

WORLDTALENTWEB NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER OF THE **WORLD GIFTEDNESS CENTER**

ISSUE 18 | JUNE 2022



WORLD GIFTEDNESS CENTER

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Letter from the Editors: Giftedness through the Lifespan

Jennie Quinn & Penina Kiss

Welcome to the latest edition of the WTW newsletter, which is thematically focused on adult giftedness and talent. There is much to celebrate in the research and insights shared by our expert authors in this month's publication. In keeping with the theme, we thought it might be nice to open with a ceremony we uniquely celebrate here in Sydney each year to acknowledge the gifts and talents of our local artists.

Australia has recently celebrated the illustrious winner of our annual Archibald Prize, a highly respected and prestigious visual arts award that attracts a range of gifted and talented artists around the country. Since 1921, the competition has been coordinated by the Gallery of New South Wales and names the winning artist whose portrait painting best represents any prominent Australian in the field of Art, Science or Politics. With so many creative recipients having received the highly anticipated award over the years, the 2022 winner, Blak Douglas, was the second Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to receive the accolade, much to the country's delight. This competition has been purposefully designed for our gifted and talented adult population, as have many other elite ceremonies such as the globally recognised Nobel Prize or the Olympic Games. While these specific competitions might seem a bit removed from our own realities, many gifted adults, (both aware or unaware of their potential), fill our everyday workplaces and encounter vastly different experiences which influence their performance, mental health and wellbeing.

We recently interviewed four past high school students who are currently in their early years of university. As they independently reflected on their childhood and adolescent life experiences at home and school, each of them mentioned two common themes - disappointment in the lack of creative freedom and autonomy they endured whilst at school. Each is currently thriving along their chosen pathways in life. They have found like-minded peers more easily than at school and they're following ambitious dreams for the futures they are shaping through STEM-based tertiary education and being socially active in their local communities. How might they find the adult world of 'full-time work' when the time comes for them to more frequently contribute to the global economy over the next 50 years? The category of work they choose to pursue is what will make the difference between those who continue to thrive and those who hold on to survive.

There are still so many questions that arise from the way in which society strategically capitalises on the gifts and talents of our adult population. Sometimes the answer is obvious, such as what we see in the extravagant public life and innovatively industrious work of Elon Musk, and sometimes it's not so apparent as our days benignly roll on. Imagine harnessing the potential in all our students and developing the talent we so desperately need in medicine, engineering, climate change, politics, education and so on. Imagine what could be exponentially accomplished on this finite planet with such talent! Imagine.

Combined, our contributing authors have dedicated years of work to understanding the complexities of what it means to live life as a gifted individual through the lifespan.

Dr Maggie Brown discusses her desire to build knowledge about gifted adults and talent development by bringing people together and networking globally with others who share this passion. To complement Maggie's research on adult giftedness, John Thompson outlines a star-studded line up of speakers who will be presenting at the upcoming 2022 Mensa Foundation Colloquium.

In the first of a four-part series, Dr David Rempel and Catalina Beckhoff discuss factors that enable gifted employees to fulfill their potential within organizations.

Finally, Imi Yo shares her thoughts on unique challenges faced by gifted individuals in their career paths and how increasing self-understanding and awareness sets the foundation for deep acceptance.

We trust you will enjoy the insights shared this month. This edition may even inspire you to be more acutely aware of the cognitive and affective needs of the gifted adults with whom you interact with each day. Perhaps it might also ignite your imagination.

Jennie & Penina



Gifted Adults: Emerging Interests and Questions

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As a psychotherapist and a psychology researcher I am passionately interested in the lived experiences of gifted adults throughout the lifespan. Until very recently, this interest was considered unusual in giftedness studies. Historically, most of the literature on giftedness and talent development focused on models and approaches for gifted children. Relatively little is written about the experiences of gifted adults beyond the topics related to domain-specific achievement. Contemporary scholars interested in understanding more about the lives of gifted adults call for more study (Fiedler, 2015, Mazzoli-Smith, 2014; Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

I have been working to bring people together to build knowledge about gifted adults and talent development across the lifespan, connecting globally with others who share this interest. As part of this effort, I conducted a review of scholarly literature specifically related to gifted adults (Brown, 2021) extending the earlier work of Rinn and Bishop (2015) to include work published after 2015 and surveying qualitative and phenomenological studies not included in their review. I then examined the different research interests of experts currently working with gifted adults (Brown, Peterson & Rawlinson, 2020; Brown & Peterson, 2022). The study used a three-round Delphi method (Linstone & Turoff, 1975) to collect data from a multidisciplinary panel of 76 experts working with gifted adults (applied and academic) from 14 countries. Additionally, I conducted a Focus Group study with 15 gifted adults from eight countries to identify key areas of interest from their perspectives (Brown & Peterson, 2020). I am also fortunate to present at many conferences and events, which allows me to engage directly with a diverse range of people interested in (and, in some instances, *not* interested) in the topic of gifted adults.

From my perspective, it seems that a grassroots movement to build knowledge about gifted adults is gaining momentum. A variety of stakeholders are asking new questions about experiences in adult contexts, and important conversations are taking place. However, this interest in experiences across the lifespan is not yet reflected in discipline-specific academic publications, nor has there been a flurry of research on the topic, perhaps understandably.

Complexity

Topics related to the life experiences of gifted adults do not fit neatly within traditional disciplinary boundaries, and there are challenges associated with studying what can be an extremely complex and multifaceted subject. Adult contexts – our roles, where we spend our time, what we are able and not able to do, our goals - change and vary across time, location, and in response to new circumstances. And, of course, individuals develop and grow. As adults, we experience personal, social, political, economic, technological and cultural shifts -

some so unexpected and profound that we may feel transformed, and others more gradual as we mature. Add to that the inherent heterogeneity of a 'population of adults', and it's easy to understand why research and academic literature about gifted adults is scarce, despite growing interest in the topic.

Challenges

To further muddy the waters, attempts to build knowledge about gifted adults are hindered by historic controversies in gifted-related fields. Debates about definitions, and disagreements around the use of words like *gifted* and *talent* are longstanding and ongoing, as summarized by Sternberg (2019). Worrell and colleagues (Worrell, et al., 2019) review and discuss other tensions in giftedness studies, including the relative importance of biological endowment and environment, entrenched views and practices such as using IQ and other single psychometric measures to select research participants, and the impasse around use of terms often found in the gifted education field (Ambrose et al., 2012; Dai, 2018) and intelligence research (Davidson, 2012; Simonton & Song, 2009). Problematic legacies and disputes in related fields can certainly complicate attempts by those interested in gifted adults to find a starting point of common ground.

Finally, concepts and methods used to build knowledge about talent development, giftedness and, with perhaps some exceptions, intelligence, were not specifically designed to answer questions about adults in complex and changing contexts. As I have argued elsewhere (Brown & Peterson, 2022) new methods and approaches have not yet been developed, and it may take time for scholars in gifted related fields to appreciate that old concepts are not adequate for answering new questions, and to evolve ideas and methods that are more 'fit for purpose'.

Current Interest

Despite these challenges and the sparse and scattered literature, interest in gifted adults appears to be growing, and may be contributing to the early development of a new field of study. Kuhn (1996) describes this as a phase where new interests are responses to problems and ideas which fall outside of the usual purview of established disciplines. In this article I describe current interest in the topic and highlight what appear to be key issues, priorities and questions of interest to four stakeholder groups. While some of this may seem familiar to certain readers, I also hope to engage the attention and curiosity of others who may not yet be acquainted with this emerging area of study, to potentially add new voices and ideas to future conversations.

Stakeholder Groups and Their Interests

Based on a combination of my research, reviews of literature, social media and international conference proceedings, and personal communications, I identify four broad (and often overlapping) stakeholder groups:

1. Professionals working within and across a range of disciplines
2. Advocates for specific sub-groups
3. Gifted adults and their support networks
4. Scholars.

Some Common Issues and Questions

There are a number of somewhat interrelated issues and questions that are of interest to most of these stakeholders. Overall, there appears to be growing interest in substantive real-life experiences and issues, as reflected in the results of the Delphi Study (Table 1) and the literature review (Table 2). Related to that, there are questions about how to support the general health and positive development of gifted adults, what that looks like in different contexts, why it matters and to whom, and when and how to intervene or provide support.

As people engage with these issues, questions arise about what it actually means to live with qualities and experiences that are generally understood to reflect intelligence or giftedness. Related to that are meta-level questions about what is actually meant by intelligence or giftedness at different stages of life, and more generally some direct questioning of historic conceptual understandings and their applicability to adults.

As with many grassroots movements and emerging fields, running alongside these questions is the issue of how to build knowledge and raise awareness. There appears to be a general shift toward a systemic or ecological lifespan approach., a recognition of complexity and a move away from unidimensional constructs. Notably, this shift is less obvious in the scholarly literature where some researchers' interests tend to be more specialized or narrowly focused.

Table 1: Areas of Interest to the Delphi Panel Members

Area of interest	Number of experts interested
Mental health or related service provision	36
Self-awareness or gifted identity	30
Relationships	25
Occupation/work contexts	25
Public awareness	23
Domain-related achievement	17
Age-related issues	16
Neurological factors	9

Table 2: Summary of Themes and Subthemes Identified in the Literature Survey (Brown, 2021, Chapter 4).

Theme	Sub theme (if any)
Whether or not gifted children become gifted adults ^a	
Family of origin ^a	
Effects of early educational experiences ^a	Acceleration and advanced coursework Enrichment
Characteristics of gifted adults ^a	Emotional sensitivity and intensity Perceptions of giftedness
Career ^a	Educational and occupational success Satisfaction in chosen career
Career and family interaction ^a	Unique experiences of women
Life goals, satisfaction and well-being	
Talent development of women	
Gifted university students	University and College students Gifted African American males at University
Psychology of gifted adults	Over-excitability
Mental health and well-being	Counselling ^a and therapy Non-clinical research
Gifted workers	
Psychometric assessment	
SMPY follow-up studies	

^a = theme or sub theme also named in Rinn and Bishop (2015)

Specific Stakeholder Groups and Their Interests

There are also some topics or issues that are of more interest to a particular stakeholder group and/or are highly specialized. Below I describe each of the four groups and identify some of the key issues and questions each is currently seeking to address.

1. Professionals Across a range of Disciplines

Interest in gifted adults is not specific to one professional group or discipline. Rather, people from many professions are beginning to ask questions, and amongst those interested, there are numerous disciplinary influences. Interestingly, many of the people currently asking questions about gifted adults engage in professional work that is outside of the usual gifted-related academic or professional circles.

Mental Health Clinicians

In particular, there is strong interest from mental health professionals – psychologists, therapists, counsellors, life coaches and, to a lesser extent, psychiatrists. For example, of the 76 members of an international Delphi Panel consisting of a broad range of experts currently studying and working with gifted adults, 24 identified as being professionally involved in areas related to mental health and wellbeing.

Interest from mental health practitioners is also seen across a range of relevant social media platforms, gifted-related websites and popular books (Brown, 2021; Brown & Peterson, 2020). Similarly, many of the speakers at major conferences and symposia related to the topic of gifted adults or giftedness across the lifespan are either clinicians and/or work professionally. For example, the speaker line-up for an upcoming gifted-related conference (<https://www.sengifted.org>) includes fifteen mental health or wellness professionals speaking about topics related to experiences of gifted adults.

Notably, current topics of interest related to the health and wellbeing of gifted adults (Table 3) are not ring fenced within any main profession, discipline or even set of disciplines. Rather, it appears that the questions being raised reflect a holistic and contextual view of health and wellbeing, likely requiring a transdisciplinary approach.

Table 3: Some Key Issues and Questions Related to Gifted Adults' Health and Wellbeing

Issue or Question	Examples of more specific interests
Do gifted adults experience problems with their mental health?	Questions about potential misdiagnoses, loneliness, and context-specific stressors (<i>e.g.</i> decreased mobility in elderhood). Possible comorbidities.
What factors contribute to health and well-being at different stages of life, and in different contexts?	Questions about the impact of emerging adulthood and aging on wellbeing. The benefits and risks of a focus on high achievement. What does health and wellbeing look and feel like to gifted adults?
Long term effects of being identified (or not identified) as being gifted in childhood.	In what ways does early identification help and/or hinder wellbeing later in life? What are the impacts of being identified as gifted later in life?
What are the interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics of gifted adults?	Specific interests in emotional and other sensitivities, social skills and intense focus, and the impacts on wellbeing.
Absence of a link between clinical practise and research.	Clinicians are concerned that standard clinical practises and interventions have not been shown to be effective with gifted adults. Also, new or modified practises specific to this population are not evidence based.
Questions about the importance of relationships across the lifespan.	What relationships are important to wellbeing (contextual and at different stages of life)? What are potential obstacles to forming and sustaining healthy relationships?

Career/occupation Related Professions

As can be seen below (Table 4), there is interest from people working in employment-related professions. Thirteen of the 76 members of the Delphi Panel identified themselves as working as career coaches or counsellors, or in occupational medicine. Given the relative importance of employment, careers and vocations in adult life, it is hardly surprising that this is an area of interest. Perhaps what is more surprising is the apparent lack of interest in this particular topic historically.

Published research has focussed almost exclusively on *achievement* in occupations or vocations, with scant attention paid to the actual lived experience of gifted workers or managers, or to their colleagues and employers. An exception is in the Netherlands, and in pockets of Scandinavia, where occupational health professionals and some researchers have worked hard to both understand and bring attention to job-related experiences and issues (c.f. Nauta & Ronner, 2008, 2016; Persson, 2009; van de Ven, 2022). Interestingly, there is no evidence of historic or, for that matter, current research interest in how gifted adults experience unemployment or retirement. While some members of the Delphi Panel interested in gifted elders raised questions about retirement, it seems that issues related to 'not working' are not high priority for occupational specialists.

Conversations with gifted adults and occupational specialists suggests that questions and issues about gifted adults at work are now emerging, and that this will likely become a priority area for those interested in gifted adults. For now, however, employment-related professionals working with gifted adults are scattered geographically, and there are no obvious opportunities for collaboration.

Table 4: Some Key Issues and Questions of interest to Career/occupation related professionals.

Issue or Question	Examples of more specific interests
How can organizations and employers design workplaces that support gifted employees to thrive?	What are the benefits and risks of self-identifying as being 'gifted' at the workplace? What accommodations or adaptations support productivity? Longevity? Achievement? Satisfaction?
Qualities and characteristics of gifted adults and potential impact on employment/career	Specific interests in emotional and other sensitivities, interpersonal skills, intense focus, complex thinking and other cognitive skills. Do gifted adults have particular leadership and relational styles?
Career choice and direction	Career planning taking into account high ability and personal characteristics. Avoiding boredom and conflict. Questions about how to measure career satisfaction across the lifespan.
Peak performance and achievement	Barriers and affordances in specific occupations and vocations.

Results of the Delphi Study and the literature review suggest that, globally, there are a handful of university lecturers or similar academic staff interested in the experiences of gifted adults in post-secondary (higher) education contexts. The apparent lack of interest by those working in higher education is surprising for two reasons. First, of course, is that historic and current interest in childhood giftedness is strongly education-focussed. Second, many of those working with gifted adults have academic or professional backgrounds in gifted education or talent development in children and adolescents (nearly half of the Delphi Panel members had significant experience in those broad areas). So, despite being aware of the obvious links between giftedness and learning environments, there is no evidence that those working with adults are extending ideas about gifted education into post-secondary or lifelong learning contexts.

Furthermore, as with those working in occupation-related areas, it seems that the few professionals interested in gifted adults in higher education have yet to collaborate significantly to share ideas and build

knowledge. As a result, interests and issues are idiosyncratic, and relate to the lived experiences of specific disadvantaged (minority and/or low income) gifted university students (c.f. Bonner, 2001; Hébert, 2018; Millward et al., 2016).

2. Advocates for Specific Sub-groups

As mentioned in the introduction, interest in the experiences of gifted adults can be viewed as emerging from grassroots initiatives. As with other bottom-up developments, questions about gifted adults are usually responses to problems or issues that affect specific people or groups of people. For example, sub-groups of particular interest to Delphi Panel members are shown below (Table 5).

Table 5: Sub-groups of Gifted Adults of Interest to the Experts

Named sub-group of interest
Employees
Elders
Women
University students
Executives/managers
Gifted parents
Highly/profoundly gifted
Adults of color
Twice-exceptional adults

those working professionally, and advocates including self-advocates. Hence, current concerns and questions raised by advocates for some sub-groups such as elders, employees, managers and university students are reflected in issues of interest to the various professionals described above.

There is also growing interest from advocates who seek to gain new understanding and raise awareness of twice-exceptional adults (where giftedness may co-exist with other variances such as ADHD or ASD). This emerging interest seems to be arising from the neurodiversity movement (Singer, 1999) that acknowledges natural differences in human brains, and the resultant variations of human functionality. Those involved advocate (often *self-advocate*) for better understanding across all contexts of life. Specific issues and questions found frequently in online forums, blogs and conference presentations include raising awareness about twice-exceptionality among the general public, gifted adults themselves, and medical or health professions, and investigating interventions, modifications and accommodations that support optimal functioning across various contexts such as work and interpersonal relationships. There are also many questions being asked about assessment (in some cases 'diagnosis') of twice exceptionality in adults, but as yet there is little published research on the topic.

3. Scholars and Researchers

Overall, the range of interests and diversity of approaches to research found in academic publications (Table 2) and amongst scholars participating in the Delphi study (Table 1) makes it difficult to provide a coherent description of who is currently studying the topic. Specific topics of interest to researchers may eventually align with the broad field of psychology, but this is far from certain. What is clear is that gifted adult research is a sparsely investigated area of interest that

does not yet have what could be called a canon of literature or a 'disciplinary home'. Amongst Delphi Panel members, I identify four broad disciplinary influences: Mental Health and Wellness, Gifted Studies (children), Talent Development (adults or lifespan) and Occupational Studies. Most scholars within the panel work primarily within one of those discipline areas.

Many researcher' interests in the experiences of gifted adults match those of mental health practitioners and occupation specialists as described above. However there are two notable exceptions: domain-related achievement and neural correlates of giftedness.

The results of the Delphi study and the literature review show that some scholars are interested in investigating domain- related achievement (or under-achievement), using longitudinal and retrospective methods to identify, for example, predictive behaviours, long-term impacts of educational programmes, and the intersection of domain characteristics and developmental challenges for specific age periods. These interests fit within either a talent development or gifted education approach, and do not specifically explore issues related to gifted adults' lived experiences. There are also a number of scholars interested specifically in exploring neural correlates of giftedness across the lifespan and at different developmental periods. This is a very new area of study, and appears to be speculative, with little evidence of interest or robust study to be found in published academic literature. However, interest in these and similar topics is more evident in online presentations, and conference presentations.

The different interests and disciplinary influences described here notwithstanding, it is important to note that, with very few exceptions (e.g., Karami & Ghahremani, 2016, 2017; Moltzen, 2011), scholars interested in gifted adults have a strongly Western bias. That is, published research is dominated by Western views of giftedness. Where scholars and researchers are interested in the experiences of gifted adults from *other* cultural, racial, or ethnic groups, the work has been with minority groups *living within* Westernized countries. It remains to be seen if there will be a view of gifted adults beyond a Western lens.

4. Gifted Adults

While perhaps not immediately apparent from reviews of academic literature, a look at recently published books, social media sites, blogs, conference presenters and online events shows strong and increasing interest from gifted adults and their personal networks, family and friends. Furthermore, large organizations such as IHBV in the Netherlands (<https://ihbv.nl/>), SENG in the USA (<https://www.sengifted.org/>) and the American MENSA foundation (<https://www.mensafoundation.org/>) now provide opportunities for members and non-members to engage with topics about giftedness in adult contexts. Based on my experience with these and other organizations such as The European Council for High Ability (ECHA) (<https://echa-site.eu/>), the Gifted Development Center (<https://www.gifteddevelopment.org/>) and the World Giftedness Center (<https://www.wgc.ae/>), as well as hundreds of individuals, I can confidently say that gifted adults are key stakeholders, and will undoubtedly continue to drive interest, raise issues and questions, and set priorities for both knowledge building and action in the future.

As with others interested in the topic, gifted adults are asking questions and raising awareness about substantive real-life issues related to their health, relationships, careers, parenting, and aging. Additionally, there are some interests and ideas that appear to be unique to this stakeholder group and are worth noting (Table 6).

Table 6: Some Unique Issues and Questions of Interest to Gifted Adults

Issue or Question	Examples of more specific interests
How to (or if to) self-identify as being gifted in various contexts.	What are the benefits and risks of self-identifying (or not) in relationships and at work? What words and concepts are useful? "Gifted" stigma. Is late assessment helpful possible?
Uncertainty and ambivalence about prioritizing high-status performance and achievement goals.	Redefining 'success' and 'failure/underachievement' in different contexts and at different stages of life. How to attain work/life balance. Refocus on personally meaningful experiences.
Identity Formation	Impacts of transition away from school environment and loss of 'gifted child' identity. Shame associated with failing to live up to the ideals of a gifted designation. Lack of awareness (self and public) and impact on self-concept in adulthood.
How to form close and meaningful relationships	Issues related to loneliness and 'difference'. Do gifted adults 'mask' problems? How to achieve a balance between intense individual focus and need for meaningful connections.

Conclusion and Moving Forward

Interest in gifted adults as an emerging field of study, is still in its infancy. As can be seen, current stakeholders are interested in real-life issues across a variety of adult contexts, and many of the issues and questions are outside of the usual gifted studies and talent development conceptual frameworks. However, a distinct conceptual or research framework for addressing issues of interest to the various stakeholders may still be a long way off. In other words, we have yet to develop methods or concepts that are 'fit for purpose'.

One implication is that the study of gifted adults may feel fragmented, with multiple and potentially conflicting views, priorities and even definitions. It is not yet clear whether existing concepts and methods in talent development studies will usefully address some or all of the issues of interest. Nor is it clear how (or if) ideas from fields such as gifted education, cognitive psychology, counselling or occupational health can be usefully applied to gifted adults.

Ultimately the value of any approach, new or existing, will be determined by its ability to offer new insights on the issues identified here. Meanwhile, interest and enthusiasm for the topic of gifted adults is growing, and discussions like this are no longer sequestered in small rooms at conferences about children. It's an exciting and creative time to be talking about gifted adults.

Conversations are powerful. They can turn us toward different definitions and different pathways. They help us look at complicated matters from different perspectives as we turn them this way and that striving to construct a new understanding

(D. Rader in hooks, 2010, p. 32)

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Giftedness Across the Lifespan: A More Complete Picture Mensa Foundation Colloquium 2022

John Thompson
Mensa Foundation Philanthropy Director

What is the Mensa Foundation?

The Mensa Foundation is a charitable organization focused on intelligence and giftedness in the community at large. Our programs and resources are (with a few exceptions) open to the public, and are not restricted to Mensa members. Our mission supports two of the three stated purposes shared by all Mensa organizations:

- To identify and foster intelligence for the benefit of humanity
- To encourage research into the nature, characteristics, and uses of intelligence

We pursue these goals, in partnership with American Mensa and/or Mensa International where appropriate, with resources donated by Mensans and non-Mensans alike.

Some Background to this Event

The Mensa Foundation's first annual colloquium was held in 1980 with the goal of bringing together individuals to consider and discuss topics of importance to society. Since then, we have explored a wide range of topics including brain health, consciousness, and genetics. The 2022 Colloquium examines another topic of importance to society – giftedness and intelligence across the lifespan.

Intelligence and giftedness have historically been considered using a psychometric perspective, often within educational contexts. The 2022 Colloquium aims to shift and broaden this perspective to one that incorporates lived experiences at the different ages and stages, and within contexts important to people's lives today. It will also serve as a galvanizing event for the Mensa Foundation's new strategic direction that seeks to build knowledge and to support intelligence and giftedness.

The Mensa Foundation wants to better the world around us through a greater understanding and support of intelligence and giftedness across the lifespan. By taking this broader view, we encourage society to embrace individual differences, and to empower people to reach their full potential.

This broadened goal is a direct result of a crystalizing experience within the Mensa Foundation itself (Walters, Gardner, 1984). Over the last four years, members of the Board thought carefully about the nuances of intelligence and giftedness throughout life, including the obvious fact that gifted children turn into gifted adults, and gifted adults mature and become gifted elders.

We know that everyone experiences life in their own unique way. Gifted individuals are no exception. And there is growing awareness that intellectually gifted people's experiences across the various contexts of life may sometimes be outside of the norm. The Mensa Foundation therefore made a decision to do whatever is necessary to build knowledge that supports intelligence and giftedness across the lifespan. The 2022 Colloquium is our important initial step towards this end.

The Colloquium

We are excited to offer this first-of-its kind event, bringing together five internationally recognized experts to discuss intelligence and giftedness across the entire lifespan. And we're very pleased to make it available to the general public (you don't need to be a Mensa member to participate) live in Nevada and also globally via live-stream and recordings.

Throughout this day-long symposium-style event, each of our esteemed speakers will share their wealth of expertise on particular ages, stages or contexts. Together, we will cover the 'complete picture' - a unique lifespan approach to the topic of intelligence and giftedness!

Our Presenters



Dr. David Yun Dai from the University of Albany is internationally known for his expertise in the areas of gifted education, talent development and creativity. David will present his Evolving Complexity Theory (ECT) – a new model that attempts to capture important elements of individual development including how each person experiences, represents, and constructs the world and ultimately develops their own self.



Rianne van de Ven from the Netherlands, is globally recognized as a professional coach for gifted adults. Drawing on her extensive work with gifted adults and her personal experiences, Rianne will identify common challenges gifted adults face in the workplace and discuss how to gain satisfaction in this important context of life.



Dr. Maggie Brown is an internationally acclaimed psychotherapist, psychologist, lecturer and researcher from New Zealand. Maggie will discuss emerging trends and interests in the topic of gifted adults with a particular focus on mental health and wellness in adulthood. In doing so, Maggie will bring to light some of the challenges faced by gifted adults, and will start an important conversation about how to live a life that matters.



Dr. Ellen D. Fiedler, Professor Emerita at Northeastern Illinois University and international author of *Bright Adults: Uniqueness and Belonging Across the Lifespan*, will present real-life examples and offer insights into the complex world of gifted adults. She'll provide a compass for enhancing life at every stage of life, with a special emphasis on issues for those gifted adults who are age 50 and beyond.



Dr. Tracy Cross will serve as the host of the event. We are honored to have Tracy at this event, and he will provide a valuable through-line between each speaker's presentation, with commentary based on his many years of research. Tracy is the recipient of the 2009 Mensa Foundation Lifetime Achievement award, holds an endowed chair position, the Jody and Layton Smith Professor of Psychology and Gifted Education, and serves as the Executive Director of the Center for Gifted Education and the Institute for Research on the Suicide of Gifted Students at William & Mary.

The Colloquium will culminate in a panel discussion including all of our experts. In-depth questions and ideas about intelligence and giftedness across the lifespan will be explored. Our participants will be encouraged to join in this important new conversation.

Join us!

You can be part of this important new conversation by attending the 2022 Mensa Foundation Colloquium on July 5, 2022, either in person in Sparks, Nevada or from anywhere in the world via livestream. The event will also be recorded. Learn more about the event and register at <https://bit.ly/3LZdE1x>.

The atmosphere at our Colloquium is a friendly one, where you can meet new people and catch up with friends, network and build relationships. It's an opportunity to contribute to an important and timely conversation about intelligence, giftedness, and living a life that matters. We hope you will join us.

Some interesting reading:

<https://www.mensafoundation.org/about-the-mensa-foundation/foundation-voices/foundations-50-year-history-ponders-growing-support/>

<https://www.mensafoundation.org/about-the-mensa-foundation/foundation-strategic-plan/>

The Crystalizing Experience: Discovering an Intellectual Gift – Joseph Walters, Howard Gardner <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED254544.pdf>



9 Career Challenges Faced by Gifted Adults

Imi Lo

Psychotherapist & Author
Eggshell Therapy & Coaching

Loneliness, boredom, and attracting envy are common experiences.

Gifted individuals often face unique challenges in their career paths. Many are not sure what they want to do with their lives. They are also more likely to change careers several times. Highly gifted individuals often have high expectations and tend to be perfectionistic, leading to difficulty finding a work environment that meets their expectations. They may also find it challenging to connect with most people. Here are some common challenges for the gifted on their career trajectory:

1. Finding It Difficult to Settle in One Career

You may find it hard to choose just one career path as a multi-talented, multi-passionate person. Gifted individuals can often do well in many different fields. This can be both a blessing and a curse. For example, you may find that you are good at science but also like writing. Or, you may be great at math, but you also love art. The downside of being multi-talented is that it can be hard to settle in a career.

Furthermore, intellectually gifted individuals are often pushed into stereotypical career fields at a young age, including medicine, engineering, the law, or research. These may not be ultimately fulfilling for you.

Due to the unconscious guilt of being different, you may also feel like you need to conform to society's expectations and not stand out too much. This can lead to you choosing a similar career to what others have done instead of following your passion.

2. Emotional Intensity and Misunderstandings

If a child is identified as a prodigy at an early age, the entire focus of people around them may be on developing that one talent. This comes at the expense of other aspects of their development, such as emotional regulation skills. Lopsided development is especially a problem when a gifted person has not yet honed the skills to manage their emotional intensity and overexcitability.

Others may expect you to be more mature than you are. They may pathologize your passionate quality and natural intensity as immaturity or malice. This can lead to social isolation and underachievement, both in adolescence and as an adult.

3. Being Faster Than Most

The gifted often have a difficult time relating to others. You assimilate information faster and can correlate information quickly. You may feel

like you are constantly swimming against the current, trying to explain things that are obvious to you but confusing to others. For example, when others in a meeting are still discussing things, you have already drifted away to the next idea on your mind. The problem is that your colleagues may interpret your body language as a lack of interest or focus and an inability to work as a team.

4. Boredom and Feeling Trapped

The gifted usually are unable to thrive in a monotonous environment and need stimulation to be productive. Managers would likely fail to realize that you prefer to work at your own pace and require room to contemplate concepts and new ideas. You need a high degree of autonomy to thrive. However, most office environments don't function that way. In the absence of a conducive environment, you may experience self-doubt and dissonance.

5. Loneliness

Your lack of interest in participating in small talk can result in your colleagues perceiving you as an "outlier." In addition, the gifted often have a solid moral compass. Always wanting to do the "right thing" can bring you into conflict with colleagues and superiors. Your unique qualities can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially if you don't have a support system of like-minded people.

6. Being Seen as a Threat to Authority

A gifted person has the capacity to view things differently. However, your ideas might intimidate managers who are insecure or not open to input. You likely respond well to logic and would find instructions that do not make sense to you challenging. However, when you are not convinced, your analytical mind kicks into overdrive, which can be viewed as a threat to authority.

7. Attracting Envy

In many ways, the gifted are envied by those around them. Since you process thoughts faster than most others, you communicate with a force that few can comprehend. However, this also makes you a target for bullies and detractors who can't understand why you cannot just "keep your head down" and fit in.

Though you have the emotional and intellectual acumen for a higher position in the organization, others may prefer a more conventionally competent person. People may frame you as being distracted, unpredictable, or disruptive, and someone who performs better as an individual than as a team.

In such a scenario, your prospects of getting a promotion might be adversely impacted.

8. Perfectionism and Fear of Failure

Studies have found that gifted people are more likely to suffer from the fear of failure than their nongifted peers. This fear can lead to a condition known as imposter syndrome, in which you doubt your own abilities and feel like you are constantly pretending to be something you are not. The fear of failure can be debilitating and lead to low self-esteem and underachievement. Gifted people who feel like they can't live up to others' expectations may also avoid challenging tasks or give up on pursuits they once loved.

9. Being Prone to Burnout

Your empathic quality and emotional sensitivities make you more in tune with other people's feelings, and you may find it unbearable to witness injustice and bullying. But your deep empathy also makes you more sensitive to disharmony in a professional environment and can eventually bring emotional burnout.

Sometimes you are so obsessed with getting everything right that you cannot stop working for long hours, which can lead to burnout eventually.

Thriving as Who You Are

Many gifted people choose paths of entrepreneurship to accommodate their work styles and needs. But that may not be for everyone. In fact, it is not absolutely essential for you to have your own business, as long as you get to enjoy a degree of autonomy, exercise creativity and make an impact in whatever you do. Even if you cannot make any drastic change now, you can still learn to make the most of working in a conventional office setting. Your emotional sensitivity to the "unstated" facts and other people's feelings gives you a unique perspective. Your highly analytical mind and intellectual curiosity mean you see trends before others. You may use those insights to connect more deeply with your peers, customers, and team members.

If you feel unhappy in the current role, perhaps start by contemplating what would be more ideal for you. For example, when have you been in "flow?" In what setting do you feel more adequately stimulated and engaged? What would an ideal day, if it was all up to you, look like? When in your life have you felt more fulfilled and satisfied?

Even if it is only a little, you may start adding elements in your life that feel more congruent to you. As much as you can, shift your focus to the direction you want your career to head in, and focus on what you can control.

Increasing self-understanding and awareness sets the foundation for deep acceptance. The more you can accept who you indeed are, the more you will be able to make the best of your traits and avoid common loopholes. Although your path is not necessarily an obvious, well-worn path, it is still entirely possible for you to find an environment in which you can thrive.

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The Challenges of Undervalued Giftedness in the Workplace

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This four-part series is based on the qualitative study: What Factors Enable Gifted Employees to Fulfill their Potential within Organizations? by Catalina Beckhoff, supervised by Prof Dr David Rempel, and is meant to foster a discussion on what happens to undiscovered gifted children who enter the workforce.

Facing not only rising competitiveness among organizations, rapidly evolving technological innovations in our daily lives, and a tighter growing global economy, but with the "Covid19-Crisis" one of the biggest challenges in recent history (Bapuji et al., 2020), talented and gifted individuals are certainly highly desired. Wouldn't almost everyone agree that not only organizations and society, but furthermore humankind as a union could highly profit from nurturing the most promising talents? Don't we all hope the most wise, talented, and foreseeing human beings are leading in any form, to guarantee responsible decisions for us, as a global society? Well, while many would certainly agree on this vision and would vote in favor to identify and nurture exactly these individuals, expecting this is something the school system and our highly developed economy guaranteed. It is about time to stop being naïve and taking this as a given.

Thinking about high potentials, terms like talent and giftedness almost automatically pop up in one's mind. In fact, outstanding, highly productive, or mystically creative individuals have attracted scholars and society for thousands of years (Grinder, 1985). 150 years after Galton first described his "Theory of the Hereditary Genius" (Galton, 1891), it appears to be rather surprising that unity on the definition and conceptualization of the termini "talented" and "gifted" has yet to be found (Dai, 2018). In the Christian Occident innovations and discoveries have been seen as a rediscovery of natural phenomena created by God (Grupp & Friedrich-Nishio, 2005), while Confucius in China and Plato in Greece described "heavenly children" (Passow et al., 1993; Thomason & Qiong, 2008). In the Islamic perspective, "gifted is categorized as a bounty from Allah the Exalted to His servants. The word 'karamah' which means capabilities given by Allah to those who have greater iman and taqwa best describes this term" (Yazid, 2019). Even today, in the complexity of different giftedness theories, it appears that every giftedness approach addresses different capabilities, ranging from a purely heritable feature to including characteristics such as motivation, task commitment or concentration (Warne, 2016). Due to the chaos and wilderness among the different definitions and identification criteria, within the daily praxis, the assessment of exactly those highly desired talents remains to be rather arbitrary and highly subjective (Persson, 2017).

While we may need to accept the fact for now that there will unlikely be

one approach published soon describing all talented individuals sufficiently, many educators and hiring managers unknowingly miss one important fact: gifted and talented individuals are not necessarily found among highly motivated pupils, first row students, or among high potentials within organizations (Wood & Laycraft, 2020; Nauta & Corten, 2002). Educators, scholars, and hiring managers, who typically aim to identify the most promising talents to achieve high accomplishments in the future, may risk overlooking a tremendous potential, a far more alarming problem.

Even though some research has been devoted to the subject of underperforming pupils in the educational system, little has been described about adults or gifted employees within the work environment, yet (Angela & Caterina, 2020). The research that has been focused on gifted adults, however, shows to be largely focused on the effects of an early identification for future life accomplishments and has therefore included only a preselected study group (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). First of all, unidentified gifted pupils do not just outgrow their giftedness when moving into adult stage. Secondly, yes, it is certainly more difficult to target an unidentified and therefore hardly approachable study group in further research, for obvious reasons. In the process of pondering whether it is necessary to devote resources to exactly this special subject, we should pay attention to some important and rather new insights that have come to light within the last decades.

Applying the most well-known psycho-metric giftedness definition, about 2.2% of all employees can be defined as being intellectually gifted as they score IQ-test results of 130 or higher (Silverman & Gilman, 2020). While this number may seem rather trivial at first sight, within big organizations such as the BASF group or the Daimler group a few thousand employees theoretically score over the IQ-score cut-off point and may therefore be called intellectually gifted. Worryingly, numbers indicate that hardly any of the gifted employees are able to unleash their talents adequately, while about 20-40% of gifted adults not only show difficulties to fulfill their potential, but many even suffer from mental or physical 'unwell-being' due to experienced challenges (Corten et al., 2006).

According to a small self-questionnaire study conducted in Belgium even 80% of the gifted employees feel like they are not making full use of their potential, while 49% describe regularly suffering from 'bore-outs' because they are not challenged enough at work (Vreys et al., 2016).

Underperforming or dysfunctional gifted employees are furthermore typically either unaware of their capabilities or cannot accept them and

surprisingly often suffer from low levels of self-esteem and consequently miss a sufficient understanding of their environment (Starc, 2012). Gifted and highly gifted individuals tend to seldom meet like-minded others, especially if they have not been identified as a child which often leaves them with a feeling of being wrong or different. Learning about their experienced obstacles and challenges, as well as meeting like-minded people, often enables them to greatly increase their quality of life (Kuipers, 2019).

Research reveals a rich diversity in any direction within the group of gifted individuals as some show high levels of adaption and socio-emotional functioning, while others may be more vulnerable and not well-functioning within organizations or society (Zeidner & Matthews, 2017). Some scholars indicate that intellectually gifted adults have not only quantitatively different cognitive abilities but often clearly show a qualitatively different thinking style, which naturally causes different characteristics and behavior patterns (Silverman, 2009). While diverse interests and character traits may not seem worrying at first sight, any conflicts and misunderstandings are typically caused within organizations due to exactly those differences compared to non-gifted colleagues. Furthermore, arising conflicts are alarmingly often misunderstood as a mainly un-professional or maladaptive behavior and are not recognized by organizations as signs for intellectual giftedness (Corten et al., 2006). Even though gifted employees are, just like their non-gifted peers, undoubtedly a largely heterogenous group, research indicates that many share a certain set of typical character traits and behavior patterns; meeting like-minded peers often gives a feeling of being okay and pleasantly “normal” within the diverse group of intellectually gifted adults (Silverman, 2009; Wellisch & Brown, 2013).

New studies and approaches bring job-related characteristics of gifted adults into light (Hossiep et al., 2013), while many managers in charge still expect gifted and talented candidates to be smart enough to look out for themselves (van der Waal et al., 2013). This might apply for many talented and gifted employees, who function at a high level and accomplish great achievements, others may need assistance to unleash their potential and to pave their way in life. Furthermore, many educators and hiring managers pay too little attention to distinguish between high achievements, abilities and skills, meaning that gifted individuals neither show the same competencies in every domain, nor is it said that the demonstrated performance reflects the general ability to develop capabilities in the future. While skills can be described in this context as proficiencies developed through training and experience, abilities are assessed as a conceptualization of the potential qualities to do something (Ganzach & Patel, 2018).

Giftedness may appear in a magnificent light, sparkling off mysterious and admirable vibes and due to the war of talents in today's job market, many companies have opened up to accommodate for the individual's needs. It seems like almost everyone and every organization admires innovators such as Steven Jobs or Elon Musk and while many people may dream of meeting such a celebrity, most organizations would certainly want to hire such talents. Looking at those stunning careers, it may be easy to overlook how many struggles and obstacles these innovators have had to overcome personally and economically to realize their visions. Famous innovators such as Steven Jobs would never have reached their potential, if they had not met employers who have recognized their talent, accommodated for their needs, and accepted their demands (Brackmann, 2020, p. 88). Factors like flexibility, limited hierarchy, room for development and creative ideas have been described as favorable organizational characteristics for gifted employees, which does not necessarily prevent gifted employees from experiencing potential pitfalls and conflicts (Corten et al., 2006).

Experienced obstacles of dysfunctional or underperforming gifted employees show, quite impressively, being gifted with high abilities is not only a gigantic resource, but rather a great inconvenience if these talents are not channeled gainfully and are not looked after (Persson, 2017). We may need to wave goodbye to access giftedness as a strict

labelling construct and pave the way to tolerate and appreciate individuality, defining ways to efficiently nurture every talent gainfully. Accepting the fact that there is neither one typical “talent” role model available, nor is intelligence or giftedness easily measurable and accessible in one single domain or direction (Sternberg, 2005).

It seems to be about time to address the difficult and often highly sorrowful experiences certainly too many intellectually gifted individuals experience and pay attention to their difficulties within the educational system and the scientific world. As a starting point, this qualitative study aims to define factors that enable, especially underperforming or dysfunctional, gifted employees to unleash their tremendous potential within organizations. Not only to significantly contribute to the organizational success, but with respect to the personal well-being of the described focus group. Starting with an overview about the different giftedness approaches, to examine how talents may fall through the cracks, we investigate which capabilities organizations may need and how these can be described by applying giftedness models in the second part of the series. Typical character traits and behavior patterns of intellectually gifted adults, as well as potentially arising conflicts, are the subject of the third part of this series, while the final part of this series aims to describe promising enabling factors within organizations to unleash the gifted-potential.

To not only benefit organizational success, but to grant the dysfunctional or hidden gifted employees an environment, in which they can develop and thrive, this important matter must be addressed. Therefore, awareness of the obstacles of many gifted individuals must be increased, while misinformation and myths must be revised at the same time (Brown et al., 2020). Sending aid to those affected, to help them find a way to channel their overwhelming and intensive mind, is certainly a matter of great importance, as a moral responsibility, and a tremendous resource for organizations and society.

Part 2 will be shared in the next edition.

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We would like to invite you to write an article for the WorldTalentWeb newsletter. The theme and writing style are open for the author to determine. Articles could take the shape of an interview with a specialist in the field, a report on research or a recent event, a book or resource review etc. The guidelines for the article are listed below.

Please submit your article to the following email: WorldTalentWeb@ha.ae

Guidelines for submitting an article for the WorldTalentWeb newsletter

1. A submitted article should be between 800 to 2000 words, not including references.
2. WorldTalentWeb newsletter caters to the international community and thus, all articles should be written in English.
3. American or British spelling is accepted.
4. All non-native English speakers should make sure to check their articles for language accuracy before submitting them.
5. The article should be in Times New Roman font, size 12 pt.
6. Authors should avoid using footnotes.
7. Authors should adhere to the APA style and/or formatting guidelines provided in the APA Manual, version 6.
8. The article should be submitted with embedded photos, and tables, and figures if relevant.
9. The article should be submitted as an email attachment as a Microsoft Word document.
10. Articles should be word-processed and single-spaced with 1 inch (2.54 cm) at the top, bottom, left, and right of every page as per the APA 6th edition requirements.
11. Authors should strictly observe the copyrights-requirements and cite the work of others correctly.
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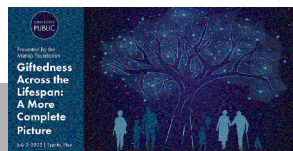
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2022 Colloquium Giftedness Across the Lifespan: A More Complete Picture

Tue, July 5, 2022
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The *WorldTalentWeb* newsletter is bimonthly published by the World Giftedness Center (WGC) of Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation for Distinguished Academic Performance. Dubai, United Arab Emirates



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