

## Recommendations based on research project 'Good supervisors for gifted employees'

- **What are fitting tasks for gifted employees?**
- **How do you interact with your supervisor if you are a gifted employee?**
- **Some considerations for gifted managers and supervisors.**

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In a previous article ('Good supervisors for gifted employees?' IHBV February 14, 2012) we have described the questions and results of a survey amongst Mensa members asking them about their experiences with good supervisors.

This article will outline what would be fitting tasks according to the contributors to the survey of January 2011 and what would be a fitting working environment for gifted employees. We will add some of our own experiences to the results.

After that we will give some recommendations for gifted employees about interacting with supervisors based on the results of the survey and on our experiences with gifted employees.

We will finish with some recommendations for gifted managers and supervisors.

### 1. Fitting tasks

The gifted people who participated in the survey have a clear idea of the sort of tasks that allow their talents to be used in the organization in the best possible way.

Some ideas of the contributors about tasks that they are suited for:

- Gifted employees are good at making (literature) overviews, creating/designing research and investigating complex problems.
- Gifted employees are very good at designing (changing) company processes at a higher and lower abstraction level.
- Gifted employees can pinpoint exactly where there is (or will be) a problem in the organization. They also know what can be improved or fixed and how this should be done.
- Gifted employees are often excellent self-starters that have a complete overview, like to work hard, get things in order thoroughly, but they tend to get bored very quickly after the starting phase.
- Gifted employees work better in strategic positions than in executive positions.

Based on our own experience with gifted employees we would like to add the following:

- Gifted employees have a good overview of processes and tasks that interconnect. These are often tasks that transcend departments or business units. Some organizations utilize this talent by creating a new role where the gifted employee can create proposals and give advice that transcends business units. In this way talents like complex thinking and creativity can be used to the fullest advantage.



## 2. A fitting working environment

Gifted employees expect their supervisor to allow for a learning organization and an 'enterprising' environment where creativity, problem solving skills and intelligence are used to the fullest advantage. Their frequently divergent ideas can cause the connection to colleagues to be lost. The contributors say that as a supervisor you should 'give support in an adaptive way', and also 'be alert to bullying by colleagues'. Gifted employees like it when supervisors don't try to make them into a team player, unless there are other gifted employees in the team, with whom they can debate.

We would like to add another aspect of organizational culture. In our experience a number of values like integrity, honesty, reliability and fairness are of great influence on how gifted employees feel they function. If these values are not shared by supervisors and/or colleagues this can lead to great tension for gifted employees. Feelings of not having any power to change things, not being understood or not being believed can be the result of this. Which, in turn, can lead to a burn out, depression or labour dispute. The awareness that the mentioned values are not self-evidently shared in an organization can possibly prevent these negative effects.

We have also noticed that gifted employees tend to take on more tasks than in their job description. These tasks can be job-related or not, like organising personnel excursions, emergency response training or activities in the Works Council. This will be an expression of their work engagement. Not all organizations appreciate this. And sometimes someone who is making suggestions or presenting new ideas will also be the one asked to execute them. This way work engagement can lead to overload for the gifted employee, because many times the gifted will need the help of others for the execution and implementation of the work, but they aren't able to see this themselves or don't know how to ask.

Education about giftedness and its benefit to a company can help employer and employee accept differences, if some allowances can be made to the sometimes very specific way of dealing with gifted employees. This will contribute to achieving the highest possible benefit to employer and gifted employee.

## 3. Interacting with your manager/ supervisor

Gifted employees are aware of the fact that they are not like the average employee. This leads to some self reflection which is evident from the following statements taken from the survey results.

- Being smart is no excuse; it's only an advantage if you know how to use it well.
- Being gifted is not the same as achieving things. A high IQ is no guarantee for success, sometimes it can actually be a risk factor. Don't think you have found the goose with the golden eggs.
- Point out to gifted employees that they are absolutely right regarding the subject matter, but that things like discretion, resistance, interests, etc. are important as well.
- Stubbornness/pushiness is mostly caused by commitment to the organization's goals and not from wanting to be right.
- Policies in use to make an organization run efficiently are often blindly followed by employees. A gifted employee can be obstructive if he/she



doesn't see the benefit of it or has the feeling that the policy isn't achieving its objectives.

From our own experiences we would like to add these recommendations:

- Realise that your brain and your senses probably work faster and are more attuned than those of your manager (and probably all your colleagues). This means that your way of seeing, hearing, feeling and processing information can be very different from theirs. You can't understand their way, and they can't understand yours. Accept this as a fact. Although these are characteristics of being gifted, it's better to describe these effects specifically than to say you're gifted.
- Be pro-active in creating your own tasks, work space and work circumstances. Make a list of the things you need to work pleasantly and effectively. Let your supervisor know that you like to learn from feedback.
- Ask feedback from your supervisor. If you find that difficult, because you expect negative feedback, then try to adjust that by asking for constructive feedback. For example: What are the strong points of my report according to you? What do you think I did well recently? How can I improve my work in your opinion?

#### 4. Gifted managers/ supervisors

Of course there are gifted supervisors and managers as well. How they apply their giftedness in their work and how it could be improved would require another survey. In his book Lackner (2012) devotes an entire chapter to gifted managers. And Dauten (2011) wrote a very funny and striking book 'The gifted boss' that should be required reading for all bosses!

A few things we like to impart are:

- A management role can be very challenging, but also have a lot less interesting work. Oftentimes as the manager you don't deal with the subject matter so much.
- Remember that your employees are less smart than you are. That requires patience and tolerance.

#### References

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