



Got stuck because a worker is too clever?

Not a lot of people know that being gifted can cause problems at work. And the employees concerned are sometimes the last to realise this. However, some gifted employees find themselves in a difficult spot at work and don't always get the effective help they need. This increases the risk of the situation getting much worse, and could also lead to mental health issues and eventually unemployment and receiving benefits. This can cause a lot of valuable talent to be wasted! This leaflet is meant to inform occupational health physicians, insurance physicians and occupational assessors on how to detect giftedness as a possible reason for illness and provide some tips on what to do.

What is giftedness?

There are many definitions and descriptions of giftedness. Having an extremely high IQ is a common factor in all of them. However, most of them also specify that giftedness is more than just high intelligence. At the IHBV (Gifted Adults Foundation) we use the description that was created by a Delphi study among a panel of twenty Dutch experts in 2008:

*A quick and clever thinker, who likes to deal with complex matters. Autonomous, passionate and inquisitive. A sensitive and emotionally rich individual, living intensely. He or she enjoys being creative.**

There are a number of different variables that cause gifted people to show less than optimal (work) achievements and/or be unhappy.

What are reasons to suspect giftedness?

The table* below lists the characteristics of giftedness, as well as the qualities and pitfalls when at work.

What is giftedness?	Qualities at work	Pitfalls at work
A very high IQ (thinking)	Quick overview, quick expertise	Judges too fast, skips steps
Autonomous (being)	Independent	Very headstrong, conflicts
A high sensitivity (feeling)	Nuanced	Too emotional
Highly perceptive (observing)	Sees a lot	Oversensitive to stimuli
Driven and curious (wanting)	Driven and curious	Unstoppable
Being a creator (doing)	Productive	Does many unnecessary things
Creative	Creative, innovative	No direction
Intense	Very involved	Doesn't know own limits
Quick	Fast, quick to learn new things	Loses contact with others
Complex	Good overview	Gets stuck on the details

It is obvious that some of these pitfalls could cause symptoms like burn-out, communication issues and conflict. Another problem could be a bore-out, that has some of the symptoms in common with a burn-out.

When people don't know they are gifted and they are not treated accordingly, it's possible that the normal approach for illness and re-integration is not effective.

What can be done?

- When you suspect that giftedness may be an issue for a client when there is a risk of absence or a continued situation of benefits claiming, then gently broach this subject and explain why you think that this could or should be explored.
- When a client has never thought about this and wants to know more about the subject, then advise to find reading material (like the Delphi model and the referen-ces) and point in the direction of the website of the IHBV.
- Counsel the client to find ways to make contact with people that are (or might be) gifted, by finding meetings or joining on-line forums.
- Discuss the specific traits and pitfalls of giftedness. And find ways of dealing more effectively with these issues and getting back on track.
- If it seems appropriate, then advise the employer about the specific conditions that can improve the chances of re-integration for this particular client and about prevention in order to stop more absenteeism in the future.
- For some people it's enough to know that they are (or might be) gifted in order to be more effective. For others professional help is advisable. Find a counselor that has experience with giftedness.

* Kooijman-van Thiel, M. (red.) 2008

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