

I know I'm right!

Many gifted employees experience that they have conflicts at work, sometimes resulting in long term absenteeism or unemployment.

What problems do gifted people experience at work?

And what can they do to prevent conflicts?



How does a conflict at work arise?

Being gifted can lead in various ways to a work conflict. Here are a number of examples:

- It's possible that you, the gifted person, have trouble performing routine tasks, after doing them for a while. As a result you will aim your focus on things outside your job description, or start developing ideas about how the employer should run the business or department. This can cause a manager to feel like you are interfering in issues that are none of your concern.
- Another typical example is that you keep having great new ideas and start new projects for them, without finishing the existing projects. This may cause a chaotic work pattern where existing agreements will not be honoured.
- Being autonomous in your thinking can be a disadvantage at work. By focusing strongly on the contents of an issue, and not considering hierarchy or existing procedures, there is a chance that colleagues or managers will feel offended.
- Another familiar example is where you have a proposal or idea that can be of advantage to your employer. Often, you are convinced that this will have significant benefits and you are very determined and strong-minded when expressing this idea. And because you see this as the most logical conclusion from the available facts, you will not be inclined to back down on this. People will see this as being pushy and it will generate a lot of resistance in your colleagues and managers.
- On the other hand, it's possible that people reject your proposal and you have a lot of difficulty in understanding why. When you keep mentioning the proposal and keep looking for ways to get it implemented, this difference of opinion can lead to a real conflict.

A cold and rational conflict

More research needs to be done into the differences between conflicts at work of gifted people and those of other employees. Results of the first studies show some significant differences. Oftentimes the issue can be labeled as a 'cold' conflict: a difference of opinion in business matters and not in emotional matters. And it doesn't present itself in open confrontations, but develops in the background during an extended period of time. The communication is rational and focuses on the issue itself. It is often based on dissatisfaction with the working agreements and processes in an organisation.

After a while the conflict can start to eat away at the confidence of the employee, and cause increased stress levels, depression and absenteeism. Some gifted employees will be ill for a long time, get burnt out, lose their jobs or are no longer able to work at all.

What to do to prevent conflicts at work?

A gifted person can do a lot to prevent work conflicts. Here are a number of recommendations:

Being aware of and discussing issues

- No change without awareness. Being gifted often has a big impact on how you function at work. Be aware of this and try to map out your pitfalls as much as possible. How much have they contributed to starting the conflict?
- Be clear about what you need as an employee, preferably early on. Many gifted employees feel best in an environment where the procedure you follow is not the most important thing, but the outcome of your actions. And room for innovation and being creative is very helpful.
- Practising and coaching can help to increase awareness of the pitfalls of your giftedness. If you need help with this, then don't hesitate to ask an occupational health physician or other expert for assistance. The IHBV website offers a list of counselors that have experience with gifted adults.
- Whenever possible, try to avoid that a difference of opinion will reach the level of a conflict. Don't wait too long asking for help or mediation.
- Some managers will be open to your giftedness and may offer to adjust your job description to your talents. Before this can be done you need to thoroughly assess whether this is possible.
- Or you have a manager that is not at all open to your giftedness. Or you find that the culture of the company really doesn't suit you at all. In that case you need to ask yourself whether you want to continue in this job (and at what cost to yourself).

Communicating in a different way

- Ask your colleagues open questions about the problem you have found, instead of offering an analysis and solution on the spot. Asking questions will help you gain insight into the thinking processes of your colleagues. Try to adjust your communication to the answers you get.
- Don't try to convince your colleagues that you are the expert and will explain to them how the whole thing works. Try to give them some room to respond to your ideas.
- Sometimes there are valid reasons not to use an idea (or not yet), even when it doesn't seem logical. Listen to the other person's input.
- Give your colleagues the time and opportunity to follow your train of thought and assess if it's correct or not. This way you avoid that they will feel pressured by you.
- Realise that at work it's not always about who's right. Other interests could be important as well. Try to prevent your colleagues losing face or having their reputation damaged.