

## Very smart and without work. How is that possible?

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### *English Summary*

There is very limited research published about gifted adults. From this literature we read that gifted people do not always come into full bloom. It is impossible to tell for which percentage of the gifted adult this is the case. An educated guess in 2009 by professionals working with gifted adults showed that about one third of them functions good, one third functions moderately, and one third functions badly. For 2014, this situation is assumed to be similar.

At the Gifted Adults Foundation (IHBV) many signals are received indicating that there is problem with gifted adults who are involuntary without work. For the IHBV, the educated guess, the literature and the signals were enough reason to start research among gifted adults without work. We formulated these research questions:

1. Is it possible to distinguish (common) factors among gifted adults as reasons for losing their jobs?
2. Is it possible to distinguish (common) factors among gifted adults as reasons for not finding (new) work?
3. What needs do gifted adults have for finding work?

To answer these questions a questionnaire was made and distributed among gifted adults without work. The list contained closed questions in which many factors were questioned systematically, and open questions in which respondents could give explanations and elaborations on their answers. They used this latter possibility widely. This gave us a big amount of both quantitative and qualitative data, fitting the exploring character of this study. The number of respondents was 174.

In this study a systematical search was done on possible factors related to the process of losing a job. We found that the most important factor of getting into this situation is the gifted person himself (or herself). After this factor came factors like the type and the level of the work, the manager/supervisor and the company or organization where the person works.

Questions about the relation of each factor with their own giftedness showed that in nearly all factors this relationship is felt by at least half of the respondents for whom the factor applies to. Apparently giftedness intervenes in all aspects of someone's life.

An analysis of the explanations that were given by the respondents points mainly towards the (lack of) challenges within work and the notion that work should be meaningful. Some personal characteristics that are mentioned are: perfectionism, uncertainty, lack of focus, overstimulation, problems in communications and lack of people on the same wavelength.

In a possibly disturbed relationship with the supervisor the respondents indicate incomprehension between the respondent and the supervisor; a conflict; the fact that the respondent is seen as a threat; and the failure of the supervisor in relationship to the respondent.

For the second research question related to not finding new work there are similar results: the most important factors are the persons themselves. Other frequently mentioned factors are: the labor market, the content and the type of the work, the education and private circumstances. When asked about the role of giftedness in not coming back in work, giftedness is mentioned by many respondents in all factors. Again it is clear that giftedness plays a role in many domains of the lives of the respondents.

It is striking that in the factors “job application procedures” and “selection committees” the relationship with giftedness is felt strongly. Finding a match with the current procedures and committees is often not easy for the gifted. That can be explained by a difficult communication: not wanting to participate in the role play, introversion, modesty, fear of failure, uncertainty, not being able to sell one self and other reasons. Also preconceived ideas about giftedness may be present. Another suggestion that respondents made is that standard procedures do not seem to have been developed for gifted people. Their multi-facetedness, creativity, plurality of capacities without the fitting diplomas and their special characteristics are not appreciated by committees who like to play safe.

Another theme found in the results of this study is education and diplomas. Education and diplomas are difficult in many ways for the gifted: 1) Gifted people frequently don't finish their education. 2) We see that gifted people are able to develop themselves to a high professional level by means of work or self-study, but lack the appropriate diplomas. Then, at a certain point, growing in their job is not possible because of the lack of diploma's, neither applying for another job on that level. 3) There are gifted people who are too highly educated, and who are then seen as a threat. 4) Potential employers make wrong conclusions in the case of applicants with a variety of very diverse diplomas or studies, or less common diploma's.

The third research question dealt with exploring of the needs. The three most important needs to get back to work are: coaching, widening the relevant network and following a study or course. As for coaching they write about: general career coaching, coaching to get know yourself better, self-knowledge, self-confidence, searching their talents, fear of failure and how to start your own business. These may be specific points of attention that play sooner or stronger in the gifted compared to other people looking for a job. In the answers we recognize the problems of gifted adults from other literature, especially boredom (lack of challenge), perception of work, frustrated innovative capacity, searching for meaning, communication problems with colleagues and supervisors, underachievement and fear of failure, being different, missing connection, not recognizing own talents, labor conflicts and stress.

Overall, this study gives a richly illustrated argumentation of the problems of gifted adults in relation to work, and the mechanisms behind these problems. An interesting follow-up question would be how these problems differ from or overlap with those of non-gifted people looking for a job. It would also be interesting to find out whether these insights are shared by people around the gifted without jobs like HR professionals, supervisors, colleagues and family.

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