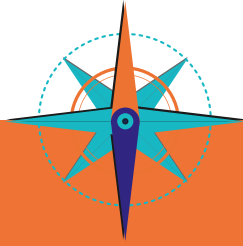




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The manager's compass

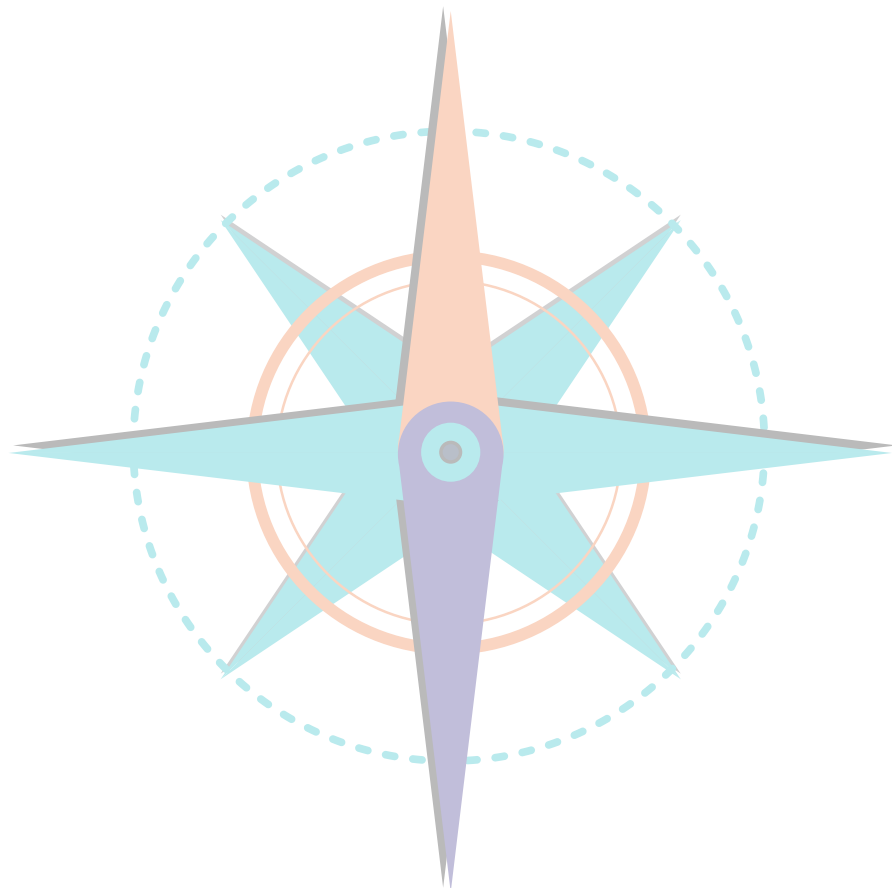
Making the most of soft skills
in the workplace

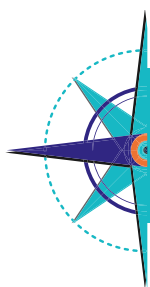
March 2024



There is a growing demand among public employers for soft skills, especially when hiring (managers and HR departments). Soft skills are the cornerstone of effective teamwork and the department's organisational culture and a driver of productivity. Today, recruiters are very much on the lookout for candidates with the ability to interact/collaborate, adapt and think critically in complex and constantly changing work environments (with new methods and practices such as teleworking, the development of digital technology, robotisation and artificial intelligence, etc.).

Making the most of these soft skills therefore calls for their upstream identification and development in keeping with the organisation's needs. All these considerations place soft skills high on the human resources agenda for managers. This publication provides insight into this skill set for local managers. Practical examples and tools will be presented for managers to identify and develop their own soft skills and leverage and perpetuate their staff's soft skills in support of the work team and their departments' needs.





Understanding soft skills in the workplace

There is no 'single' definition of soft skills. They may be defined in a number of ways. Unlike hard skills, which concern more technical and occupational aspects, soft skills have more to do with personal attributes and relational, situational and contextual capabilities. They are harder to measure, unlike hard skills which can be evaluated by performance indicators.

Whereas hard skills can become obsolete over time, soft skills can be considered as timeless. However, they are not character traits as such, but skills that can be acquired and cultivated over time based on experience and needs.

Soft skills are therefore a cross between attitudes and behaviour that determine how individuals relate to themselves and interact with others in personal and professional environments.

Examples of soft skills:

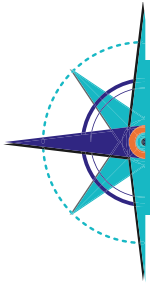
Decision-making	Communication
Analytical thinking	Self-control
Curiosity	People skills
Innovation	Creativity

Further reading:

- **Le dictionnaire interministériel des compétences des métiers de l'État (DiCo)** (Interministerial Dictionary of Public Sector Job Skills – in French only), published by the Directorate General for Public Administration and the Civil Service (DGAFP), lists all the generic skills (hard skills, soft skills and knowledge) required for the different public sector positions and presents a common definition for each skill (starting on page 91 for soft skills): https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/files/files/ArchivePortailFP/www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/files/dictionnaire_interministeriel_compences_2017.pdf

- **Le référentiel interministériel des compétences managériales des cadres dirigeants de l'État - DIESE :** (Interministerial Specifications for Public Sector Management Skills – in French only): [Documents de référence | diese](#)





Identifying soft skills for you and your team

Managers wear several hats. They are hierarchical intermediaries, team leaders and colleagues. In addition to their technical expertise, soft skills are becoming increasingly important in managers' skill sets. This observation is particularly striking following the COVID-19 pandemic and the development of hybrid work, calling for managers to draw increasingly on their social skills and emotional intelligence to keep their work teams united despite the distance and the individualisation of work relations.

These soft skills improve their handling of day-to-day matters such as performing tasks, supporting staff and complex problem-solving.

So managers need to work first and foremost on their own soft skills needed to do their job and to strike the right balance in their manager-staff relationships.

A few examples of managers' soft skills to start with!

Sense of public service: Concern to comply with the public servant's code of conduct, embody civil service values and serve the public interest.

Empathy: A management pillar, involves attentively listening to staff and having the ability to share their feelings and emotions. This quality makes for more efficient complex problem-solving and can allay certain misgivings.

Sense of organisation: The ability to organise yourself and manage your team's work (anticipate, plan and adapt).

Team spirit: Needed when pursuing a shared goal. It makes for cohesion, self-fulfilment and overall performance. Team spirit consists of giving everyone's initiatives a positive reception, helping each other out and accepting others' mistakes.

Adaptability: Ability to adjust decisions, take action whatever the circumstances and support staff in times of change. It facilitates acclimatisation to new working situations and supports group cohesion.

Initiative: Spontaneously taking the measures likely to optimise your action in your area of managerial responsibility.

How to identify your own soft skills

A good guideline is to review all your past work experiences (or the most exemplary) and examine their content and the soft skills needed and used. This method could also be applied to personal experiences (associations, sports, etc.) to consolidate this self-awareness work.

Practical examples:

- **Transformative change project management can call for the development of a high level of adaptability and innovation.**
- **Work experience in communication can reveal creativity and people skills.**
- **A legal assignment management position can bring to light a strong capacity for analysis and synthesis.**

In addition to a detailed study of work experience, another way of identifying your own soft skills is to think back to certain significant managerial situations such as conflicts, stressful situations and achievements and analyse your reactions in each case.

Ask your entourage for feedback on your soft skills and room for improvement. Where possible, it is always helpful to have the perceptions and opinions of third parties to take a step back from your own view.

You are not alone. Your administration can most probably offer you assistance with identifying your soft skills (skills and capability assessments, personality tests and training). Ask your local HR department for advice.



➔ Soft skills development tools

Once your soft skills have been identified, it would be a shame to neglect them and not make the most of them. Managers can take a number of actions to avoid this pitfall.

Select a skill and practise it regularly in your managerial activities to improve it. For example, work on the attention you pay to others during conversations to improve your listening skills. It could be a good idea to improve your time management skills by preparing set schedules, sharing them with your staff and regularly monitoring them to prevent schedule slippage.

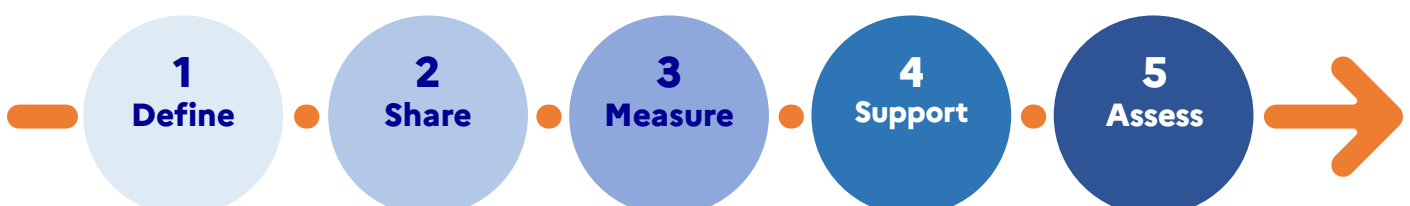
Emulate others. Observing colleagues is an effective tool. For example, particular attention could be paid to peers recognised for their good communication skills to take on board the techniques used: spoken language (words and expressions) and non-verbal communication (gestures and tone of voice).

Coaching can build your soft skills with programmes geared to your needs. Whether in individual or group sessions, coaching works in depth on case studies and actual situations.

➔ Supporting your team

Analysing soft skills in the work environment is the best way for managers to adjust their communication and actions to their staff's behaviour, reactions and personalities. Identifying and developing the team's soft skills in the light of their goals and activities is therefore a powerful tool for managers to keep their work teams united and more efficiently encourage individual and group success.

The approach proposed below can be applied collectively (to the team or entire structure) or individually (to each staff member).





1
Define

1 – Define soft skills relevant to the department's needs

The manager outlines the department's main activities and goals and then looks into the soft skills required to draw up a list of typical soft skills representative of the team. This is a collective approach conducted (with staff or peers) in one or more workshops/working groups depending on the level of analytical detail required (staff, department, directorate, etc.), the activities concerned and in-house particularities.

2
Share

2 – Share soft skills in a standardised document

Once identified, the soft skills need to be listed in a concrete, objective and clearly established document to highlight them and share them with the staff. Note that it is also recommended to subdivide this list at an individual level based on the different team members' jobs (front office, local managerial staff, field inspector, etc.).

3
Measure

3 – Define measurable actions

The purpose is not to draw up a 'fixed' document, but to take a continuous improvement approach to perpetuate soft skills in the department. This is done by defining some simple concrete actions to pilot test over a given period of time (one to three months). For example, an employee or group of employees could be assigned a goal of holding three collective intelligence workshops over a three-month period to develop their creativity and people skills. A group of staff could also organise in-house simulation exercises on handling difficult front office situations to develop their self-control and communication skills.

4
Support

4 – Support staff with mentoring

The manager's role is also to help staff acquire and build their soft skills. In addition to the abovementioned training track, regular mentoring sessions provide local support. Time spent on informal conversations also develops an understanding of one another and builds trust.

5
Assess

5 – Take a progressive approach to assessing soft skills

Soft skills, like hard skills, can be evaluated by a dedicated assessment of concrete actions taken. As with the example above, it would be useful to conduct a three-month review with the staff member/group concerned to assess progress made and difficulties encountered.



“HR Mentoring and Innovation for Managers” by the Human Resources Sub-Directorate for Clerk’s Offices, Court Services Directorate, Ministry of Justice

In its innovative HR approach to management support, the Court Services Directorate (DSJ) has introduced a mentoring service for managers to round out other actions and give them a wide range of support options when they take up their new duties.

Initially piloted under the 2022 Human Resources Innovation Fund (FIRH), the **“HR Mentoring and Innovation for Managers” (MIRHE)** project became a permanent measure in July 2022.

Mentoring builds interpersonal relations based on support, assistance, exchanges of practices, expertise and learning (hard and soft skills). The measure is coordinated by the human resources sub-directorates for the judiciary and clerk’s offices. It is designed for chief justices and presiding judges, public prosecutors and clerk’s office directors when they take up their positions, whether for the first time or not. It is also designed to prevent professional isolation among managers.

Mentors are professionals who offer their expertise and experience acquired throughout their careers. They all work as volunteers.

They engage with their less experienced colleagues, **providing support by means of attentive, non-judgemental listening, advice, and sharing and passing on experiences and skills in all confidentiality.** Mentoring also serves as recognition of the mentors’ professional experience.

Mentors receive eight days of training before starting their mentoring activities and subsequently benefit from regular collective oversight (four days a year). The idea is to support as much the mentees in their approach as the mentors in their practice.

A first group of 11 mentors was trained by FIRH funds and the Court Services Directorate trained a second group of eight mentors the following year. Seventeen mentors were trained (nine by FIRH funds and eight by the DSJ the following year) and are now providing mentoring services. Each mentor works with one to three mentees for a year. A mentoring charter signed by both parties frames the mentoring relationship.

As with the other HR measures introduced by the DSJ, the **purpose of mentoring is to provide professionalism in HR support, build the attractiveness of local management positions, develop managerial skills and improve the quality of public service in the justice system.**

The overarching goal is to plug mentees into the realities of court life, establish the practice of mentoring alongside other tools in court services, and contribute to the development of innovative working methods in the civil service.

Some advice to managers on setting up this type of action:

- Provide a professional mentoring framework: upstream training and oversight
- Define a mentoring charter to frame the mentoring relationship
- Provide for human resources to steer and manage the mechanism
- Avoid situations of crosscutting career paths
- Provide for regular communication activities

Contacts

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- accompagnement-rh.sdrhg-dsj@justice.gouv.fr



Spotlight on recruitment

Hard skills remain essential for employability, as job descriptions cannot be fully met without them. Today, however, soft skills are playing an increasing and differentiating role in the hiring processes of a growing number of public organisations. This gives these organisations a dual advantage on the job market:

- First, they hire first-class fully rounded profiles in terms of hard and soft skills, geared to their needs and ways of working.
- Second, their internal and external attractiveness is bolstered by increased job satisfaction, a closer match between jobs and

➔ Identifying soft skills in an interview

The subjective nature of soft skills calls for particular attention, since it is not easy to identify and analyse them in an interview situation. The following provides some advice and tools to help with this:

Candidates may be asked to engage in a “simulation exercise” to evaluate their reactions and behaviour. The purpose of the exercise is to help managers analyse candidates’ profiles and their suitability for the future work environment. The point is therefore not to analyse candidates’ technical skills, but their reflexes and relational and behavioural qualities.

Practical examples:

- **“A conflict arises with a colleague in your department: how do you react and what steps do you take to handle it?”**
- **“There is a sudden change in the work environment (new assignment, new member of staff, etc.): how do you respond and how do you adjust?”**
 - Everyday situations can also be raised to give candidates the chance to reveal their values and discuss their reactions: **“A colleague regularly opens the window in your shared office. You have told the person on several occasions that the noise and cold bother you. This is one time too many. What do you do?”**

Exchanges of views between recruitment players (managers and HR) are a good way of sharing different stakeholders’ feelings and opinions about job requirements. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the selected profiles meet needs from all points of view.

Feedback from new recruits is a constructive tool that can be used to improve interview techniques. Planning a discussion with staff one or three months into the job provides a good opportunity for them to share their discovery report (feedback on onboarding and questions raised) and for managers to build their capacity to analyse candidates' soft skills.

You are not alone. Your administration may have specific tools such as factsheets, scorecards and personality tests. Ask your local HR department for information.

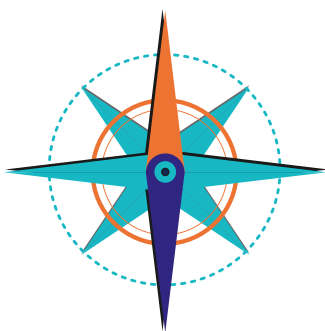


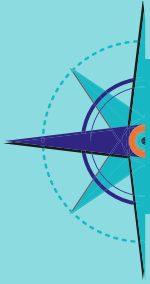
Some practices from around the world

- **At ENGIE**, managerial behaviour with respect to four corporate values (boldness, open-mindedness, rigour and compassion) has a direct impact on assessments, remuneration and career advancement.
- **Quebec**, has forums for sharing practices and skills guidelines based on six roles to be embodied by public managers, including that of a true leader (courage, resilience and emotional intelligence).
- **Belgium** is exploring the development of a new human-centric leadership vision for its federal administrations.
- **Estonia** has a scorecard of six key skills for senior public management recruitment, assessment and advancement including "support" for staff satisfaction, motivation, life balance and personal growth.
- **In Finland**, public managers are assessed on the basis of their ethics among others.
- **In Greece**, a single skills scorecard for public employees focuses mainly on teamwork, adaptability and leadership.

Further reading

- **Guide de l'encadrante et de l'encadrant dans la fonction publique** – [DGAFP Guide-de-l-encadrant-web.pdf \(fonction-publique.gouv.fr\)](#) – in French only
- **Le Dictionnaire interministériel des compétences des métiers de l'État (DiCo)** – [DGAP Le Dictionnaire interministériel des compétences des métiers de l'État \(DiCo\) | Portail de la Fonction publique \(fonction-publique.gouv.fr\)](#) – in French only
- **Manager Compass – Management by Values** [DGAFP https://www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr/toutes-les-publications/la-boussole-du-manager-manager-par-les-valeurs](#)
- **Module « Travailler autrement »** - [DITP Une formation pour «travailler autrement» grâce aux sciences comportementales | Direction interministérielle de la transformation publique \(modernisation.gouv.fr\)](#) – in French only
- **Référentiel interministériel des compétences managériales des cadres dirigeants de l'État** - [DIESE Documents de référence | diese](#)
- **« Soft Skills, vous avez dit : soft skills »** – [CEDIP, Ministère de la transition écologique et de la cohésion des territoires Soft Skills, vous avez dit : soft skills ... | Secrétariat Général - DRH - CEDIP \(developpement-durable.gouv.fr\)](#) – in French only
- **« Les compétences comportementales, des compétences de plus en plus prisées par les recruteurs »** - [CEDIP, Ministère de la transition écologique et de la cohésion des territoires fiche_en_lignes_no81-2-2.pdf](#) – in French only
- **« Les soft skills pour innover et transformer les organisations »** - [France Stratégie Les soft skills pour innover et transformer les organisations | France Stratégie \(strategie.gouv.fr\)](#) – Full document in French only





Soft skills in action

Perrine Caille

**Organisation, Attractiveness and Staff Retention Director,
Human Resources Department, Bordeaux Teaching Hospital**

What is your view of soft skills in the workplace?

“Soft skills are essential workplace skills in all professions. At the hospital, they are a valuable resource that everyone – health workers, administrative, technical and logistics staff, and socio-educational workers – has in them and can develop. The human resources director plays a key role in helping professionals identify, assess and develop these soft skills. This is especially true for managers who need to leverage a great many soft skills alongside the hard skills they require to do their job. This can be seen in action with every crisis we have to face. The drastic change in the environment means that it is less technical skills than adaptability and communication skills that matter.”

Is it important for public managers to leverage soft skills and what are the potential risks/pitfalls?

“It is vital to leverage professional soft skills and to understand that these are skills that can be learnt and practised. For example, anyone can develop their listening skills, empathy and communication skills. Yet, sometimes, the learning curve faced is so steep or the person lacking in motivation that you might have to start with support in other types of more easily attainable skills. Our education system has often pushed us to develop our inabilities. Yet we can also seek to build our abilities to give our best. This is a source of personal growth and a valuable work organisation resource.”

Could you give us an example of a skills development initiative in action in your structure or beyond?

“The Bordeaux Teaching Hospital has totally rethought its managerial pathway to emphasise professional soft skills. This new pathway is for all managers with or without management training and experience and irrespective of their initial occupation: doctor, director, health worker, administrative, technical or logistics staff, etc.

This managerial pathway is made up of four complementary management skills development modules.

- First, managerial assessments are used for individuals to gain a better sense of themselves as managers, objectivise their values and motivational drivers, and measure their different skills areas. As one soft skill a manager needs is humility and self-criticism, this approach is key and helps build the rest of the pathway.

- Second, managers are offered training. Managers are offered “basic” and “advanced” training courses in partnership with Sciences Po Bordeaux with the accent on acquiring and putting into practice professional soft skills in different formats (short and long training courses, seminars and workshops).

- Third, discussion groups will soon be put in place for managers. Some will be peer discussion groups while others will be multisector and/or multi-establishment. They will be led by hospital staff trained in co-development.

- Fourth, coaching sessions will be offered to managers in need of them. These will be provided by an in-house coaching unit currently being developed for the purpose.

Our managerial pathway is open to healthcare establishments locally, regionally and nationwide. For example, our basic medical management training course for health professionals recently won a National Lifelong Learning Association for Hospital Staff (ANFH) bid and so we will now be providing these training modules nationwide in partnership with Sciences Po Bordeaux.

Our aim in this approach is to support managers in their practices and the development of their skills with a positive message. Management is an evolving discipline and soft skills can be learnt throughout a career (even from personal experiences that resonate with situations experienced in the workplace). Managers who are clear about their position and skills, who want to grow and have the right tools can do so with the support of the institution and its management.”

Clémence Wegscheider

Director of the Occitanie Regional Platform for Interministerial HRM Support (PFRH) – Regional Prefecture

What is your view of soft skills in the workplace?

“Soft skills in the workplace are key to professional success. Although it is possible to grow your technical expertise, it is harder to develop your professional soft skills which are closely associated with who you are, intrinsically. It is important to consider the fit between your own soft skills and your work environment and check that the two match (will my soft skills serve my work environment and am I geared to what is expected of me in my work?).”

Is it important for public managers to leverage soft skills and what are the potential risks/pitfalls?

“The right attitude for the job and work environment is key to a high-quality public service. All public managers have a responsibility to identify and leverage their team members’ soft skills in the workplace. They also have a duty to set the example by putting into action the soft skills expected of their teams every day. Nevertheless, a team cannot be steered on soft skills alone. You need guaranteed hard skills to be able to do the job properly.”

Could you give us an example of a skills development initiative in action in your structure or beyond?

“I have introduced collaborative hiring into the team’s work practices to identify our future colleagues’ soft skills.

In concrete terms, the soft skills analysis process is set in motion from the moment we publish a job vacancy. We look at the contacts made by applicants (by e-mail or telephone) and use a scorecard to analyse the CVs and covering letters sent.

Recruitment day is then a three-step procedure:

- Discussion of motivation and analysis of technical skills (relative to the profile sought) with myself and a team member;
- Discussion with the entire team in my absence based on a simulation exercise and questions from the team;
- A final discussion between the applicant and myself to get the candidate’s feedback on the day and whether they would like to take forward their application.

The different steps serve to assess the soft skills sought and the step with the team in my absence is a moment for candidates to showcase their true selves.

This hiring process also enables us to showcase to applicants our own collective soft skills as a hallmark of PFRH Occitanie.”

Further reading:

www.fonction-publique.gouv.fr



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