

From Challenge to Resource: Coaching for the Gifted and Consulting for Giftedness in Organizations

Today more than ever before, organizations demand flexibility of their members and leaders. Business models are questioned and modified before they are ready for implementation. Agility and out-of-the-box-thinking are the over-used buzzwords in many companies. In this world of ever-increasing speed, a large group of people is looking for security and stability, secretly waiting for some peace and quiet.

Organizations answer this discrepancy with elaborate programs in order to motivate their members for permanent change and increased innovation.

At the same time, there is a group of people who are especially able to question the status-quo and think disruptively; Typically, these individuals

- Will find repetition and routine tiring,
- Are naturally curious and have a high energy for learning,
- Can quickly understand complex and latent connections,
- Thrive on challenges,
- Question information, identify weaknesses and unresolved issues,
- Do not shy away from pointing out what they believe is obvious,
- Work at a fast pace on anything they find interesting,
- And will then prove to be an impatient driving force.

Cognitively gifted people often display the above-mentioned skills, so you would expect them to be the predestined leaders of change everywhere. And yet: A considerable number of these talents remains undetected or stuck somewhere in their career – often labeled “difficult”, “arrogant”, “antisocial”, “impossible to lead” or “unacceptable as a leader”.



How come? Why do organizations often seem unable to tap into this potential of the cognitively gifted?

The traits that often come with giftedness can prove to be wonderful resources, if used correctly. If used excessively or at the wrong moment, they can also be a source of irritation and will then disturb, provoke and polarize. In any case, cognitively gifted individuals usually operate at a very high intensity and speed; they will produce an impact that their environment can neither negate nor escape. On the one hand, organizations are therefore highly invested in retaining gifted people, on the other hand, these talents are often tiresome and challenging.

How can organizations successfully meet this challenge?

In order to answer this question, one needs to understand when individuals are able to unfold their potential and when they will appear a square peg in an environment of round holes. Highly gifted people often have an asynchronous personal development: They oscillate between the intellectual world of adults and the emotional world of their age peers. They think and act differently from children, teenagers, and young adults of the same age which means that there is often only limited opportunity to learn and practice relevant social competencies. If there is no touch-point where the worlds meet on a par (e.g. in sports) and there is a lack of social experience and learning, integrating into organizational systems and cultures can be a challenge: The impact stays restricted to the field of expertise but many resources remain untapped by the organization as a result.



Often, if cognitively gifted people are expected to successfully lead a team, manage a project, or work in a team, they therefore have to catch up on certain typical fields of learning and development:

- Handle adequately their own high expectations of themselves but also of colleagues, their boss, and their staff.
- Recognize and adapt decision criteria apart from logic and intellect.
- Accept and learn to use political reflection and action in modern organizations by consciously allowing nuances and gray zones.
- Set clear priorities and stay focused – instead of enthusiastically starting new projects before current ones are finished.
- Set boundaries to the extent of personal engagement in order to stay healthy and not burn out.

Coaching is an effective and proven format to support this kind of personal learning and development. As a member of the biggest global organizations for gifted people (Mensa und Intertel), I have studied this phenomenon for many years and have developed and specialized my coaching approach to this group.

What are the specific requirements coaching for the cognitively gifted needs to answer to?

There are four essential success factors in coaching gifted individuals. The approach must allow the coachee to:

1. Work at their own quick pace and their own complexity – no ifs, ands, or buts,
2. Lay down their cognitive weapons,
3. Explore heretofore underrated alternative ways of action,
4. Develop new strategies for individual challenges – from changing perspective to communicating ideas, objectives, and plans.



Based on many years of experience, my coaching and consulting is customized for:

- Gifted individuals looking for a coach and partner for dialogue on a par.
- Companies looking for a coach to support those intellectually potent talents and leaders who struggle to unfold their full potential in the system and culture.
- Organizations searching to build systematic HR-instruments directed at supporting and tapping into the potential of the cognitively gifted.

What are the essential insights?

Cognitively gifted individuals – beyond their fields of expertise – offer a number of resources that are currently highly relevant to organizations. As a result of their talents, these individuals are surpassingly willing and able to learn. Coaching that has been customized to their specific needs will, in my experience, be readily adopted as an effective and efficient support for personal development and learning.

Focusing the gifted with targeted coaching and other possible formats is therefore an essential instrument in retaining these talents and successfully integrating all of their resources into the organization.

