
Inverted: normal in minority

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As a professor, I am involved in the "beta-talent-forward" project. The project aims to help young people within the autistic spectrum to attain (and keep) a job, often in the high tech industry. Not only do we focus on the candidates, but we also focus on the employers and the set-up of the workplace, in order to obtain the maximum out of the intended employment relationship, to both the employer, and the employee. In recent weeks we have completed intakes with 12 candidates! With a wink to the report of the Dutch Association for Autism (NVA), the candidates are "all autistic, all different"! One striking similarity: All our candidates are gifted (IQ between 115 and 130) or highly gifted (IQ 130 or higher). This week I interviewed four of the candidates. Beautiful people, who sometimes have a completely new and innovative perspectives on technology and business. They really have a lot to offer.

Recently, I had an appointment with an old student friend. Suddenly, at home at his place, the neighbours started to cry out loudly, bumping and screaming. "Do not worry," my friend said, "they are corps members of Albertus Magnus" (a student association). As young lions they "play". Alcohol consuming, roaring and lingering, they practice relationships: win or lose, continue or give up, dominance, the right of the one who can scream loudest, the right of the strongest. My companion goes and asks the students next door to behave a bit quieter.

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Meanwhile, I think about my conversations this afternoon. People for whom the content level is central, but the level of relationships is not always self-evident. When working, how prestigious your job or titles are is not the point. It's so often about the "networking" (literally doing something neat to working) more than about the content. In addition, it is often more about who has studied with whom (and who is granting whom a publication) than about who is the best to do the job. The higher and abstract the functions, the stronger this seems to be. Because of this, being a (high) functioning "autist" makes it easy to miss the train; dedicated to cognitive abilities, but in a world where you do not understand or act on the "make-believe" (e.g. collapsing or expiring in situations of demonstrating powers).

My thoughts are interrupted. A new shout rises from the neighbouring house. No / little content, very much relationship: the board members (rulers) of tomorrow. There is a big distance between my afternoon, the content, and the evening, the relationship. For the outsider I'm now, it's like I've come to a zoo next to the walrus residence. "You do not have to be an autist," my old friend says, "if you don't understand this".

Sometimes the world seems to be inverted. Intelligent and sometimes brilliant people with the focus on the content are regarded as disturbed (autistic) and bulky corps members as the norm! Beta-talent-forward. There is a lot to bridge: "Life is crazy, and sometimes I'd rather be mad!" But, employers, if you really want to make a difference to your business, go beyond who can scream the loudest, and consider employing a highly gifted employee with a form of autism.