

# The Good Game: A Challenge the Process Activity

*Critical Thinking Feedback Driven Communication*

The Good Game teaches students the importance of balanced feedback. While many people in the newest generations seek praise for tasks completed, it is essential for them to learn the damage that can be caused by providing only positive feedback. Come experience a real-live undergraduate leading you through The Good Game! And discuss with our faculty how we developed a systemic approach to activity-based experiential learning in our Management major.

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## **Introduction**

Throughout their coursework, BSBA Management majors at the University of Central Missouri take part in many required experiential learning experiences including the Integrative Business Experience (IBE - 12 credits), eXperience Based organizational behavior (XB - 3 credits) and various leadership classes utilizing Workshops over textbooks. Additionally, students take part in simulations, activities, client projects, peer reviews, and a host of additional experiential learning approaches intended to push students into becoming highly self-sufficient learners. As they progress through their degree, they are asked to take on more and more of the teaching (training) function. Both faculty and students feel that new graduates with strong training skills are more likely to make an immediate impact at work.

The Good Game, is intended to help undergraduate students understand how feedback can affect various aspects of productivity, learning, and growth. The activity was designed for MGT 4320 Leadership where we use Kouzes and Posner's (2017) The Leadership Challenge as our primary textbook. It is a "Challenge the Process" activity that focuses learners on thinking outside of the box to come up with solutions to problems that go beyond what people would consider the 'normal' path. In this case, only receiving positive feedback forces the participant to go beyond normal communication to solve the puzzle. Learners discuss the merits of positive and negative feedback methods. The activity is suitable for any class where students must learn to not only give but receive feedback.

## **Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

### Theoretical Foundations.

It is evident that, in the utter absence of knowledge of the results of one's actions, it is impossible to improve performance. Feedback of some form is critical to improving performance. However, feedback can take several forms. It can be gained through the personal investigation of potential discrepancies between goals and outcomes, as a result of the nature of the task itself, by actively seeking others' reactions, etc. As traditionally conceived in management theory, feedback can be gained through information supplied by others as part of an effort to improve job performance. In the latter case, when others provide feedback with many factors, like personality characteristics, attributes of the person giving the feedback, affective reactions, etc., can influence its effectiveness. (For a detailed overview, see the meta-analysis by Kluger & DeNisi, 1996.) While positive feedback can increase motivation by signaling a commitment to goals, negative feedback increases the motivation through creating the awareness of lack of progress toward achieving goals. In both cases, feedback helps people self-regulate their behavior, which can improve performance (Finkelstein, et al., 2016).

Millennial and post-millennial generations need to learn that constructive or corrective feedback is vital to improving performance (Gleeson, 2003; Anderson, Buchko & Buchko, 2016). While often perceived as a generation with little taste for constructive feedback, millennials are open to critique if couched concerning company goals (Anderson, Buchko & Buchko, 2016). Generation Z, or post-millennials, may be even more sensitive in their approach to constructive feedback. Regardless, as educators, we need to prepare future leaders to give and receive feedback of all types (Gleeson, 2003).

While the Good Game is a simple game, it paints a stark contrast to what life would be like if only positive feedback were delivered. As an employee, one would lose half of the understanding of objectives and goals, and in many cases, see overall productivity decline due to unawareness of goal/result discrepancies.

### Teaching Implications.

The UCM workshop learning format finds its basis in the work of David Kolb whose highly influential book entitled 'Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development' was first published in 1984. Kolb's representation of a model of experience in a scientific form has helped to move educational thought from focusing on the instructor back to focusing on the learner.

Not all writers agree with Kolb's theory. Rogers points out that "learning includes goals, purposes, intentions, choice, and decision-making, and it is not at all clear where these elements fit into the (Kolb) learning cycle (Rogers, 1996, p. 108)." Habermas has also proposed that there are at least three kinds of learning and that we have different learning styles for each (Rogers, 1996, p. 110). Perhaps the most basic criticism of Kolb's 4 Stage Learning Cycle is that "In reality, these things (stages of the learning cycle) may be happening all at once (Jeffs and Smith, 1999)." However, Kolb's contributions cannot be underestimated and have impacted the way instructors think about learning.

At the University of Central Missouri (UCM), we have been building experiential learning into our Management Major for over 15 years. We have decided not to look at the stages of the experiential learning cycle, but instead to trust that experiential learning works as a holistic learning process. For us, it is a trust in the long-term learning outcomes rather than an

examination of the shorter-term learning process in a single class. Long-term attendees of OBTC will recognize that both the Integrated Business Experience and eXperienced Based Management (XB) are represented in our major. In particular, this workshop focuses on the ‘workshop’ format of our Leadership course.

An *undergraduate* student who has ‘survived’ the UCM experiential learning barrage leads an exercise known as “**The Good Game.**” He will relate this exercise to Kouzes and Posner’s exemplary leadership practices by leading a debrief at the conclusion of the activity. He will also field questions from attendees on his impressions of a highly experiential major. Faculty will explain how we have systematically implemented experiential learning throughout the Management Major and field attendee questions.

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## Learning Objectives and Discussion Questions

The Good Game workshop is designed to generate a discussion around leadership principles, in specific, to discuss Kouzes and Posner's (2017) exemplary leadership practices. The intended purposes of this activity are to give individuals' opportunities to lead by example and to demonstrate that leading by example is not the easiest thing to accomplish. The activity addresses the following **learning objectives** pertaining to the Challenge the Process exemplary leadership practice (Kouzes & Posner, 2017):

- *Initiate incremental steps and small wins to overcome significant challenges*
- *Conducting pre- and postmortems with your projects*
- *Learn from your mistakes*
- *Foster hardiness in self and others*

In addition, example discussion questions are paired with their corresponding learning objectives and relevance to leadership practices on the following page in Appendix A.

**APPENDIX A.**

DISCUSSION QUESTION	RELATION	LEADERSHIP PRACTICE
What was your biggest challenge in this activity?	Personal-best leadership experiences always involve some challenge. Leaders take charge of change	Challenge the Process Search for Opportunities Foster Hardiness
What types of communication did you use other than words?	Listen deeply, discover and appeal to a common purpose, and give life to their vision by communicating expressively.	Inspire a Shared Vision Enlist Others Develop a Shared Source of Destiny
Did your group initiate incremental steps and small wins?	The three essentials of experimenting and taking risks are initiating incremental steps and small wins, learning from mistakes, and promoting psychological hardiness.	Challenge the Process Experiment and Take Risk
How did you build off of those small wins?	Small wins build people’s confidence and reinforce their desire to feel successful.	Challenge the Process Experiment and Take Risk Initiate Incremental Steps and Small Wins
How was that beneficial to your group?	They provide a stable foundation that preserves gains and makes it harder to return to the way things were.	Challenge the Process Experiment and Take Risk Initiate Incremental Steps and Small Wins
To the member in front, what was most helpful to you from our team members?	Small wins help leaders build constituents’ commitment to a course of action by starting with actions that are within their control, tangible, and doable	Challenge the Process Experiment and Take Risk Initiate Incremental Steps and Small Wins



<p>Looking back and now that it is not a competition, what do you think your group could have done better?</p>	<p>According to Dick Nettell, “In today’s environment, if you want to be successful, doing things the same way won’t get it done.... if we’re not willing to be innovative and do things differently, we are going to have the competition pass us like we’re still sitting on the freeway.”</p>	<p>Challenge the Process Search for Opportunities <i>*The Leadership Challenge</i> Instructor’s Guide</p>
<p>Life is not always about positive feedback, how do we (as leaders) deliver corrective feedback?</p>	<p>Seize the Initiative Exercise Oversight “As long as you believe what you’re doing is meaningful, you can cut through fear and exhaustion and take the next step.” Push to give employees the opportunity to change, without forcing it. Giving the opportunity to take initiative results in unexpected positive changes.</p>	<p>Conducting pre and post-mortems (the activity debrief itself is a postmortem). Foster hardiness in others</p>
<p>If the second rendition of the game was played: Why was the second rendition easier than the first? How did negative feedback affect your understanding of the task Give an example of a time when negative feedback helped you in your career or schoolwork</p>	<p>““If you can think of ways to improve the process, you should take it.” This means you have to stop simply “going through the motions” when it comes to doing your job. It’s a lesson all leaders need to learn.”</p>	<p>Challenge the Process Innovate Solutions Inspire a Shared Vision</p>

## **Exercise Overview**

The Good Game allows students to experience what life would be like if everything were positive. Contrary to what one might believe, things begin to become difficult when the sole communication device merely is the word “Good.” In this activity, you begin by selecting a participant, and send them out of the room behind closed doors, at this point, you are free to communicate with the audience about a task that the participant must perform. The Task can be anything, such as picking up a trash can or writing something on the board. The task becomes even more difficult if there is a specific number involved, such as completing seven push-ups. Once the class has decided which task the participant is to complete, the participant should be called back into the room. At this point, the only word classmates may say is “Good.” The participant may start confused, looking for what he/she must do, and begin to start doing various activities to try to guess what the objective is, when they are headed in the right direction, classmates simply say “Good.” If the participant is moving away from the objective, say nothing, and allow frustration and agitation to take place. The Participant will eventually complete the objective, thus completing the first stage of the game. At this point, the instructor makes a decision based on time constraints and the overall group setting. One could jump straight to the discussion questions, or, with another volunteer, re-do the game, but this time allowing the word “Bad” for when the student begins to stray further from the objective. While the participant will already know a basis on how the game works this round, the objective will change, still leaving a challenge. However, re-doing the game shows students a clear and distinct understanding that both forms of feedback were crucial to understanding the task faster, and with fewer frustrations, which is an excellent segue into the discussion questions.

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## Session Description

### Timeline:

0 Minutes - 5 Minutes	-----	Instructions
5 Minutes - 20 Minutes	-----	Activity
20 Minutes - 40 Minutes	-----	Activity Discussion
40 Minutes - 60 Minutes	-----	Experiential Learning Discussion

### Participant Involvement:

As a result of attending this workshop participants will:

- Engage in a dialogue for systematizing experiential learning
- Foster leadership skills in the areas of providing positive and negative feedback, initiating incremental steps and small wins to overcome significant challenges, learning from mistakes, and fostering hardiness in self and others
- Be led by an undergraduate student

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Appendix B.

CHALLENGE THE PROCESS

University of Central Missouri



**THE “GOOD” GAME**

**OBJECTIVE:**

To communicate a final goal to one team member without speaking anything but the word “good”.

**DIRECTIONS:**

- 1) One member of your group will stand in the front of the room.
- 2) That member cannot speak and must try to figure out what their objective is by moving around and taking their group member’s advice.
- 3) The rest of your group will receive a slip of paper with an objective on it that they must relay to their team member.
- 4) They cannot say anything but “GOOD” when that group member makes a correct motion.
- 5) Once that person has accomplished the task completely, they are finished.
- 6) The team that accomplishes their goal first wins.

**QUESTIONS:**

- 1) What was your biggest challenge in this activity?
- 2) Did your group initiate incremental steps and small wins? How was that beneficial to your group?
- 3) Did any of the groups use pre- or postmortems? How was that beneficial to your group?

**HOW THE GAME RELATES TO REAL LIFE:**

- Initiate incremental steps and small wins to overcome big challenges
- Conducting pre- and postmortems with your projects
- Learn from your mistakes
- Foster hardiness