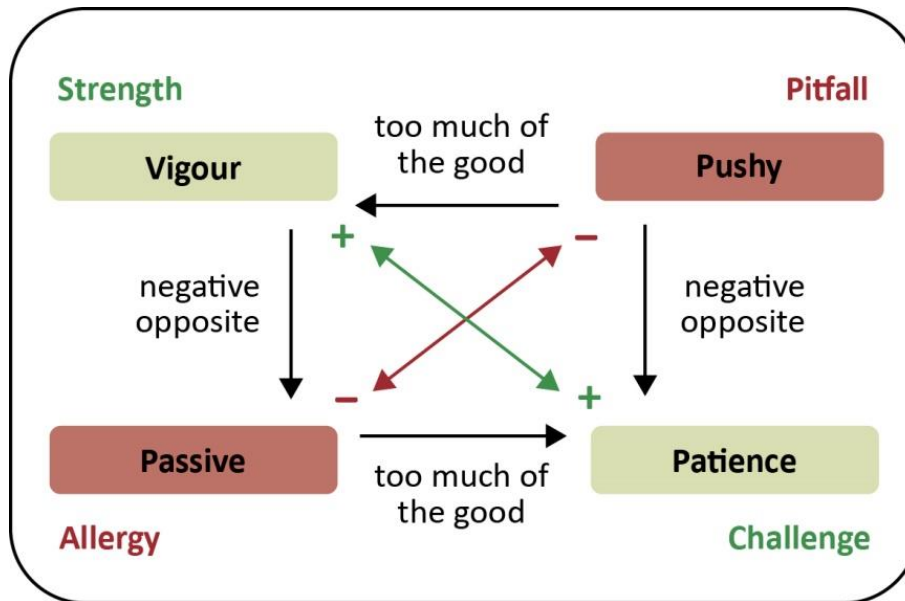


Figure 3 Core Quadrant

Determination and patience are opposite strengths. Pushiness and passivity are the weaknesses of these strengths and are also opposites of each other. Also, patience is the positive opposite of pushiness and passivity the negative opposite of determination.

Let us assume – on the basis of this example – that a person believes himself to be pushy and thinks this quality a weakness or pitfall in himself. After having filled in the strengths and weaknesses quadrant, it turns out that the pushiness is caused by the balance between determination and patience being upset. He has exclusively focused on the strength of determination and has ignored the strength of patience. The strength of patience has landed in the shadow and become latent. So, for this person, the challenge is to develop the quality of patience. The fact that the strength mentioned has landed in the shadow has another consequence as well. Usually this person will get annoyed at other people by the distortion of his or her own latent strength, and so may become allergic to passivity. This can be explained through the mechanism of projection (see Section 4.4).

If you find it difficult to trace the strength behind your weakness or if you are not aware of some weaknesses of your own, the strengths and weaknesses quadrant can be a useful aid. When looking for the strength behind the weakness you may take the following approach. First, choose the weakness (pitfall) you want to examine. Next, look for the allergy. Then the question is: which weakness is the opposite of your own weakness? Suppose your own weakness is swimming with the tide. The opposite weakness is inflexibility. You will usually hate the opposite weakness: it is the allergy. Then you can look for the strength behind the weakness. Inflexibility is a distortion of determination.

Then determination is the challenge. From the challenge you look for the opposite strength. That is flexibility. Flexibility is the strength behind the original weakness of swimming with the tide. So when filling in the strengths and weaknesses quadrant the order is: pitfall, allergy, challenge and strength.

Some people do not have a very clear picture of their own weaknesses, perhaps because they do not want to see them. In that case too, a Core Quadrant can be a useful aid. When filling in the quadrant the allergy is the starting point. The first question is: which annoying quality do you hate in other people? Suppose this is laziness. Then the next question is: which weakness is the opposite of laziness? To you this may be fanaticism. Fanaticism may be your own pitfall then. The next question is: what is fanaticism a distortion of? It might be a distortion of enthusiasm. To complete the Core Quadrant the final question is: which strength is the opposite of enthusiasm? This could be staying calm or calmness. The route taken when filling in the Core Quadrant in this case is: allergy, pitfall, strength, challenge.

When beginning with the allergy the starting point is that many people hate the weakness that is opposite their own weakness. Moreover, people often arrive at their own weakness at the moment they are confronted with their allergy in another person. Sometimes a confrontation with the allergy in another is not even necessary for arriving at their own weakness. This is so when the fear of the allergy is very strong.

During training in presentation techniques one of the participants received the comment from the audience that he adopted too unpretentious an attitude. He reacted by saying 'I often do so consciously, for I am afraid of coming across as arrogant'.

Some people also tend to label their challenge as negative as soon as they see it in another person. Thus, if I am very flexible myself, I will easily call determination inflexibility.

Core Quadrants are very suitable for self-examination. You can also use them to trace latent strengths (see Section 6). The accuracy of a Core Quadrant can be checked in different ways. Each corner point can be found from the three other corner points. You can, for example, find a strength through the weakness, the challenge and the allergy.

Filling in a 'Core Quadrant' is not always easy. If you link a Core Quadrant to a concrete situation it will usually work better. It is also important to choose your own words. It is often not simple to find the right word for a strength or weakness. The same quality can be named by two different people in different ways. Moreover, a certain strength in one person will have a different distortion than for another.

From my experience the Core Quadrant as a whole is not that suited to applying to people who have a low level of education. If, for example, you are looking for someone's challenge, it is better work only with the lower part of the quadrant. That will make things a whole lot easier. By the way, you can only make a Core Quadrant about yourself.

### Restoring the balance

How can you restore the upset balance in yourself and thus cancel the weakness? The answer sounds very simple and that is possibly why it is also implausible to many people. The point is simply that you will have to employ a strength (the challenge) more often. You would be well advised to wonder why you use a strength too little. Sometimes you are blocked by an image or obstructive thought, whether or not this is in connection with transference. For example, if I have the image that other people no longer like me when I act forcefully, this may be a reason for denying the strength of being forceful. As a result of that a kind of accumulation often develops as well. At a certain moment the bucket is full and distorts power into aggression. A strength becoming (temporarily) latent and landing in the shadow usually distorts. In rash moments this distortion comes out, thereby making the upset balance in yourself real.

Another consequence of the image that nobody likes you when you act forcefully could be that you are going to sacrifice yourself and allow people to walk all over you. It often happens that in that way an image evokes a weakness. In training sessions it happens quite regularly that a whole new world opens up to participants when they find out how this mechanism works for themselves. Their weaknesses are being put into a different perspective, because they understand what causes them. The obstructive thought 'I am not allowed to make any mistakes' can cause the weakness 'perfectionism' or the idea: 'What I want can never be realised' can lead to 'being passive'.

A question frequently asked by people when looking for the balance in their strengths is: to what extent in myself do I have the strength that I employ too little? Let us start from the example that was discussed before, involving the strengths of determination and patience. If you are mostly determined and have neglected the strength of patience you may wonder 'Am I a patient person?'.

The starting point in looking for the balance between two strengths is the ambition to employ both strengths to the same extent that they are present in that person. Sometimes they are equally strongly present, but often that is not the case. When determination is in first place in the top 10 of the person concerned and patience is at number 8, then it is a matter of giving them both the right place. The question is: when is there a balance? You can compare this with the scales that people used in the past and on both sides of which weights were hung. Even when two weights (that is, strengths) of different weight are

hanging on them, there may still be a balance. This is the case when one weight is further away from the fulcrum than another.

If a weakness is the result of an imbalance in your strengths you can distinguish three steps in coping with it:

1. *Description of the situation.* Describe the circumstances and your condition in which the weakness occurs. What did you want, what did you think, what did you feel and what did you do? Also look at what led to your landing in the weakness. Indicate how the weakness affects you and others.
2. *Analysis.* Make a Core Quadrant for this situation. From this follows, for example, the strength (the challenge) you employ too little, thereby causing the opposite strength to become distorted. Work out which images or feelings are the cause of your employing your challenge too little.
3. *Action.* Decide for yourself what you can do to restore the upset balance and how you can best act when the situation concerned occurs again.

A course participant says: 'During a performance appraisal the executive told me that he thought I was often passive during progress meetings and that he regretted this. I recognized what he said. When my behaviour was analysed during a course I noticed that 'passivity' to me was the distortion of the strength of calmness. People generally find me a calm person. That is how I experience myself too. When an opinion is asked for I usually have one, but I wait until others have had their say. But then what I want to say has usually been said already, so that I do not say anything at all. I find it a waste of time to repeat what others have said before. Thus I have gradually become increasingly passive.

In this situation it is important to me to find the balance between active and calm. I want to adopt an active attitude only when I can make a useful contribution. This starting point may lead to me adopting an insufficiently active attitude, particularly when I lose my chance of saying something. To prevent this I want to do so from now on as quickly as possible in situations in which I can give my opinion. So I will get more involved in the conversation too.

In this example it is rather easy to solve the weakness. Often it is considerably more difficult, especially when deeper-lying images or emotions and transference play a part. We have seen that in most distortions resulting from an upset balance two opposite strengths and weaknesses are involved. These four qualities can be represented in a Core Quadrant. Occasionally things are more complicated with an upset balance. Widely divergent weaknesses can evoke one another in yourself.



A manager found out during a course that, in him, the strength of care often distorted into being interfering. As a result of that he interfered too much in the work of his employees. Thus his own work got into a tight corner. In this way his strength of being lively distorted into being restless. Thus being interfering indirectly resulted in restlessness.

A person's strength may also become distorted if it is not seen or recognized by the environment. Suppose someone has the strength of flexibility but the environment does not have any use for it. This strength will then distort into swimming with the tide. Thus the person will get feedback from the environment even when it is negative. If this happens often, the weakness becomes a habit: flexibility can only be employed as swimming with the tide.

### 5.3 WEAKNESS AS A MASK

A second way of looking at distorted strengths is from the starting point that a weakness is a form of mask behaviour. It disguises what you really want. In this case it is a matter of working out which strength is hidden behind the mask of the weakness. This can differ greatly for each person and each situation.

A teacher says: 'During team training the strong and weak sides of each team member were shown by means of The Feedback Game. I was given the weaknesses hard and aggressive by my team members. Some felt I crucified them with my sharp tongue and my hard attitude. They thought that through this behaviour I unnecessarily caused damage in the team. One member of the team said that he had become afraid of me. In short, there were enough reasons to have a closer look at my behaviour. In the discussion it became clear to me that I show this behaviour in situations in which I myself do not know the answer to the problem at stake and I feel I am positive that the solutions others put forward are totally wrong. Instead of being unpretentious and saying that I do not know either, I try to make myself invulnerable by adopting a hard and aggressive attitude. Obviously I would rather trip up other people than say that I do not have a solution either'.

In the above example the weaknesses of hardness and aggression mask unpretentiousness. The person concerned acts hard and aggressively rather than unpretentiously. When looking for the original desired strength behind the mask behaviour a therapist friend uses the phrase: 'I would rather \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in weakness] than \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in strength].' When the strength that people avoid has been traced, the next step is to work out what causes the mask behaviour. Next you will have to find solutions for this. Incorrect images play a leading part in this too. In the above example the obstructive thought could be: 'I am not allowed to show my weaknesses'.



## Secondary needs

In the above example the team member concerned wanted to make himself invulnerable. In order to achieve this he used the weaknesses of hardness and aggression. Invulnerability is a secondary or substitute need. A secondary need can manifest itself when you are under pressure. Then you may think that the primary or true need is no longer possible and will end up in a substitute or secondary need. For comparison: you want real flowers, but as you think they are not there you settle for artificial flowers. Better a surrogate than nothing at all. This may also happen subconsciously. Next, people often employ weaknesses to realize that secondary need. Then that secondary need is the motive behind the weakness. One person wants approval from her boss and therefore starts to behave in an extremely friendly way. Another tries to mislead his colleague so as to keep him in his power.

When mask behaviour hides a weakness, secondary needs play an important part. The trick is to work out what the primary need is (what you really want) and express it with the accompanying strength. The three primary needs when relating to others are: giving love, receiving love and being yourself. Linked to that are the secondary needs (Korteweg & Voigt, 1985): power (instead of giving love), approval (instead of receiving love) and invulnerability (instead of being yourself).

With *power* you try to keep control over others. Commanding the environment is central. You place yourself above the situation, as it were. Other people are often seen as pawns to play with.

*Approval* as a secondary need implies that you are focused on doing those things that others will say that you have done well. In this case you would like the environment to say 'yes' to you. The most important characteristic of the secondary need of *invulnerability* is an attitude such as 'you won't get me'. A person may screen off their own territory and build a wall around it so that others cannot influence them.

Often secondary needs are not expressed openly, but function as a hidden agenda. Because secondary needs evoke distorted strengths they often result in a cost to the quality of the contact between people. Other unpleasant effects of secondary needs are addiction and alienation. Sometimes people get addicted to a secondary need, such as power. Such an addiction is comparable to drinking salt water: a person will drink more and more and it will never be enough. You may be quite successful with that secondary need, but it will never take away the pain caused by what you surrendered for that. No matter how much power you gain, it will never be enough to meet the desire to give love and feel a sense of connectedness to others that lies hidden underneath.

Alienation may arise when you get so used to the secondary need that you will start thinking that it is an essential part of your personality. You lose touch with yourself because you lose sight of what you really want (the primary need).

### Weaknesses and pleasure

Apart from secondary needs something else may play a part in the weakness as mask behaviour – namely, a secret pleasure that can play a part in weaknesses in two ways. First of all there is the relief you experience by avoiding something that frightens you. Fortunately, you do not have to use the strength you find difficult to employ. Instead, you show a weakness.

Another possibility is that expressing the weakness itself will give rise to secret pleasure.

A woman says: 'One of my weaknesses is reacting aggressively. In such a situation my partner reacts very reservedly. Inside I laugh at him. Like: 'Ha, ha I have taken you in!. I do not show my pleasure, however: it is secret. Even when contact with him returns to normal I do not tell him how much pleasure I had. If I am honest, I also find myself nasty when I react aggressively. I react in that way when I cannot get what I want in a normal way'.

Sometimes the secret pleasure is the (unconscious) motive to create a certain situation yourself.

A student says: 'I sometimes find my weakness of sloppiness very pleasant. As a result of sloppiness I am often late and forget some appointments. In this way I am given extra attention, however, and I enjoy it'.

A weakness may yield profit to a person, but that person also pays a price. He or she will become isolated in some way. The pleasure connected with the weakness and which is kept back is always a solitary pleasure. For many people it is difficult to admit to themselves that they gain pleasure from a weakness or a hidden secondary need. That is an obstacle when examining and unmasking the weakness concerned.

### Unmasking the weakness

When a weakness leads to mask behaviour three steps can be distinguished in coping with it:

1. *Description of the situation.* Describe the circumstances in which the weakness comes to the fore. What did you want, what did you think, what did you feel and what did you do? Then you should also look at what preceded the weakness coming to the fore. Also indicate what the effect of the weakness on yourself and the environment is.

2. *Analysis.* Try to find out which strength is hidden behind the mask of the weakness. The phrase: 'I would rather \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in weakness] than \_\_\_\_\_ [fill in strength]' is useful in this. Then you have found the strength that the weakness has replaced.

Other auxiliary questions are:

- Which secondary need is served by expressing the weakness?
  - What was your primary need in this situation? What did you really want? By means of which strength could you have expressed that primary need?
  - Which images or feelings kept you from doing what you really wanted to do?
  - Which secret pleasure do you get out of the weakness?
3. *Action.* Decide for yourself what you can do to bring the primary need with the accompanying strength to the fore, so that you can best act when the situation concerned occurs again.

When turning a secondary need into a primary one in a certain situation, the distorted strength often disappears of its own accord in that situation.

### **Weakness as a handicap**

It may happen that you have tried in various ways to do something about a weakness, but have not succeeded. Then that weakness should be seen as a handicap. This also holds for as long as you do not know how to cope with a certain weakness. If a weakness is a handicap this means that you should stop fighting it and accept it. Moreover, it is important then to create conditions that make it easier to live with. Thus you can contentedly cut your coat according to your cloth.

A project manager says: 'I take criticism of my performance badly. Then I react irritably and defend myself fiercely. Next I am bad-humoured for a few days. In my job being allergic to criticism is a serious handicap. Some employees no longer feel free to comment. This sometimes has a negative influence on the quality of our projects. Up to now I have not found out how I can reduce my allergy. I did think of a practical solution for suffering less from it, though. Now I organize progress meetings with my employees more often. Thus their comments come in smaller doses and are easier for me to cope with'.

### **Exercises**

1. Take the list of your six most important weaknesses (cf. Exercise 5, Chapter 3). List them in order of the degree to which you suffer from them. Then ask someone who knows you very well to make such a list for

you too, seen through that person's eyes. Compare and discuss these lists together.

2. Indicate how each of your six most important strengths can distort. In which situations or under which conditions does this happen?
3. Take the three weaknesses you suffer from most at the moment. Analyse these weaknesses by using the steps described in Sections 5.2. or 5.3. For each weakness examine which of the two approaches is applicable to it. It is useful to discuss this exercise with a person you know.
4. Choose a situation in which you come into your own. Which weaknesses lurk within it?
5. Which of the three secondary needs do you recognize most in yourself? In which situation? Which distorted strengths of your own are connected with this secondary need?
6. Is there a weakness that you currently experience as a handicap? If so, how do you cope with it?

## 6 TRACING AND DEVELOPING LATENT STRENGTHS

I find helping people look for their (half-) latent strengths a very inspiring activity. The wonder, disbelief or resistance of people characterizes this process. It is a natural reaction to the unknown in yourself. A latent strength comes knocking on you from inside as it were. Often you get cold feet or you feel clumsy and do not know what to do. You will, for example, feel the need to react in a humorous way in a serious, businesslike situation. You will think, 'I cannot do this, for it is behaviour that my interlocutors do not know of me at all'.

If you compare yourself with a garden, you may see the emergence of a new strength in yourself as follows: the earth cracks, because a new flower is growing and wants to get to the light. This produces the question: do you try to smooth over the crack (in your self-image) as quickly as possible or are you curious to see the new flower?

As we learned in Chapter 3, there are two possibilities with latent strengths. One is that a totally new strength to you, which you did not know existed, is involved. The other possibility is that a certain strength was there, but at a certain point you stopped using it. This strength has disappeared from sight. You have 'forgotten' it.

Latent strengths are comparable to a treasure trove that we cannot do anything with until we remember in which spot we have hidden it. There are different ways of tracing latent strengths, for example via:

- Recognition in people you find very sympathetic or, on the contrary, very uncongenial (Section 6.1).
- Situations that are challenging to you (Section 6.1).
- Strengths that are hidden behind weaknesses that you secretly would like to have more of and that represent your 'secret pleasures'. (Section 6.2).
- Developing latent strengths does not always go smoothly. In Section 6.3 several obstacles to this are discussed.

### 6.1 SYMPATHIES AND ANTIPATHIES

A fun and interesting way in which you can trace latent qualities of your own is to choose people you find very sympathetic or very uncongenial as a connection. First you have to carry out the two following assignments:

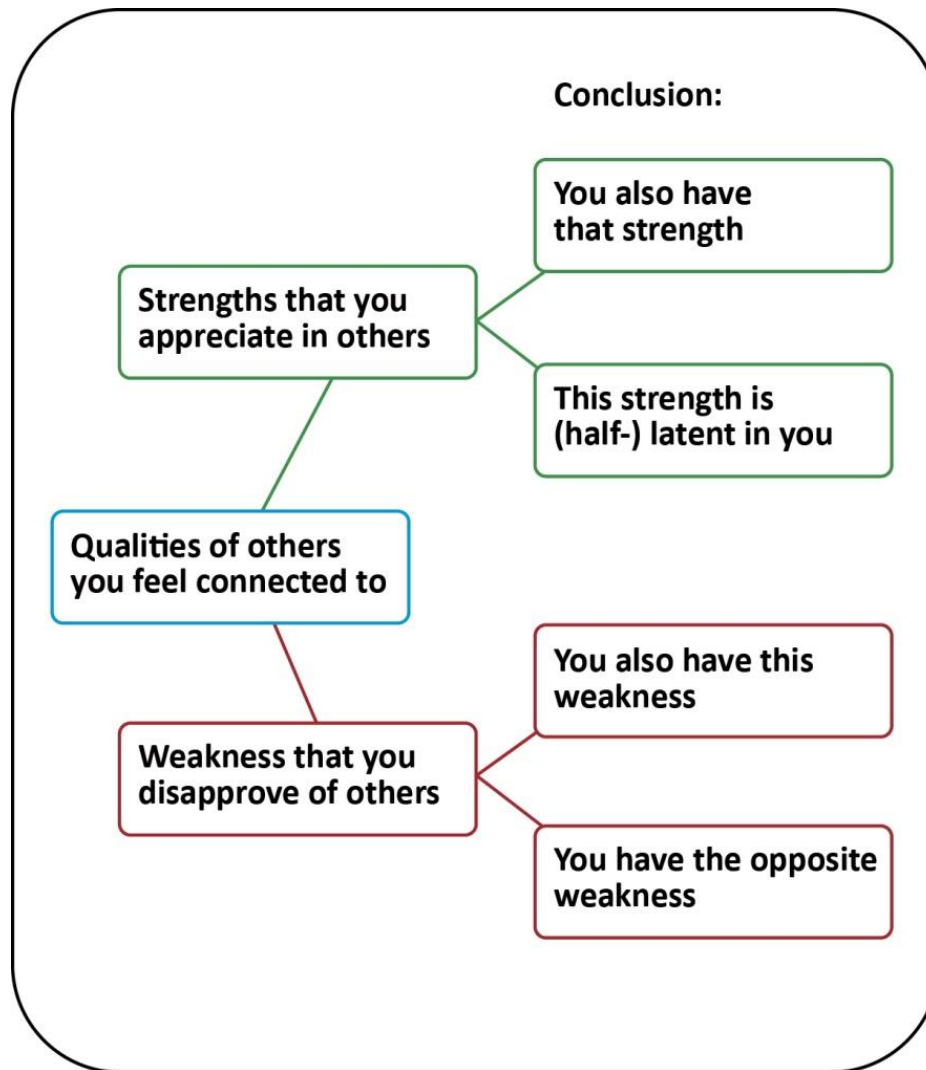
1. Think of two people you find very sympathetic. Work out for each of them the qualities that cause you to find them sympathetic.
2. Think of two people you find very uncongenial. Work out for each of them which of their qualities you hate so much.

Try to describe the qualities in the above assignments as accurately as possible. Leave all the other qualities of the people concerned aside.

You can apply experiences of sympathy and antipathy to yourself by means of the mechanism of projection (cf. Chapter 3). The starting point in this is that everything that strikes you significantly in your environment, both positively and negatively, tells you something about yourself, for it says something about strengths of your own that are unbalanced (distorted), or that have landed in the shadow and have become latent. So people whom you find sympathetic or uncongenial can teach you something.

An important criterion in judging sympathetic or uncongenial people is that you are touched by them, that you feel emotionally (either positively or negatively) involved with them. There are often other people too, whom you do not find very sympathetic, but with whom you can go on feeling free. The fact that you do not get along with these people does not necessarily say anything about you.

Figure 4 shows which possibilities there are for applying the (un)congenial-experiences back.



*Figure 4 The meaning of qualities that you feel emotional involved with*

For each quality of sympathetic persons there are two possibilities. The first is that you project a strength of your own on to another person. You value in the other a strength you also value in yourself. The question you could ask to find out is: which of the strengths you have ascribed to the other person do you recognize as manifest strengths of your own?

The second possibility is that you project a (half-) latent strength of your own on to another person. Then the question is: which of the strengths you have ascribed to the other person would you like to make (more) use of yourself?

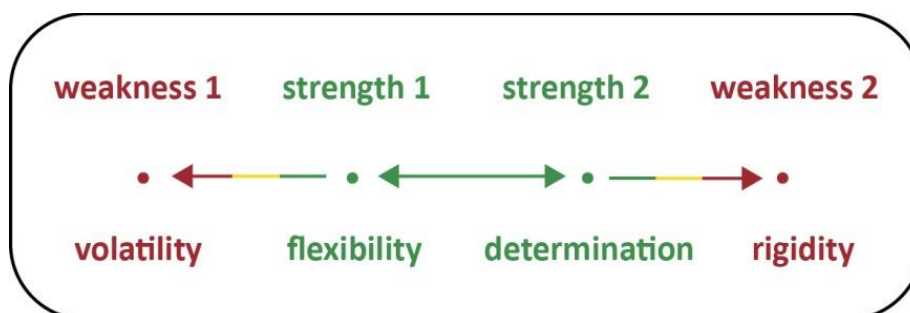
It is often difficult to assess whether a strength is latently present in you. When a latent strength that you had forgotten is involved, you will manage to recognize it. But if a new strength is involved, you usually will not know it. A way of finding out whether a strength is latent in you is to consider whether you would like to be able to employ it. If the answer is 'yes', you can take it that the strength is latently present.

Initially, many people do not believe that they unconsciously project a latent strength on to another person. After some time they usually find out that they do possess this strength after all.

With uncongenial people, applying the experience back to yourself is somewhat more intricate. There are also two possibilities. The first is that you project some weaknesses of your own on to another person. You reject in another a weakness that you also hate in yourself. To find this out you may ask yourself the following question: which of the weaknesses you have ascribed to another/others do you also possess yourself (a little!)? Next you may look for the strength hidden behind the weakness concerned. In this it is useful to see the unpleasant quality separate from the other person. If you cannot do this it will be more difficult to trace the strength hidden behind the weakness, because you see the uncongenial person in a mostly negative way. Another question that may help you to extract a strength from a weakness is: what kind of behaviour (strength) would you prefer the other person to show in place of that annoying behaviour?

The second possibility for tracing a strength that is hidden in a weakness of another person is to approach it in the following way: the person concerned shows exactly the opposite negative behaviour of what you show. So the other person has a polar distortion. If you are very inflexible yourself, you will usually become annoyed with a person who swims with the tide.

You can even go one step further, for behind both weaknesses there is a strength: determination is behind inflexibility and flexibility is behind swimming with the tide. These two complementing (and opposing) strengths and the two corresponding weaknesses are shown in Figure 5.



*Figure 5 Opposed strengths and corresponding weaknesses*

You will object to a person having the distorted version of your own latent strength. If you are going to develop the latent strength of flexibility in yourself, the inflexibility will decrease and the original strength – determination – will come more to the fore. Thus the upset balance between flexibility and determination is restored. If you become better balanced you will be less annoyed by the person you initially hated so much. The 'distance' between your behaviour and that of



the other person will become shorter and therefore the degree of annoyance will also be reduced.

Many people find the above approach rather difficult. As an illustration I therefore give an example of a student.

‘I get annoyed at people who overestimate themselves, who are arrogant. Arrogance is a distortion of the strength of self-assuredness. In myself I recognize that I regularly underestimate myself and feel insecure, especially in the presence of someone who is arrogant. Underestimating myself I consider a distortion of unpretentiousness. Self-assurance is still a latent strength in me that I would like to develop’.

The message of the above exercise is: what annoys you or what you feel attracted to indicates that, with regard to the strengths concerned, you are not balanced – that you do not use them optimally. I would like to mention here a few points that strike me when working with the above exercise. Frequently people shoot from one extreme weakness to another. On one occasion they will react insecurely, while on another they will behave arrogantly. This too involves finding a balance. The same holds for a person who is very spontaneous but hates people who gossip. Such an individual is so regularly that spontaneous that they experience the negative effects of it, for they occasionally say things they ought not to have. Thus the person is not balanced. You could say then that a strength such as discernment is necessary, so that the person learns to determine more precisely whether it is appropriate to the situation to be spontaneous.

Some people shoot back and forth between not employing a certain strength and employing it in a distorted fashion. New strengths can tip the balance because you have to experiment with them, due to lack of experience. As time passes by more balance will arise. After all, at first you do not know the nuances of this specific strength. People may check themselves at one time and not say anything, while on another occasion they may react aggressively. Employing a distorted strength is usually the consequence of not employing it in a previous situation. What matters then is employing the strength concerned when the situation requires it and you would like to do so.

People are often afraid of the weakness they are irritated by. They are afraid they will be like that too. The outcome of their fear is that they deny the strength belonging to the weakness in themselves, as a result of which the weakness will only surface in an even more distorted manner.

It requires some puzzling over this to apply qualities you find pleasant or unpleasant in others to yourself. For each person the picture is different, so the suitable words differ just a little.

For some people it is very difficult to discover, in the way described above, how much the environment is a mirror of what they really are. It is almost inconceivable to them that they can find out something about their own latent strengths from people they do not like.

### **Challenging situations**

As with sympathetic persons you may also feel attracted by those situations that are challenging to you. A challenge can put you on the scent of a new strength. Then the question is: what would be a challenging situation to you and which strengths do you need in it?

It is not only situations that are challenging but also situations that are difficult for you that can offer an opportunity to develop latent strengths. Dissatisfaction with your current (work) situation can be an (unconscious) signal that new qualities want to develop in you. This kind of dissatisfaction signal may be very inconvenient.

A 35-year old entrepreneur says: 'My business has been doing well for years. Lately, however, something has begun gnawing at me: 'Do I want to go on with this kind of work until my retirement?'. This question makes me feel insecure. Everything is going well now, so why should I do something else? On the other hand, maybe I am looking for a new challenge. I do not know.'

## **6.2 THE SECRET PLEASURE QUADRANT®**

A perspective that is quite interesting in tracing strengths and that is fun to apply is that of 'secret pleasure'. The starting point is that you look for annoying qualities that you yourself do not have, but that you occasionally might want to employ. Based on the mechanism of projection (see Section 4.4) the principle is that the strengths hidden behind these weaknesses are your latent strengths. You can investigate whether that applies to you as well. Below I will explain the procedure that I have been applying for years in (team) training sessions and coaching.

### *1. Trace weaknesses that you would want to have more.*

When you ask people to do this, they usually cannot come up with these straight away. That is because people are usually not aware of them. The Feedback Game is well suited for getting ideas about those weaknesses. If you do not own The Feedback Game, you can also use the list of weaknesses in Appendix I. The assignment is to select those weaknesses that you do not have, but secretly would wish to employ every now and then.

At first people may look at you a bit strangely, because they find the assignment a bit weird. They say: 'Weaknesses, are they not what you want to get rid of?'. But once they are selecting the cards, gradually more and more people start to smile: they get in contact with their secret pleasure! It is the naughty side of yourself that is part of your shadow and is being addressed. In a training I ask the participants not to show others the cards they selected.

*2. (Applied only in groups or teams) Express one of these weaknesses non-verbally.*

The rest of the group has to guess which weakness it is about. Laughter all around! The reason why I have people express their secret pleasure is that in that way people get even more in contact with it. I have seen the most rigid of people loosen up by expressing their secret pleasure non-verbally. For example, a slender and shy woman revealed her secret pleasure by expressing a large gorilla, making loud noises while chest-thumping. She received a big round of applause from her team members.

*3. Explanation of the theory behind this assignment*

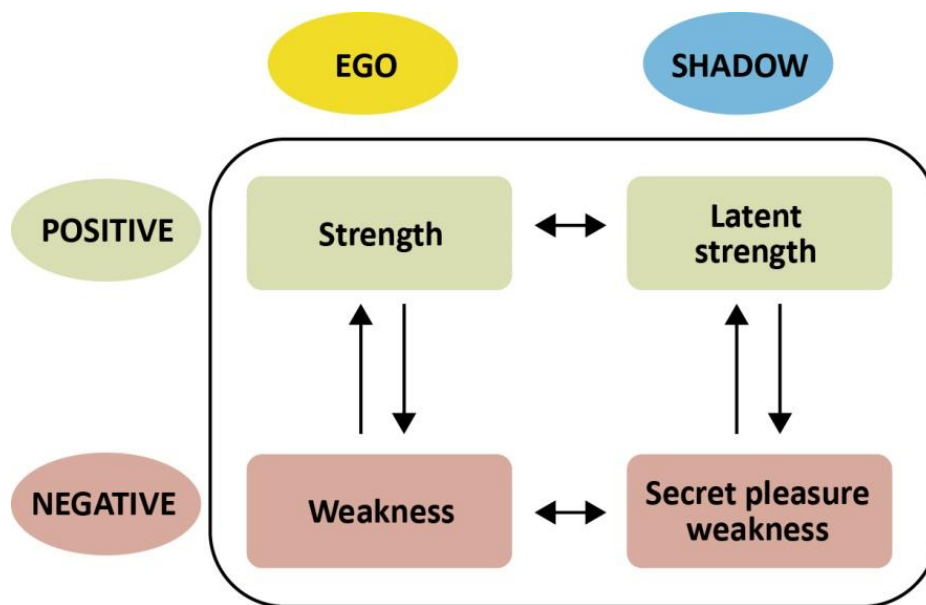
The principle is that secret pleasures are part of your shadow (see Section 4.1) and say something about hidden strengths of your own. By handling this assignment you can learn more about this and you get the opportunity to start developing these strengths.

*4. Trace the strengths behind the secret pleasure weaknesses.*

These are possible latent strengths of your own. I use the Secret Pleasure Quadrant for this (see below).

*5. Select a latent strength that you wish to develop.*

At this last step it is about making a choice from the possible latent strengths, traced at step 4. You select the strength you wish most to develop. It is also useful if you can think of an obstructive thought that might prevent this.



*Figure 6 Secret Pleasure Quadrant®*

In the Secret Pleasure Quadrant I combine the model on personality from Section 4.1 with the stages in development of strengths from Section 3.4. Vertically in this model the strength and weakness represent the parts of the ego. They are the qualities you are aware of and you say 'yes' to. The reciprocating arrows between the strength and the weakness indicate that they can transform into each other: sometimes you employ a specific strength, but in for example a stressful situation you slip into its distortion. Once that situation is over, you start reacting from the initial strength.

In the shadow part are the latent strength and the secret pleasure weakness. The reciprocating arrows in this case mean something else than when applied to the strength and weakness. That is because a few things take place in your subconscious (shadow): in this case it is not about visible behaviour and you cannot influence it. The arrow from the secret pleasure weakness towards the latent strength indicates that the latent strength lies hidden behind the secret pleasure weakness. Whereas the arrow from the latent strength towards the secret pleasure weakness indicates that as soon as you start to develop the latent strength, the secret pleasure weakness becomes less strong. If you succeed in developing the latent strength to the full, the secret pleasure weakness will disappear altogether. You will then have integrated your shady side. You can learn more about this in Section 4.4.

Horizontally in the Secret Pleasure Quadrant a distinction between positive and negative has been made. The double-arrow between strength and weakness indicates that these are opposed to each other, as does the one between the weakness and the secret pleasure weakness. The latter could therefore also be called a latent weakness. The main difference from the latent strength, however,

is that a latent weakness will usually not develop because you consider that behaviour as negative!

The purpose of applying the Secret Pleasure Quadrant is usually to trace your own latent strengths or somebody else's. You then only have to look for the underlying strength of your secret pleasure weakness. You then need not complete the rest of this model. If you are interested in the connection between your ego sides and your shadow sides, it is of course still interesting to fill in all four parts of this model.

Let us examine two examples. Suppose that one of your secret pleasure weaknesses is that you would like to be more blunt, but you do not use that weakness. The hidden latent strength to that weakness is 'direct'. The corresponding strength and weakness are respectively 'discreet' and 'indirect'.

Another example is of a person whose secret pleasure is being selfish. The hidden latent strength would be 'being assertive'. In this case the corresponding strength and weakness are respectively 'taking care of someone else' and 'self-effacing'.

### **The Secret Pleasure Quadrant and the Core Quadrant**

Applying the Secret Pleasure Quadrant offers interesting possibilities in both teams and individual coaching. Tracing your hidden strengths can also be done by applying the Core Quadrant (see Section 5.2). If you are familiar with the Core Quadrant, it is important to keep the differences between these two quadrants in mind.

The difference between these two concepts is that a latent strength that comes to the fore in applying the Secret Pleasure Quadrant, is more likely to be recognized by the person concerned than the latent strength (challenge) coming to the fore from the Core Quadrant. The reason for this is that the secret pleasure weakness lies hidden less far away in the shadow than the allergy. This is because the allergy is linked to a strong negative emotion. For the shadow parts holds: the further away something is hidden in the shadow, the stronger the emotion it evokes.

The advantage of making it easier to recognize a latent strength by applying the Secret Pleasure Quadrant, is that you may want to be more eager to develop and use that strength.

Anyway, both models can very well be applied in parallel. Applying them both to the same person usually results in different latent strengths or challenges coming to the fore, because each models exposes different areas from the shadow.

### **Secret pleasure in teams**

Applying secret pleasure in teams is not only great fun but also very useful. This already starts with expressing the secret pleasure weakness: the rest of the team gets to see a totally different side of you.

By later on discussing in the team the strength behind the secret pleasure weakness, this procedure gains additional value. This can be affected by stating clearly which part the specific person can play if the hidden strength is going to be developed and used. The advantage of discussing that in this way is that to many people it will become much easier to demonstrate that specific strength in the team. Nobody will be surprised because this possibility has already been discussed.

## **6.3 OBSTACLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LATENT STRENGTHS**

Latent strengths are strengths already present in us. However, the way must still be cleared to allow them to express themselves. A latent strength can be developed by employing it more and more. Such a new strength develops into a half-latent strength and possibly later into a manifest strength.

A half-latent strength can develop into a manifest strength. You already use such a strength occasionally, but there are even more situations in which you can do so. Many people separate work and private life too strictly: they reserve some strengths for their private life because they think these are not useful in their job. It is easier to develop a half-latent strength than a latent one, for the latter category is more difficult to recognize. Moreover, it often takes some time before people believe that they really do possess that particular strength.

### **Latent strengths and insecurity**

Even if it is clear to you which strength can be developed (further) in you, you are not there yet. 'Knowing' is a different kettle of fish from 'doing' and 'making oneself familiar with'. In this you may be confronted with different obstacles. The first obstacle is your own insecurity, doubt or shame. At the moment you start, for example, to behave more spontaneously than before, you may take fright. You may tend to think 'I will not do it any more, I find it too scary'.

It may also happen that you begin to doubt. Does this strength really suit me? That one does not fit in with my self-image! Then you will have to adapt your self-image. Often people resist this.

A participant in a training session on job application says: 'Before I took up this training I had the idea that the strength of enthusiasm was not really a strength of mine. I saw myself mainly as a quiet and sensible person. I did admire enthusiastic people, though. At the request of the trainer I began to practise this strength in an interview. At the end of the interview my reaction was: 'I have been play-acting. That is not the way I am. I feel like I am taking people for a ride'.

The rest of the group reacted positively to my surprise. According to them, I came much more into my own. After the video recording I had to agree with them. However, my doubts did not disappear.

In the weeks following the training the question kept on occupying my mind as to whether enthusiasm really was a strength of mine. Now, four months later, I have come to the conclusion that I have more enthusiasm in me than I thought.

A second possible obstacle in developing a latent strength is the reaction of the environment. Sometimes others welcome the change; at other times they may react negatively. The reason for this is usually that others will have to react differently to you because you have changed. They usually do not feel like it. Instead of adapting their own behaviour, people try to undo the change in you by reacting negatively to it.

To you it may often be inspiring to use latent strengths. You get the feeling that you are alive and kicking. Self-confidence and the feeling of self-respect increase. Because of this, familiar strengths may retreat somewhat into the background. The new strength enters your personal top 10 of strengths. As a result, another strength falls a few places or disappears from the top 10.

It is interesting to make a top 10 of your strengths every year. The most important criterion in this is the degree to which a quality is most dear to you and gives you most pleasure. After a few years, this annual top 10 can give a picture of your development during that period.

### Exercises

1. Carry out the exercises at the beginning of Section 6.1. Work out what the results of these exercises tell you about your strengths and weaknesses. Use what is written in the pages following these exercises. I suggest that you impersonate the people concerned as accurately as possible. Act as if you are them and notice what this does to you.
2. Which strengths does a person have to have for you to fall in love with him or her? To what extent do you have these latent strengths?

3. Suppose you were born in the Middle Ages and you were free to choose a profession or activity. What would you prefer to do? Which strengths could you use in it? Does this include strengths that are currently half-latent in you? If so, which ones? (The reason for choosing the Middle Ages in this exercise is that society was a lot simpler then than it is now. Thus people can more easily choose what they like.)
4. What would be your dream profession or occupation if there were no limitations on you with regard to knowledge, opportunities and so on? Which strengths could you use in it? Does this list contain strengths that are (half-)latent?
5. Try to find out what you were like as a child. You can talk about it with relatives. Which strengths did you have as a child? Do you still have these strengths or have you 'lost' one or more of them? Follow the steps in Section 6.2 to trace these latent strengths. Use the list of weaknesses from Appendix I to trace weaknesses that you take pleasure from.



## APPENDIX I

### LISTS OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

#### STRENGTHS

1. adventurous
2. appreciative
3. assertive
4. calm
5. confident
6. content
7. convincing
8. direct
9. disciplined
10. down-to-earth
11. enthusiastic
12. fun-loving
13. generous
14. good communicator
15. go-getter
16. hard working
17. honest
18. humorous
19. independent
20. inspiring
21. intelligent
22. kind
23. meticulous
24. modest
25. neat
26. open
27. orderly
28. optimistic
29. patient
30. powerful
31. precise
32. relaxed
33. reliable
34. respectful
35. responsive
36. sensitive
37. skilful
38. serious
39. versatile
40. well-balanced
41. ambitious

42. analytical
43. attentive
44. caring
45. cheerful
46. consistent
47. courageous
48. creative
49. dedicated
50. determined
51. empathetic
52. flexible
53. focused
54. goal-oriented
55. good listener
56. idealistic
57. innovative
58. mediator
59. mild
60. playful
61. pragmatic
62. putting things into perspective
63. responsible
64. spontaneous
65. tactful
66. taking the initiative
67. thoughtful
68. tolerant
69. wise
70. well organized

## **WEAKNESSES**

1. absent-minded
2. aggressive
3. bad listener
4. blunt
5. boastful
6. bossy
7. careless
8. chaotic
9. clumsy
10. complaining
11. confused
12. dependent
13. dissatisfied
14. evasive
15. envious

16. greedy
17. hesitant
18. impatient
19. irresponsible
20. lazy
21. mistrustful
22. moody
23. obstructive
24. over-anxious
25. over-critical
26. oversensitive
27. pessimistic
28. prejudiced
29. quitter
30. rude
31. selfish
32. shallow
33. shy
34. sloppy
35. stressed
36. stubborn
37. swimming with the tide
38. restless
39. undisciplined
40. unreasonable
41. aloof
42. arrogant
43. cynical
44. deceptive
45. dishonest
46. disparaging
47. easily distracted
48. feeling insecure
49. fickle
50. inhibited
51. interfering
52. intolerant
53. miserly
54. naive
55. non-assertive
56. obtrusive
57. passive
58. reckless
59. rigid
60. servile
61. short-sighted
62. slow

- 63. sly
- 64. spiteful
- 65. talkative
- 66. tattletale
- 67. touchy
- 68. unkempt
- 69. unrealistic
- 70. wasteful

## APPENDIX II

### OVERVIEW OF METHODS OF PLAY

Method of play	part of the game (1)	appli- cations (2)	required level of security (3)	playing time (min.)	number of players	level of familiarity (4)
1. Becoming aware I	SW	TMCP	-	30-40	1	-
<i>version A</i>	SW	TMCP	-	30-40	1	-
<i>version B</i>	SW	TMCP	-	40-50	1	-
2. Becoming aware II	SW	TMCP	M	50-70	2-4	R
3. Becoming aware III	SW	TMCP	H	75-90	2-4	R
<i>version</i>	SW	TMCP	H	75-90	2-4	R
4. Becoming aware IV	S	TMCP	M	20-40	2-8	R
5. Becoming aware V	S	TMCP	-	30-40	1	-
6. Feedback I	S	TMCP	M	40-50	2-5	R
<i>version A</i>	S	TMCP	M	40-60	2-5	R
<i>version B</i>	SW	TMCP	H	80-100	2-5	R
<i>version C</i>	SW	TMCP	H	80-100	2-5	R
<i>version D</i>	W	TMCP	H	40-60	2-5	R
7. Feedback II	S	TMP	M	40-70	2-6	R
<i>version A</i>	SW	TMP	H	80-120	2-6	R
<i>version B</i>	SW	TMCP	H	40-70	2-6	R
<i>version C</i>	SW	TMCP	H	30-40	3-8	R
8. Feedback III	SW	TMCP	H	45-60	2-10	R
<i>version</i>	SW	TM	L	20-60	2-8	NR
9. Feedback IV	SK	TMP	L	40-80	4-15	NR
<i>Version</i>	SW	TMP	M	60-100	4-15	NR
10. Feedback V	SW	TMP	M	40-60	3-5	R
11. Teamwork I	S	TM	M	40-60	4-8	R
<i>version A</i>	SW	TM	H	80-120	4-8	R
<i>version B</i>	S	TM	M	90-150	8-16	R
<i>version C</i>	S	TM	M	75-90	8-16	R
12. Teamwork II	S	TM	L	20-40	3-10	R
<i>version A</i>	S	TM	M	20-40	3-10	R
<i>version B</i>	S	TM	L	20-40	3-10	R
<i>version C</i>	W	TM	M	20-40	3-10	R
13. Teamwork III	SW	TM	M	40-80	3-10	NR
<i>version A</i>	SW	TM	H	80-120	3-10	R
<i>version B</i>	S	TM	M	40-80	3-10	R
<i>version C</i>	W	TM	M	30-90	3-8	NR
14. Teamwork IV	S	TMP	L	60-75	4-25	NR

Method of play	part of the game (1)	appli- cations (2)	required level of security (3)	playing time (min.)	number of players	level of familiarity (4)
15. Getting acquainted	S	TMP	L	15-30	4-15	NR
<i>version A</i>	SW	TMP	L	20-40	4-15	NR
<i>version B</i>	S	TMP	L	15-30	4-15	NR
<i>version C</i>	S	TMP	L	15-30	4-15	NR
<i>version D</i>	S	TMP	L	20-40	4-15	NR
<i>version E</i>	S	TMP	L	20-30	8-20	NR
16. S/W of an org.	SW	TM	L	30-60	3-12	NR
17. Opinion on function	S	TM	L	40-70	2-25	NR
<i>version A</i>	W	TM	L	40-70	2-25	NR
<i>version B</i>	S	TM	L	40-70	2-25	NR
18. Evaluation	SW	T	L	10-30	5-20	NR
<i>version A</i>	S	T	L	10-30	5-20	NR
<i>version B</i>	W	T	M	10-30	5-20	NR
19. Icebreaker	S	T	M	15-45	5-15	R
20. Staff appraisal.	SW	MC	H	45-60	2	R

### Explanation

(1) S = Strengths; w = Weaknesses.

(2) T = Training; M = Management; C = Coaching; P = Private life.

(3) L = Low; M = Moderate; H = High.

(4) NR = Not Required; R = Required.

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