

Workplace most wanted list - is it hard or soft skills?

How do you measure someone's ability to manage their time? Or their ability to work as part of a team - or to lead that team to victory?



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This is something recruiters are expected to assess in their exchange with a job candidate when looking at both their hard and soft skills. By scouring their CV, asking the right questions and meeting face to face, they soon extract the information they need about a candidate's 'hard' skills – measurable, teachable capabilities, often technical or practical, such as a computer programming degree or proficiency in a foreign language. More challenging to suss out are their 'soft' skills – traits often related to people skills such as management, self-reflection and flexibility – which are difficult to quantify and prove.

When companies work with a recruiter to create a job description, hard skills will form the foundation of certain roles – particularly those in technical industries, or where a specific competency or level of experience is core to the role (such as a data analyst or head chef). At the same time, there are certain industries where soft skills in the workplace are more important than hard ones. Take PR, where success relies upon your ability to build rapport with press and clients, and people are often hired based on the strengths of the relationships they've built.

According to the [2019 Hottest Skills Index](#) from the Business Talent Group (BTG), project management – a soft skill – was the most in-demand consulting skill. The report also identified a “surge in demand” for marketing and communications consultants – a 750% increase on 2018. Particularly desirable specialisms were strategy, transformation and data science, at a time where companies are shifting to a digital-first standpoint.



Soft skills are hot skills

2 Apr 2019



In 2019, LinkedIn [asked Dutch recruiters and HR professionals](#) what skills were highest on companies' wish lists. The most sought-after hard skills from companies were pretty tech-centric – cloud computing, artificial intelligence and analytical reasoning. But at the same time, 85% of respondents say that soft skills are very important for the future of recruitment and HR.

Incapably capable

Flexible workspaces are regularly used by recruiters and companies to interview candidates in locations nearby. Joanne Bushell, managing director and VP Sales in Africa for Regus' parent brand, IWG plc, says, "In South Africa, a critical skills shortage has been identified in the ICT sector but [companies are complaining](#) that in many cases, they are having to turn away capable candidates due to a lack in soft skills required to communicate and report effectively to their teams and managers."

In short, clients are increasingly demanding candidates with hard skills in emerging tech – but also candidates with the soft skills to implement new processes, and to work in tandem with technology to retain the human element of a business. And, when it comes to filling a management role, recruiters are most likely looking for someone with a unique balance of technical prowess and their ability to lead and inspire people – a hard/soft hybrid.



The most in-demand skills and how to find them

30 May 2019



How to test soft skills?

A candidate's hard skills are easy to prove or disprove. But how can recruiters make sure they possess the soft skills their client is seeking? Generally, it's about applying a more scientific approach. One option is to use software that asks candidates to take an online assessment – answering questions or playing games. Algorithms crunch the results and provide an analysis of applicants' soft skills so that they can be compared like for like with others.

Alternatively, standardised interview questions relating to a soft skills list make it much easier to compare candidates. Having a set of questions that each recruiter uses each time they interview for a certain role is crucial. "Tell me about a time something important at work didn't go to plan, what was the outcome?" and "Tell me about a time where you were asked to do something you'd never done before – how did you react?" are well-known questions for assessing candidate's leadership and adaptability – but all candidates going for the same position need to be asked these in the same way for their soft skills to be comparable.

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