

# "Do we really have to learn "diversity" first?" or "Don't be afraid of scanner personalities".

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*This article is aimed at both managers and HR developers who have a very special "species" of employees in their team: The Scanner Personalities, the multi-talented, the specialized generalists or so-called "T-shape profiles". How you can recognize them, how you can best support them and why exactly this is worthwhile, you can read in this article.*

*If, when reading this headline, or more precisely at the word "scanner personality", an eyebrow slowly moves upwards at first and the inner critic gets into position, I can understand that. I felt the same way.*

## Variety and diversity

That's why I'm starting with the topic of diversity. The word is cropping up more and more frequently. In Germany, there is the „Charta der Vielfalt e. V.“ (Diversity Charter). The desire for diversity is there. The dimensions of diversity are: Social origin, age, skin color, nationality, gender, physical and mental abilities, religion and world view, and sexual orientation.

Even though the desire is there, the question is how visible and tangible are these dimensions to us? How do I react when I encounter diversity, otherness? Am I immediately on fire? Or is the reaction everything but diverse?

Diversity is a mixture of "maximum and meaningful irritation", which opens up the possibility of breaking free from a mental torpor. One of the mentioned dimensions of diversity is called "mental abilities" and under this term I settle the topic "giftedness" in all its facets. In this article I focus on the "multiple talents".

The point is that for some people, the topic of "multitalentedness" is a gateway to their complex inner lives and thus to their personality traits. And if multitalented people are a challenge for themselves at first, how does it feel for their superiors? Or the personnel developers?

In her 1994 book "**What do I do when I want to do everything?**", author **Barbara Sher** brings the subject of multitalentedness to the market for the first time in this form.

## Recognizing characteristics of the multi-talented

They are called scanner personalities, neo-generalists, multi-talents. Jack of all trades. Or universalist. Or generalist. Or specialized generalist.

Frequently, multi-talented people have one or more areas of expertise, supplemented by a variety of knowledge from other disciplines. In other words, multitalented people LOVE to learn.

Multi-gifted people have a **high and fast apprehension** and learn new things quickly if they are interested. They are complex experts, are very good observers and pattern and context recognizers, work themselves into facts in the shortest time and get to the core of the subject.

Due to their high willingness to learn and experiment, their curiosity and their networked, interdisciplinary and creative thinking, they always make their own sense of things and give unexpected impulses for thought and approaches to solutions. They exude a "**future mindset**", a mixture of versatility and courage, a love of learning, the unconventional and a spirit of research. The Medici effect in action.

Their **enthusiasm, energy and originality are contagious**. There is something magical when they are "on a roll", things just fly at them and it rains "coincidences". They are hungry, love extremes and are true "forward movers" and care little or not at all about "political games" and about status conceit. Multi-talented people need variety and challenges.

Due to their **very good knowledge of human nature, sensitive perception and intuition**, multi-talented people have a good eye for potentials ... of their fellow human beings, different situations and possibilities.

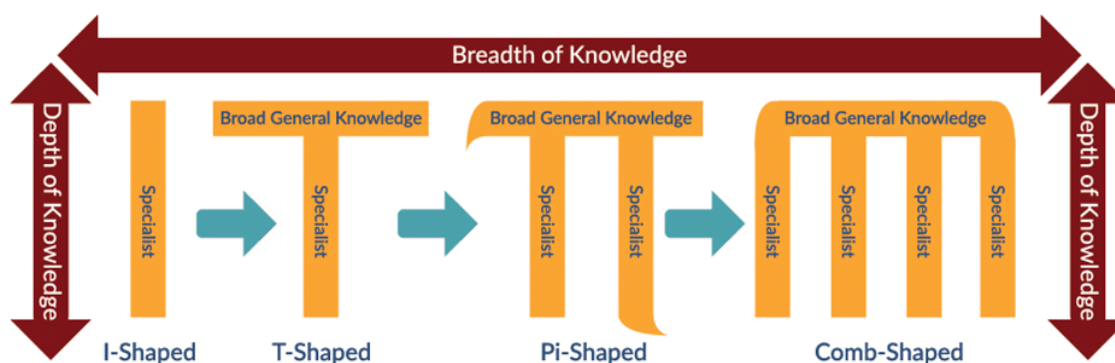
Multi-gifted people experience themselves intensely as "different" and for many the greatest longing is to find their place in life, to finally do "their thing" and to experience appreciation for it.

Multi-gifted people often have the feeling that they can do less. They have a certain idea of many things, but not in depth. In society, however, it is still the expert who counts. Many things come easily to the multitalented. They do not have to make an effort. Society still lives under the assumption that success must be hard-earned.

## Specialists? Generalists? A model for more understanding

As mentioned earlier, multitalentedness is a personality trait. It would be a mistake to assume that multitalented people have all the answers. No, they don't. **They have learned to ask the right questions.**

And here is another interesting aspect: With the frequently changing interests and the joy of learning of multitalented people, the professional path often starts with an apprenticeship or a course of study. The continuing path is and remains characterized by diverse interests, courage and perseverance. The curriculum vitae becomes more (more) colorful. And time and again, both straight and unsteady paths form the extremely attractive "**T-shape profile**," the "**pi-shape profile**" or even the "**comb-shape profile**" (see graphic below).



An I-shaped profile is a person with deep expertise in a specialized area.

People who combine the advantages of generalists and specialists have T-Shaped Skills / Profiles. T-Shaped means their skills look like a T.

The horizontal bar represents a wide range of expertise. For example, they know several programming and scripting languages, they have a rough knowledge of project management, and they know the e-commerce market. In each subject area, they can speak or work well in it - but without being a real full professional.

The vertical bar in the T (the I, so to speak) stands for the in-depth expertise. For example, these people know Java inside out and have already implemented several projects with it. It is difficult for colleagues to compete with them in this area.

Pi-Shaped means that the person has two specializations that are thematically distant from each other. These two I's together with the umbrella of the T make the sign Pi.

M- or Comb(ination)-Shaped are people when they have several specialties with deep expertise in addition to broad general knowledge.

## **The Medici Effect**

In his book "The Medici Effect", Frans Johansson explains why groundbreaking ideas usually arise when experts from different disciplines work together to find a solution to a problem, because this is when the Medici Effect takes effect. Frans Johansson uses examples to show how to create the optimal environment for the Medici effect to occur and how to develop ideas into innovations. Diversity is an economic success factor. The contents of this book have been the impetus in numerous companies to establish the "Diversity & Inclusion" department.

Due to the broad interests of a multitalented person, the Medici effect is a kind of "factory setting", is part of the standard. They carry the various areas of expertise within them. Multi-gifted people love to circle precisely at the intersection of different disciplines and areas of expertise.

Successful creatives don't produce because they are successful, they are successful because they produce.

## **Multi-talented people in a team**

I'm reminded of the scene when a dog owner lets his spirited dog jump up at a completely surprised passerby with the words, "He just wants to play."

It's much the same when a multigifted person is on your team. The way multitalented people work is fast, focused and playful. In doing so, they cross boundaries, and not with the intention of invading someone's territory, taking over the job, or even doubting their competence. Highly gifted people are about the cause. They want to make their contribution. They want success. They don't want long discussions. "KZP = get to the point" suits them just fine.

In the German-speaking book "Strengt Euch an" (Make an effort), Wolf Lotter writes: "The knowledge society needs self-motivated high performers for whom commitment and self-determined action are not a burden but a pleasure."

## Advice for Leaders

If you are a leader and have one or more multi-talented people on your team, here come my best advice:

- Give him or her **space and trust**. Multi-talented people do not need a micro-manager (m/f) as a superior. They take responsibility, act pragmatically, stick to agreements and deliver.
- Good to know: Highly gifted people have a **desire for performance and results**. They are forward thinkers. Give them challenges. It's not so much about climbing the career ladder (okay, a few rungs, but not necessarily all the way to the top), but about making a contribution and being appreciated and paid accordingly.
- With the desire to perform, multitalented people may cross boundaries, put their foot in their mouth, or do things that "you" don't do. Highly gifted people work without ulterior motives. Games in the workplace are anathema to them. For them, it's all about the matter at hand, and they are **fundamentally honest** about that.
- **No to games, yes to playfulness**. Highly gifted people love to apply their expertise with playful elements. Living lightly does not mean that the expertise is gone. Playfulness is serious business for the multitalented. Humorously said and very true.
- Multi-gifted people need an environment where they feel safe to disagree (respectfully) or challenge the status quo.
- Appreciate them and they will **move mountains**.
- I observe that multitalented people don't necessarily need or want their own team. They are **individualists in a team**.

- Multi-gifted people recognize the **right moment and take action**. This means that many a seemingly spontaneous action at top speed leads to clear (intermediate) results. This sometimes quite rapid pace needs space. And trust. And understanding.
- Highly gifted people **love variety**, i.e. a part or the whole job should contain projects that last for a certain time, to be followed by new ones.
- Highly gifted people **love learning**. Learning and performing go together for them. Actively involve them in creating a learning culture in the team and/or in the company. They will look into shining eyes.
- Love the differences and the quirks. They are not like you and that is what is interesting.

I ask myself a question in this context that initially surprised me myself: Do we have to learn diversity (really first)? What about tolerance of the different? What if someone is different, looks different, thinks different, feels different and acts different? That is diversity. It is an illusion to want diversity and to live simplicity, and to think that something creative can come out of it.

In my eyes, it's about open interaction with each other, about letting the other be as he/she is, discovering commonalities and respecting and valuing differences.

What is the benefit for the individual, for teams and thus for the company? Not everyone has to be able to do everything. What a relief, right? The thing I can't do or that draws energy from me is the expertise of a colleague and he or she loves to contribute just that. A great feeling for both. **Value creation through appreciation**

**Katrin Stigge is a BusinessMentor for multitalented leaders.**

Her multitalentedness was her career booster in the Corporate World. Katrin Stigge first learned about this personality trait when she became self-employed. Today, she accompanies multi-talented leaders to refine their life's work and make it visible, and thus to push their professional path to the top and become even more successful.

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